

## WHAT IS A FREE SOCIETY?

TODAY the nucleus of the atom is both split and fused, but man is only split and confused. In this situation, what is the meaning of a free society? The question forces us to be philosophical. We have to ask other questions: "What is a free man?" And, indeed, "What is man?"

Man, by his own modest admission, is the highest form of life, and life is part of the physical universe. The essential difference between non-organic and organic matter is that organisms have purposes. Life evolves by "the gradual unfoldment and increase of organisms' purposes." Man is the inheritor of an incredibly long accumulation of biological inventions: the circulatory system, the internal skeleton, the lungs, the eye. We cannot touch a member, think of an organ or reflect on a process of the human body that is not triumphant and wonderful. As a result he is the most highly adaptable form of life. Age after age, in all parts of the planet, in all kinds of circumstances, he is tough and resourceful. He has even invented a new kind of evolution.

Man makes the tools and machines that make further physical evolution unnecessary. Does he want to hunt like the bear? He invents the spear. Does he want to dive like the fish? He invents the submarine. Does he want to fly like the bird? He invents the airplane. There is no end in sight: Yet he himself remains unspecialized. He takes on and puts off at will the specialized organs and capacities that encumber the bear, the whale and the eagle.

To do all this man had to become social. This meant language and culture. Language and culture meant something astoundingly new—the transmission of experience and knowledge. What one man discovered, all men could learn. What one generation accomplished, the next could build upon. So, within the past ten thousand years

man's inventions have blossomed—agriculture, the domestication of animals, writing, metal-working. With these and other inventions taking care of his concerns as an animal, man turned to his concerns as a human being—through myth, religion, art, literature.

All this has tremendous implications.

First, *the evolution of man is in his own mind and hands*: second, *the process is social, not solitary*. Third, *human society has become the most important part of the individual's environment*.

Here we must look at what the anthropologists call "culture." A culture is a pattern of life that is learned and shared. I repeat that culture is *learned*. Compare the newly-born human with the newly-hatched ant. The child is helpless, knowing how only to cry for help. The ant is fully competent, going at once about its duties. But the ant, needing to learn little, can learn little, and the child, needing to learn much, can learn much. The individual learns his behavior from his culture. Because man is biologically unspecialized, there is a bewildering variety of cultures, and each is expressive of only a small part of the potentialities of man.

Man can reflect on his individual potentialities that are denied by his culture. He can reflect on the differences between cultures. It was inevitable, therefore, that sometime men would begin to question the magic that surrounded their customs, that they would begin to discuss and criticize, that they would assert their individuality and try to reform and improve society.

In Western Civilization, this began with the Greeks. The reactions were two, illustrated by Athens and Sparta. In Athens began the tradition of the free society—a society open to new

possibilities, a society encouraging its citizens to be "open selves."

Even today, probably the best definition of the free society is that given by Pericles in his funeral oration:

Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighbouring states; we are rather a pattern to others than imitators ourselves. Its administration favours the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy. If we look to the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences; if to social standing, advancement in public life falls to reputation for capacity, class considerations not being allowed to interfere with merit; nor again does poverty bar the way, if a man is able to serve the state, he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition. The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life. There, far from exercising a jealous surveillance over each other, we do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbour for doing what he likes, or even to indulge in those injurious looks which cannot fail to be offensive, although they inflict no positive penalty. But all this ease in our private relations does not make us lawless as citizens. Against this fear is our chief safeguard, teaching us to obey the magistrates and the laws. . . .

If we turn to our military policy, there also we differ from our antagonists. We throw open our city to the world, and never by alien acts exclude foreigners from any opportunity of learning or observing, although the eyes of an enemy may occasionally profit by our liberality; trusting less in system and policy than to the native spirit of our citizens, while in education, where our rivals from their very cradles by a painful discipline seek after manliness, at Athens we live exactly as we please, and yet are just as ready to encounter every legitimate danger. . . .

Our public men have, besides politics, their private affairs to attend to, and our ordinary citizens, though occupied with the pursuits of industry, are still fair judges of public matters; for, unlike any other nation, regarding him who takes no part in these duties not as unambitious but as useless, we Athenians are able to judge at all events if we cannot originate, and instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all. . . .

The breakdown of the tribal society, where custom is unquestioned and authority is taken for granted, was and is a painful experience—perhaps like the trauma of birth for the individual. It dissolves the organic unity of society. It requires personal responsibility. It sets up abstract relations where before there were personal and family relations. In exchange for the open possibilities of self and society it demands a heavy price of understanding, reasonableness, voluntary cooperation. Strife and conflict become familiar; accommodation and compromise become required.

Not surprisingly, therefore, another reaction toward the breakdown of the *spontaneous* tribal society was to establish a *contrived* tribal society—to substitute manufactured magic, to use reason to suppress reason, to use the potentialities of the state to repress potentialities of the individual.

This puts us up squarely against certain problems of freedom in a democracy.

1. Do we mean freedom *under* law or freedom *from* law? Can a democratic government do *anything*, anything at all, provided it is with majority consent and constitutional approval? Or can even majority rule and constitutional sanction be bad? Is freedom to do what one *wants to do* or what one *ought to do*? My answer is that freedom is to do what one *ought to do*, but he must discover it himself. This means the freedom to err and to learn from error. A majority cannot be trusted to be all virtuous and all wise. A majority can be the worst tyrant of all, because it holds social approbation and ostracism in one hand and force in the other. A majority can be wrong. A minority can be right. Right or wrong a minority represents the rights of all minorities, which make up a society. A minority is a touchstone, a gadfly, a stimulus for reappraisal.

2. A necessary complement of political freedom is economic freedom. Economic freedom is economic self-government, control of one's labor. What does this mean when huge

organizations of capital and labor confront each other? When government intervention is pervasive because of defense, the need to avoid depression and the demands of equity? The United States from its very beginning was a mixture of private enterprise and public enterprise. Socialism is no longer just a theory; it is a reality. It too turns out to be a mixture of private enterprise and public enterprise. The question is, how can private enterprise and public enterprise be made to run in harness instead of pulling against each other? This is a practical, not a theoretical matter. At the bottom are decisions to be made by each person in privacy and honesty: Is the objective economic or political in disguise? Is the goal an increase in the general wealth or an increase in special advantage? Can the few judge for the many better than the many can judge for themselves? Can the many be counted on to understand and advance the general welfare? The objective of the economic system is the creation of wealth, and the objective of wealth in a free society is to increase the freedom of the individual. The individual can learn responsibility only by exercising responsibility. The intrusion of government into economic affairs is only one way—and often not the best way—of extending democratic control over businesses and unions. Another way is extension from "beneath"—the consumers, the employees, the union members, the stockholders. For too long we have pretended that our economic system was a separate compartment of life. We can afford to do so no longer.

3. Does freedom of expression help or hinder the pursuit of truth? Here we have an increasingly drastic contrast between our professions and our practices. The professions of a free society can still stir our blood—the organ voices of Milton and Locke, of Jefferson and Mill, of Holmes and Hand. Truth will triumph if it is free to combat error; falsehood is best combatted by free discussion; we are not God—we do not know the truth; even if we did, suppression would be wrong, wrong for the suppressors, who cannot be

trusted to limit their suppressions to error; wrong for the suppressed, who may be right, and even if wrong cannot learn from their error. In the words of Milton, "Since, therefore, the knowledge and survey of vice is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human virtue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth, how can we more safely, and with less danger, scout into the regions of sin and falsity than by reading all manners of tractates and hearing all manners of reasoning?"

But the issue is not resolved. James Fitzjames Stephen put it, "Speculation on government, morals and religion is a matter of vital practical importance, and not food for mere curiosity." Milton would have censored "Popish tractates." Cromwell, who cried to the Presbyterian prelates, "Brethren, by the bowels of Christ, I beseech you to think that you might be wrong!" did not think that he himself could be wrong. Holmes enunciated the doctrine of "clear and present danger" to justify restriction of speech. And in our time we have experienced an increasing constriction of civil liberties—in the name of securing those liberties. We have seen public opinion used to bludgeon down dissent, difference, inquiry.

Speculation *is* a matter of vital practical importance, in both ways—the abuses and the uses. The dangers are double-edged. Believers in freedom have always felt that the dangers of lack of freedom have been greater than the dangers of freedom. This is so because the use of freedom can be *educative*, while the curbing of freedom is a blighting and a corruption.

4. This leads us to the problem of security. Practically there are always restrictions on freedom. One reason is that various freedoms collide. Another reason is that at various times and places, there are differing degrees of permissible error. What is the best way to avoid error—by freedom or restriction of freedom? Is it not through the freedom to inquire, question, challenge and pose alternatives? If legislators

need freedom to know and discuss in order to legislate wisely, do not those who elect the legislators and determine the climate within which policy is made also need freedom to know and discuss? And against whom are we trying to secure ourselves? The enemy or our own people? Are we afraid of the writer or the reader? The speaker or the listener? Are we merely against slavery from people *who are different from ourselves in race and nationality*? Or are we against *slavery*?

I have been trying to state classic issues in the light of modern conditions. It is time to understand better several of the forces behind these conditions.

Let us return to an earlier point: Man is in charge of his own evolution; this evolution is social, not solitary; and human society is the most important part of human environment. During the last three hundred years man's control over his physical environment has been rising—not in a straight line, but in a line curving upward. Within the lifetime of some of us in this room he will probably send explorers outside the dominion of earth's gravity.

This phenomenal increase in power over the physical world has meant also a phenomenal increase in power over human beings. Society has long been man's most important environment. There is a difference now—a greater intensity, an all-embraciveness; all parts of our lives and all peoples are caught up in intimate interdependency. All human beings, not just those of his own culture, are now the most important part of each person's environment. All human beings *together*, not in isolated cultures, now hold in their hands the evolution of human life.

We are one another's physical environment. We are also fellow humans. In which of these two ways will we regard one another? If as physical environment, we will engage in a ruthless endless battle to destroy, exploit, and manipulate one another. If as fellow humans, we will share respect, purposes and power. I soberly believe

that this is the issue we cannot escape—a descent into depths of bestiality such as only man is capable of or an ascent to a much higher plane of relationships between individuals and peoples.

Greek civilization faced and failed this test. Listen to Thucydides describing Hellas at the end of the fifth year of the Peloponnesian war.

Words had to change their ordinary meaning and to take that which was now given them. Reckless audacity came to be considered the courage of a loyal ally; prudent hesitation, specious cowardice; moderation was held to be a cloak for unmanliness; ability to see all sides of a question inaptness to act on any. Frantic violence became the attribute of manliness; cautious plotting, a justifiable means of self-defense. The advocate of extreme measures was always trustworthy; his opponent a man to be suspected. To succeed in a plot was to have a shrewd head, to divine a plot a still shrewder, but to try to provide against having to do either was to break up your party and to be afraid of your adversaries. In fine, to forestall an intruding criminal, or to suggest the idea of a crime where it was wanting, was equally commended, until even blood became a weaker tie than party, from the superior readiness of those united by the latter to dare everything without reserve, for such associations had not in view the blessings derivable from established institutions but were formed by ambition for their overthrow; and the confidence of their members in each other rested less on any religious sanction than upon complicity in crime, . . . .

Today we face the issue grown gigantically greater in scope and penetration. Not merely the Eastern Mediterranean but all the planet is involved. Not the future of a single civilization but the continuity of human society is at stake. You know that I could put this even more strongly. I shall not. We must recognize the possibilities, perhaps even the probabilities, but terror is no friend even of survival and much less of freedom.

If we clear our heads of terror, we will see that it is the struggle for freedom that is shaking the world. In Mohammedan myth a jinni is a spirit lower than the angels capable of appearing in human and animal forms and influencing mankind

for good and evil. Two jinn have been let out of the bottle, and they cannot be put back. One jinni is the idea that the *individual human being matters*. The other is that man can do something about his condition, with respect both to physical nature and to society. These are crude. They can influence and be commanded to do terrible things. But they are also the raw materials of human dignity, a respect for self and others, and self-government under law and justice. They are abroad in the world like the radiation from nuclear explosions.

These jinn were first let out of the bottle by Western Civilization. In the west they have achieved their greatest triumphs for good. In the west also the strains of the open society have been the greatest—the demands for personal responsibility, for reason, for understanding, for maturity; the abstractness, the impersonalness, the loneliness.

The modern closed society is a deliberate attempt to return to the womb of the tribal society. But innocence lost cannot be regained. All spontaneity is gone. The planks of policy in the contrived closed society of Sparta describe fairly well policies of modern totalitarian societies. The ideologies of Imperialistic Japan, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany had little universal appeal. This is not true of the ideology of Communist Russia. For the first time since the Renaissance the Western ideology of freedom has serious competition from another source. This is a far more serious matter than the Emperor's Navy and the Wehrmacht. How can the universalist appeal of Russian Communism be explained? *It is a bogus version of certain key ideas of the West, turned against the West, like the guns of Napoleon, because of the West's shortcomings, hypocrisies, arouses and delays.*

Let us not so misunderstand the situation as to think of the world-wide issue as being between two halves of the world—the Communist and the free. The issue is one of *many worlds*, many peoples, all striving to be free as nations and to

become freer as individuals. These peoples will ally themselves or keep themselves neutral as they think best fits their interests, the same way the American people have done. We, the American people, who had a "neutrality act" when World War II began, should not find it difficult to understand the neutralist policies of statesmen like Nehru.

We will be able to gather around us and hold the support of the peoples of the world only by demonstrating a moral superiority over our enemies. We can demonstrate this only by exemplifying at home the free way of life we say we stand for, by giving aid to other peoples in advancing their freedom, and by respecting their right to be different from ourselves.

Suppose our hopes are realized. Suppose war is averted. Suppose even the Soviet system collapses or is transformed. What about the long road ahead? Do we seriously believe that the peoples of the world are going to cease striving for self-government, for an improvement in their personal and social conditions? Do we seriously believe that other spurious doctrines and false champions will not arise if there is not hope for a better life given through the leadership of those who respect human worth? Where is the hope if American people do not take to their hearts again the cause of the "tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free"? This is not new. Jefferson wrote of and for *all men*. Franklin thought in terms of the world. Lincoln brooded about "this nation or *any nation so conceived and so dedicated.*"

What is new is a keener awareness at the same time of the incredible variety of ways of life and of the underlying sameness of man; of our various expressions and our common themes; of our common nature and predicament. What is new is promising insights into the nature of man and society, which can be used for humane purposes if we are good and wise enough.

What we need is largeness of mind and soul.

Differing civilizations have met many times in the past. Always there have been collisions. Sometimes there have been creations of larger conceptions concerning the possibilities of human life—religions, philosophies, art, science. Few if any of those living in the times of creation could sense what was under way. Perhaps the creations of our anguished time will be equal to the scope and intimacy of the present meeting.

As an act of will I refuse to despair. I believe that the drive toward reason and freedom is of the essence of human nature. I believe that mankind has only begun to discover his possibilities, only begun to enunciate the purposes that will help each to fulfill himself by helping others to fulfill themselves, only begun to create the kind of open society that will elicit the almost infinite potentialities of the open self.

Both faith and despair have been justified and betrayed many times. "We must press along," Judge Learned Hand wrote recently, in his 84th year, quoting Epictetus, "Since we are men we will play the part of men."

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## REVIEW

### BIFOCAL VISION ON BOMBAY

SINCE MANAS characteristically regards the birth-pains of independent India with optimism—and finds among her leading statesmen and scholars a considerable amount of inspiration—there is particular point in taking note of Ira Morris' *The Bombay Meeting*. This novel, penned by one whose six months' stay in that still confused city was enhanced by a perceptive sympathy, throws light on why it is that Western writers often return from visits to India with conflicting impressions. The "meeting of East and West," pretty much of a failure during British rule, is still bad enough. The intellectual leaders among the Indians, while their traditional dislike for contentiousness may create an impression of flaccidity, do not take kindly to being patronized, and most American travellers, whether literary or political experts, unconsciously offend in this way. Perhaps the shrill and occasionally bloody partisanship of the new Indian national scene, by way of mass factional movements, are also a defensive reflex against new feelings and attitudes with which traditional India cannot cope—and need not have had to face—so soon. In any case, Bombay, like Calcutta or Delhi, is a turmoil of old and new, and few are those, either Indian or Western, who find sure ground on which to rest a positive faith.

*Bombay Meeting* makes no pretense of a single explanation for all of India's difficulties. The author rather brings into focus the conversations and experiences of a heterogeneous literary group meeting in "international conference," but one catches valuable insights into the central background problems along the way. The following opinion on partition and the attendant violence is offered by an American writer:

"You mean that some refugees are still living in camps after—how long is it? Almost seven years!"

"Ah yes, about half a million of them are! How can they be assimilated into a country as overcrowded as ours?" said Singh, peering over the fence to where people were pursuing the business of living in unimaginable squalor. The whole barrack area was

so crowded that it would have seemed impossible to squeeze in one more emaciated person, or even another naked child, to join the company crawling about in the dust amid swarms of flies!

"Where are these people from?" inquired Jason as they continued motoring past the endless barracks, before each of which lines of ragged laundry hung drying in the sun.

"From the Punjab," Singh answered. "From my own country! There are no Sikhs in this particular camp, but we still have camps of our own. Indeed, we suffered in the massacres more than any other part of the population, and lost a hundred thousand dead. Unfortunately, our own people's revenge was as horrifying as the original crimes! I myself was in our capital, Amritsar, at the time, and I saw such sights, Mr. Cole, that if I live to be a very old man they will still haunt me!"

A striking change had come over Singh as he spoke. His courteous, smiling manner dropped off, and into his face came a look of profound sadness. Jason noticed for the first time that the sallow face, above the beard in its black *filet*, was that of a highly sensitive, deeply feeling man.

"Tell me, Mr. Singh," he said, for some reason impelled to dwell on this subject, though almost any other would have been pleasanter. "What really happened to bring about those awful massacres? Couldn't they have been prevented?"

"Prevented!" Singh gave a little dry laugh. "Mr. Cole, there were too many people who did not *want* to prevent them, who had in fact been counting on those very massacres to frustrate our dream of a strong, united India. They were the parting gift of our conquerors, Mr. Cole, a gift as grim as their hundred and fifty years of domination! Pakistan, that geographical absurdity, a nation with two halves, is a mere blueprint worked out with the purpose of keeping us semi-dependent indefinitely. The massacres were a corollary of partition, and the deaths, the anguish, the moral woe seemed of small moment beside the achievement of that political necessity. Ah, Mr. Cole, what a subject it would be for a writer like you!"

Into the orbit of the writers assembled by Mr. Morris comes a childishly petulant and capricious maharajah, a feudal remnant whose last sun is to set within a few decades. He is joined by the naïve new "radicals" who mouth all the "down-with-the-capitalist" clichés of the American twenties. Then

there are the hangers-on of wealth—of which India has had too many, both before and during British rule—and the few who prove that a "new India" may still come into being. Various degrees of sympathy for and disagreement with Nehru are reflected—quite accurately, to the best of our knowledge. What Mr. Morris accomplishes is just what he should accomplish—a portrayal in which the reader is able to identify, at least in part, with every character depicted, despite his background or land of origin. In the presence of the dishonest commercialism so inadequately concealed by most American and European writers, one senses, also, that peculiar attitude of mind with which many of us are apt to regard the troubles of the world—as a sort of mammoth television show, before which the men who are facile with words station themselves to compose criticisms.

*Bombay Meeting* will win the special interest of those who would like to see a new generation and breed of writers emerge in India. As the setting of his book indicates, Mr. Morris is particularly concerned with a view of India which statistics and government achievements recorded in political and economic language can never convey, these being wholly inadequate substitutes for the subtleties of "the Indian story," from which Westerners could learn so much. So far, Indian novels of power and universal appeal have been few, with B. Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* still seeming to us the best so far. However, Mr. Morris apparently feels that it is only a matter of time until vital communication through the novel will be possible, with an increasing number of young Indian intellectuals presently on the road to finding themselves. There are virtues in the Western novel, and they, like all other virtues, cannot be imitated, but must be learned.

The Asian writers striving toward this end are not, Morris indicates, averse to criticism. Suspecting that Indians have been too long addicted to platitudes, they wish for sterner stuff; above all, they do not want more platitudes from their Western contemporaries. The most gifted native writer of *Bombay Meeting* sums up for his American friend:

"When you speak," Mahinder Azad went on, "I wish you would seize the opportunity to renew our confidence in you writers of the Western world. We do not ask more than that, I assure you, yet until now your colleagues have given us—pap. I entreat you not to talk down to us or to lull us with platitudes! We can take any unpalatable truths about ourselves; the one thing we cannot take is to be patronized. We have had to put up with that for three hundred years! They tell us something important, something that will nourish our hopes of a new world in which the West and the East can go forward as equal partners. Remember that if you say the right thing, thousands and tens of thousands will know of it next day. We will rejoice that the people of the West are our friends, even if some of their governments still seek to exploit us."

"I shall remember," Jason promised, though he had never thought of his talk as more than an opportunity to scintillate and perhaps astonish; his doubts had been motivated, not by the fear that he would have little to say, but the fear that he might not say that little with sufficient brilliance. Now the knowledge that Mahinder Azad took for granted a social outlook he did not have deepened his sense of embarrassment.

A "social conscience," one fears, is often only a professional accomplishment in the West. In modern India, it is apt to be more heartfelt and considerably more universal in scope. The Indian intellectual, if he be like "Mahinder Azad," is not merely nationalist, however concerned he may be with the future of his own country. The people of his world are the dispossessed and downtrodden everywhere, although political slogans and alignments are properly reduced to matters of secondary import.

The romance in *Bombay Meeting*, though hardly comparable to *A Many-Splendored Thing*, has enduring values—as much for the philosophic attitude of an unloved husband as for anything else. Jason Cole, like Edmund Taylor—if for less profound reasons—returns "richer by Asia."



## **COMMENTARY**

### **THE GREAT BOOKS**

WE found this week's leading article in a recent issue of the *Gadfly*, the publication of the Great Books Foundation, and obtained permission to print it in more complete form. The author, Robert J. Blakely, is manager of the Central Regional Office of the Fund for Adult Education.

What seems impressive about this article, among other things, is the way in which Mr. Blakely draws upon the resources of great books to illuminate his discussion. This use of the classics may have a humbling effect on the modern reader, who is made to realize that the ancients were fully as capable of sophisticated utterance and psychological analysis as modern essayists, and to recognize that this practical wisdom has an independent source in human intelligence, by no means dependent upon the discoveries of science and their technological applications.

The sponsors of the Great Books program advocate a general mastery of the cultural heritage of Western civilization, and this heritage is largely embodied in the volumes proposed for study and discussion by the Great Books Foundation. Mr. Blakely's article seems to us to illustrate the breadth of mind which is possible for a modern thinker who has absorbed the values and practiced the disciplines found in great books.

We can think of no better antidote than writings of this sort for the delusion that civilization and culture are the result of a highly developed technology. Technology is not the authentic representative of civilization, but a mere by-product of some of its skills. Those who mistake technology for civilization itself tend to become the captives of their delusion, believing that whatever they want, or long for, can be obtained only by technological means. If they want peace, they call upon technology to design for them more terrible engines of war, futilely hoping that through overwhelming military power they will be able to *force* less technically skilled

peoples to be "peaceful." If they want happiness, they rely upon technology to supply them with an abundance of things, conveniences, and facilities, and when these fail, they look to the intruding distractions made possible by the technology of the entertainment industries to fill the inner void.

The lesson of the Great Books is a simple one. It is that greatness, for man, resides in thinking deep and high thoughts and in finding a way of life harmonious with such thoughts. The Great Books program, whatever its limitations, is one of the few movements in the modern world which seeks the realization of this objective.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

THE debates raging on the question of whether or not "modern education" furnishes acceptable instruction for the young reveal that the most concerned parents are those whose children are either just beginning or just terminating their stay in the public schools. In other words, by consensus of critics, the first years and the last years are the hardest! While parents of the very young characteristically worry over whether modern methods achieve sufficient progress in the three R's, the parents of high school seniors are most apt to give attention to matters of social and moral responsibility.

By stating this rather obvious contemporary fact, we immediately establish a bid for sympathy for our teachers; moral and social responsibility are prime concerns from kindergarten on in the modern school—so much so that parents are given opportunity to feel that insufficient attention is given to "three R" instruction. By the time an adolescent is ready to graduate from high school, however, his parents are sometimes prone to blame the schools for not providing enough "moral teaching."

At this point the whole subject becomes elusive, enabling the factionalists to excoriate the failings of those who uphold pedagogical theories differing from their own, and this conveniently obscures the need for fundamental review of *all* formal positions. The fact is that today's children are not easily impressed by their elders' convictions about moral values—whether the elders are teachers or parents—and it behooves us to wonder why. The answer, we suspect, is divided into at least two parts: First, the "old" counsels have a dull sound. They have a dull sound because few parents and teachers are being much more than "dutiful" in their preachments. "Moral" teaching is inspiring only when it is something more than conventional—when, instead of familiar echoes, its principles sound like

priceless discoveries. What a position for the average teacher to be in! Even the conception of being "dutiful" in passing on moral precepts is suspect in the modern intellectual climate; the children are not responsive, yet the community expects some "moral" emphasis from the teacher. There seems no way out of this except for the teacher to make some ethical discoveries himself—about which he can speak passionately. Unfortunately such discoveries may, and often do, sound subversive of the *status quo* and are not always tolerated.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with some of the oldest ethical precepts known to man. The Sermon on the Mount, the admonitions of the Indian Christ, Krishna, and the psychological ethics of Gotama Buddha, all contain eternal verities. But being taught a precept and making a discovery about ethics are two different things. Those who are moved by any of these three great instructors are not "talked into" responsiveness; instead, a "conversion" takes place, but in order to be meaningful it must be self-induced—involving discovery. In what David Riesman calls a "tradition-directed society," another kind of conversion takes place, not so impressive or inspiring, but effective in its way. The young person learns that the family and the community into which he is born function constructively according to definite rules. He who is to be a part of that family or community must accept these rules if he is to live a traditionally full life. In the tradition-directed society, each man does not have to be a philosopher, because a philosopher is concerned with vexing puzzles and problems, and such a society has, at least provisionally, settled them. But in *our* society, which is not clearly directed by any one tradition of behavior—where, in fact, as Karen Horney never tired of pointing out, the traditions are so contradictory and discordant as to produce neuroses for numerous people who cannot learn to travel in opposite directions at the same time the need for discovery of an inspiring ethic is great indeed.

We are confronted daily with problems of ethical decision which would tax the genius of the worthiest philosopher, yet we have no living tradition of philosophy. So how can we, or the teachers in our public schools, "pass on" an ability so conspicuous by its absence? There is little use of saying in dire prophecy that the world is in a great mess, hovering on the brink of destruction. It is still our world, and men of wisdom have always turned troublous circumstances into the raw material of further awakening. The will to understand, and the will to resolve conflicts—at least, to begin with, in respect to oneself—is the highest potential of man. And the will to understand and to resolve inner conflicts is encouraged to manifest by approaching every aspect of life with the *attitude* of discovery. Lessons in the attitude of discovery are what our children need most, and, since this lesson can only be taught by people who have located and encouraged this attitude in themselves, we can expect ethical improvement only when parents and teachers become more concerned with discovery than with complaint.

The world has been moving toward the atomic age for a number of centuries, during which time the philosophic quest for ethical truth has been in abeyance. An interest in discovery was present, of course, but found outlet in the world of physical nature. Just now the spirit of discovery in science seems less zestful, less alive, not because we have come to an end of discovering things in the natural world, but because this type of discovery, in its totality, reveals itself as no more than a single phase of life. A restricted emphasis loses its power to instruct for one who so identifies himself with it that he knows no other perspective; thus, today, the scientists—though better than ever *as* physical scientists—seem by and large much less interested in what they are doing than were their forebears. On the other hand, there is no way to avoid facing up to the fact that "moral education" is complicated by each additional involvement of social, economic and international structure—not

because ethical *principles* must change, but because they don't exist without embodiment, and their embodiment, today, must be in terms of a monstrous complex of new relationships. Only the parent or teacher who is willing to "go back and think as if he were the first man who ever thought" is really qualified to show a path for the young.

We "exist" in a time of routine acceptance, but we shall be unable to truly *live* until we make it an age of discovery. The basic questions we need to ask, and ask together with our children, are tough ones. Our marital, economic, political and international mores are letting us down, and we must probe them for inadequacies in need of correction. The adolescent who is encouraged to ask such embarrassing questions as, "Is marriage necessary?" or "Why not refuse to accept military training?" or—ask openly, and this is a different sort of question—"Why should I concern myself with anything save my own immediate personal desires?" is at least going to have to think, and thinking is the fundamental prerequisite for ethical awareness.

Parents will say, "But how can you trust a mere stripling to set his own standards on such subjects, since he will naturally tend to rationalize his own selfishness?" Well, a parent or teacher does not have to trust a youngster to come up with a good answer in order to invite him to think. If the answer is not a good one, we have to try to supply a better alternative or a better view. Actually the young, today, are making their own standards, anyway, and if they so often come up with poor ones, this may be due to the fact that we discourage their fuddling attempts, unwilling to admit that many of the old standards are pretty fuddly, too.

## *FRONTIERS* Seekers, Not Believers

A PRACTICAL impulse set in motion by Gandhi years ago seems to have flowered into an activity among Christians—more particularly among Quakers—which may become typical of the liberal Christianity of the future. In a conversation with Horace Alexander, an English Quaker who has spent much of his life in India, Gandhi suggested that the Quakers might take the lead among Christians in forming an inter-religious organization which would welcome Christians and non-Christians alike. According to a quarterly journal now devoted to this idea, "The Quakers, as an organized body, could not take up the challenge, but they have allowed some of their members in India who felt the concern to go ahead in this adventure."

The organization which resulted, with headquarters at G.S. College, Wardha, M.P., India, is the Fellowship of Friends of Truth, and the periodical which serves its ends is the *FFT Quarterly*, published in India from the same address. Mr. Alexander, now in England, is the chairman of the association, and he was doubtless one of the prime movers in its formation.

An article by Mr. Alexander in the January 1955 issue throws light on the transformation worked in sensitive and devoted Christians who go to India. He tells of the life of C. F. Andrews, biographer and admirer of Gandhi, who first arrived in India in 1904 as a Christian missionary. While Andrews remained a Christian throughout his life, he came to recognize in men of other religions the "presence," as he put it, "of Christ," describing his relations with a "saintly Mussulman" in this way: "I had no thought whatever of proselytizing or conversion, though we talked with the utmost freedom about religion, which was the one subject nearest his heart." Mr. Alexander remarks: "Later, as is well known, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi became C.F.A.'s two most intimate friends, and

those who knew their friendship could never for a moment imagine that Andrews was ever even secretly hoping to induce them to become members of the Christian Church."

It is somewhat in this mood that the Quaker members of the Fellowship of Friends of Truth pursue their adventure in religious fraternity. While the Fellowship is, relatively speaking, quite small, as religious organizations go, the idea which brought it into being is rapidly spreading among thoughtful Christians. The *Christian Century* for August 3 has an article by Douglas V. Steere, a Quaker writer of some distinction, which proposes that the Fellowship of Friends of Truth may be pioneering an attitude which will some day absorb all that is vital in the Christian tradition. As a Quaker, Mr. Steere refers to the Society of Friends in particular, but his article is really addressed to all Christians. The fundamental question he raises is this: Have Christians a faith in Christ great enough to be unfearful of comparisons with the spiritual content of other religions? He writes:

The Society of Friends stands today before a major crisis and a major opportunity. What was once the Chinese wall of physical distance, language and cultural isolation which enabled each of the great world religions to live a life of comparative security within its own borders, has now all but disappeared. In this new situation the Quaker form of the Christian religion finds itself queried by the deepest levels of Buddhism, of Hinduism, and even in rare cases of Islam. These religions ask Quakerism whether it is universal and inclusive and therefore able to respect their worship and practice. In the course of the last year a Zen Buddhist abbot and a Hindu swami both put such questions to me.

After a provocative discussion of the need of Christians to learn to be without fear of the truth in religions other than their own, Mr. Steere reveals the grounds of his own serenity in his closing passage:

What ultimately happens to the Society of Friends as a denominational body does not matter much. What happens to the world as the result of

daring to irradiate it with the universal reconciling love of Christ is in the end all that does matter.

The scope of the *FFT Quarterly* should be of great interest to all those concerned with the revival of nonsectarian, philosophical religion. It contains articles by Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, and there are studies of Buddhism also, one of the latter pointing out that Buddhism, which commands the devotion of hundreds of millions, and the respect of many millions more, is actually a Godless religion! A quotation from this last article (by Marie B. Byles) should help to indicate the spirit of the *Quarterly*:

What then do the Buddhists with their godless religion have in common with Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Zoroastrians, and others with their God-religions? (I have not mentioned Jainism.)

Two things: Firstly, they have the dharma, the Truth, the Law that holds for all; for no one who has tested it will deny, for instance, that if you return evil for evil, it will lead to more evil; but that if you return kind words for unkind, this will lead to peace and well-being. And secondly, they have that inward spiritual experience found in silence. . . . Those who have looked within find that there is that which lies beyond both senses and intellect. The Buddhists may call it "Nirvana". . . . The Christian may call it the Presence of God, but when he does so, he is not speaking of a belief in a Supreme Being, but of an inward experience, not adequately expressed in any words. And now it is the turn of the Buddhist to tell the Christian that what the Christian *really* means is, not God, but that which is "Beyond"—preferably spelt without a capital.

An explanation of how it happens that the Quakers have indeed taken the lead, as Gandhi proposed, in this work is found in another article, "Are Quakers Christians?" by Vivian Worthington. A passage from this article shows the reason behind Mr. Steere's suggestion that the Society of Friends faces both a crisis and an opportunity. This writer says:

Friends have been rubbing shoulders with the non-Christian world for a very long time in their relief and other works and might therefore seem to have grown to an appreciation of other points of view to a greater extent than other Christian sects. Even so, there has not hitherto been any great demand for

membership of the Society from non-Christians; it is only that there is something of a stirring in the minds of Friends that the time may be ripe for a big expansion, but which is likely to be in the non-Christian world rather than in the Christian. If such an expansion is likely to occur as a result of the opening of membership to non-Christians, what would be the effect on the Society of Friends? Would it manage to retain its identity and its discipline?

It would be difficult for Friends to adventure beyond their own traditional standpoint if the most important element in their religion were a set of beliefs; but it is actually the uniqueness of Quakerism that *believing* is held subordinate to *seeking*. Friends are *seekers*, rather than *believers*; and though it may be reasonable to put a limit to the area of search, nevertheless, I think, few Friends would put other religions on the wrong side of the barrier. So we might pose a question here to every Friend: "Is it permissible to seek outside the Christian religion?" I don't know whether this question has ever been clearly put or if so, whether it has been authoritatively answered. It is not a question that Friends have really had to grapple with hitherto; they have addressed themselves to problems of relationship with other Christian groups, and the hidden assumption has always been that a person applying for membership would certainly be some sort of a Christian.

These are profound thoughts and questions for the Christian community to consider, and it is to the everlasting credit of the Friends, who are *seekers* rather than *believers*, that the questions have been raised from among their number.