

## DUBIOUS "SUCCESS STORY"

SOME weeks ago, an editorial in *Life* Magazine expressed surprise that in the present day of "incredible accomplishments," the literature of the United States should be so backward in reflecting the several triumphs of American civilization. "Ours," *Life* declares, "is the most powerful nation in the world." Further, we have "had a decade of unparalleled prosperity." Finally, we have "gone further than any other society toward creating a truly classless society." These observations are made in defense of a young writer, Sloan Wilson, whose recent novel, termed "uneven" by the *Life* writer, is said to be "at least affirmative." At any rate, it has a "happy ending." *Life* quotes Wilson's explanation approvingly:

"The world's treated me awfully well, and I guess it's crept into my work. . . . These are, we forget, pretty good times. Yet too many novelists are still writing as if we were back in the depression years."

From this beginning, *Life* launches what purports to be a serious analysis of modern literature which welcomes a thinly represented revolt against "three decades of U.S. fiction dominated by skeptical criticism, sexual emancipation, social protest and psychoanalytical sermonizing." What is missing in our literature, the editorial concludes, is "a yea-saying to the goodness and joy of life."

There is some sage comment in *Life*, as, for example: "Faulkner, for all his enormous gifts, can be searched in vain for that quality of redemption, through love and brotherhood, which always shines amid Dostoevski's horrors." A slicker sentence condemns the "new realism" which is "exemplified by a parade of war novels which mostly read like the diary of a professional grievance collector with a dirty mind and total recall." Here, doubtless, the writer has in mind books like Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the*

*Dead*. *Life* makes a ritual genuflection to Robert Frost's observation that poets have "a vested interest in human misery," notes that "agony begets art," and that maybe "art mistrusts prosperity," then gets on to its theme: "the breeches-busting Paul Bunyan of the U.S. today seems to deserve better literature" than is being produced by current novelists.

One trouble with the *Life* editorial is that it is a castigation without an explanation. The disenchantment of the contemporary American novelist is merely called "strange," or "doubly strange," since a generation or so ago books like *The Great Gatsby*, *Main Street*, and *The Grapes of Wrath* were regarded as faithfully mirroring their times. Now, apparently, times are better, but fiction has turned wayward and irresponsibly reflects "degeneracy and negation."

But why? Is it simply that modern novelists are a bad breed? Or is it that the "incredible achievements" hailed by *Life*, while incredible enough, have little relation to the apprehensions felt by the novelists. What is there, after all, in the "prosperity" of the past ten years to prompt a celebration of the "joy of life"? We hold no brief for morbid novels, nor for the despair that many of them represent, but we don't see that *Life* has offered any important grounds for either "affirmation" or the "joy of life." The good times we are enjoying are ominously underwritten by the economics of preparation for war, and the optimism generated by peak retail sales is already haunted by spiralling figures on installment buying, such as preceded the 1929 depression. This latter, however, is not the sort of fact which affects the writer's consciousness. Malaise in literature has a deeper origin, related to the alienation which all but the strongest of creative natures may feel while fighting against submergence in the morass of insipidity,

conformity, and thoughtless but calculated brutality of modern civilization. The modern writer's protest may be weak, a dark narcissism of general cultural failure, full of both fear and reproach, but at least it avoids pretense. It lacks, for the most part, any form of nobility, and after several generations of scientific devaluation of the human individual, can find few resources for the spirit of inner redemption. Ours is a culture in which art, if not the artist, starves for the kind of nourishment which cannot be bought with money.

But to document the disturbance of creative writers, while easy enough, would be a project not worth pursuing. The arts, after all, commonly take their cue from other fields of endeavor. There weren't many psychoanalytical novels written before Freud, and the themes (or obscurities) of modern art have been traced in part to the new model of the universe produced by modern physics. Artists and the writers, except for the occasional genius, can only work with the materials supplied to them by their time, so that *Life's* criticism is nothing more than one side of an argument about the quality of those materials. A reply to *Life* may be taken from something Robert O. Bowen, the young author of *Bamboo*, wrote for *Intro Bulletin*, a new monthly devoted to the arts. Bowen says:

It is not the serious young writer who is abusing the craft of fiction today, for he is not producing pseudo-religious claptrap, lush historical novels, or detective stories with a highly suggestive incidence of aberrational violence. He deals with the values of the actual contemporary world, in which religious doubt is wide and profound, where sex is common and ugly. He is learning to look on and endure and even love the living world as it is, rather than to escape it through illusions which are incompatible with it and rather contemptible in the bargain.

The sense of violation which pervades the writing of my generation is, simply and clearly, an objection to the personal and spiritual violation that marks our time, to the substitution of file numbers for names and the psychiatrist for the priest. The "tough, sensational and brutal" which Van Wyck Brooks finds to be the identifying factor in contemporary novels, is in fact a clear objection not to contemporary

novels but to the sordidness in modern material values. Actually, if the Brooks faction would only see it, we are not writing about whores, but about salesmen in terms of whores; not about perverts, but about badly motivated administrators in terms of perverts; not about alcohol and drugs, but about that great darkness which is closing down over our civilization and which men cannot see beyond the glare of neon lights.

Can we expect the novelist to create the substance of a better life? A Dostoevski, perhaps, may have a try at it, but Dostoevski, besides being a genius, lived before the Great Fear. *Life*, incidentally, mentions Tolstoy along with Dostoevski in its paragraphs reproachful to young writers. This was a mistake. If ever a man opposed all the things represented by a modern mass magazine, it was Leo Tolstoy. Along with a few other intuitive Europeans, Tolstoy saw the way modern civilization was going and resisted it in every way he could—even to becoming an absolute pacifist and writing powerful tracts against war and the "statesmanship" which leads to war. Is *Life* willing to accept the Tolstoyan philosophy in order to get a Tolstoyan quality in modern literature?

But Tolstoys and Dostoevskis come only about once in a century, and can you think of any good reason why such men, supposing they had a choice, should visit *us*?

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that any worthy literature or art, if it is produced today, must be depressing or ominous in content. There is a paragraph in Lewis Mumford's *Art and Technics* which speaks directly to this point, making the distinctions which a thoughtful appraisal of modern cultural expression requires:

The healthy art of our time is either the mediocre production of people too fatuous or complacent to be aware of what has been happening to the world [the *Life* editors, perhaps!]  
—or it is the work of spiritual recluses, almost as withdrawn as the traditional Hindu or Christian hermits, artists who bathe tranquilly in the quiet springs of traditional life, but who avoid the strong, turbid currents of contemporary existence, which might knock them

down or carry them away. . . . The fact that such artists live and quietly sustain themselves is in itself a good sign, though it reveals nothing about our further social development, since this kind of artist has always found a cranny to grow in under the most unfavorable personal or social conditions.

What these self-enclosed artists reveal is the unshakeable determination of life itself, as I think it was Amiel who said, "even under conditions of maximum opposition by external forces."

Like all abstract analyses, this paragraph needs the touch of illustrations to come alive. It is possible, for example, to show that a genuinely self-enclosed artist may on occasion emerge from his refuge or "cranny" to offer on the world about him comment which is as penetrating as that of any of his more "agonizing" contemporaries. Henry David Thoreau is the best possible illustration of this capacity. A modern writer in the Thoreau tradition, Henry Beston, has like resources. For sheer refreshment and an extraordinarily intense experience of the natural world, we can think of no better book than Beston's *The Outermost House*. This story of an isolated but not lonely year on the beach of Cape Cod accomplishes a rare union of the poetic imagination with close observation of nature (we refrain from saying "scientific" observation only for the pedantry implied), and combines also the drama of natural events with the spirit of a type of human adventure that blends in full appropriateness with the roar of storms and the lash of waves against reefs and shore. Yet Beston, when moved to speak of the affairs of men, is capable of a high and illuminated indignation which leaves little doubt of his awareness of "what has been happening to the world."

Somewhat less "self-enclosed," perhaps, but also immeasurably enriched by their attraction to a natural environment are two other writers—Joseph Wood Krutch, a leading critic and essayist, and the late Aldo Leopold, author of *A Sand County Almanac*. Krutch needs no introduction to the reader of these pages, and although Leopold is by comparison obscure, a reference to

the MANAS review of his volume (July 30, 1950) soon makes plain the critical resources at his disposal.

The truly "affirmative" writer, in other words, can hardly win an accolade from *Life* for celebrating the recent achievements of our present civilization.

It is a matter of some interest, furthermore, that the most affirmative writing of the time is coming from men who are professionally responsible for healing the wounds human beings inflict upon themselves, whether individually, or corporately, as societies. (This is true of course, only if "affirmative" be taken to mean expressive of faith that men have the capacity to rectify wrongs, to change, better, and transform both themselves and their environment. A happy complacency about the dollar volume of department stores and the large royalty checks publishers are able to send to their most popular authors is not the form of "affirmation" we are talking about.) The Quaker pamphlet, *Speak Truth to Power*, is an expression of affirmative writing. With as much or more sophistication than the devaluators of mankind, this pacifist analysis and proposal is deeply grounded in the Quaker conviction that there is "that of God in man." Then, in the field of psychotherapy, there is the striking affirmative quality present in Erich Fromm's latest book, *The Sane Society*. Our point is that the men who really try to make themselves responsible for the healing processes available to the sick of our time have *got* to become affirmative thinkers, or give up. And in their study of the requirements of healing, they also become sharply critical of the habits, attitudes and practices which bar the way to health. The same would apply to those who are earnestly committed to both reform and progress in education—the people at St. John's College, for example.

Returning to the subject of America's "incredible accomplishments," a single-page article in the *Nation* (Oct. 8) by Joseph J. Seldin details the exploits of television advertisers in converting

the very young into potential buyers of their products. Mr. Seldin, himself an advertising man, describes research findings which reveal that "youngsters eagerly repeat television and radio commercials which strike their fancy. Even five-year-olds sing beer commercials over and over again with gusto." This repetition of advertising themes by children costs the advertiser nothing, and, as the research report quips, "They are also more difficult to turn off.

Six years ago, advertising professionals foresaw the "incredible" sales potentials promised by television and one alert firm questioned a four-year-old about the "best" brands of toothpaste, washing powder, and coffee, getting replies which fully confirmed the susceptibility of the young to television selling. The firm promptly placed an advertisement in a trade journal, describing this "survey," and exclaiming:

Where else on earth is brand consciousness fixed so firmly in the minds of four-year-old tots? How many pre-school Americans are pre-sold on how many different products? What is it worth to a manufacturer who can close in on this juvenile audience and continue to sell it under controlled conditions, year after year, right up to its attainment of adulthood and full-fledged buyer status? It CAN be done. Interested?

Seldin's comment is appropriate:

Manipulation of children's minds in the fields of religion or politics would touch off a parental storm of protest and a rash of Congressional investigations. But in the world of commerce children are fair game and legitimate prey.

*Life* might play host to criticisms of this sort, since both radio and television have doubtless made inroads on the income of the Luce publications, but the logic of the commercial, rhymed, singing, or merely shouted, is only an extension of the printed advertisements carried by mass magazines, so that the criticism would have to be restrained. There is no need to claim that Advertising, all advertising, is Immoral, but that advertising which is deliberately designed to condition rather than to inform is an obvious

enemy to both education and civilization. The prime purpose of the manufacturer who sells to the mass market is to control or direct human impulses, and, if possible, to make *impulses* the most powerful motivation in human conduct in relation to the purchase of goods and services.

This is the modern version of the Dionysian revel or orgy—with the pipes of Pan being played, however, by the capering clowns and other hirelings of the respectable merchants of the community. There is something pretty awful about the studied attempt to separate people from their dollars by an elaborate and incredibly costly program of "conditioning" which is so all-pervasive that it determines the jingles children sing and the jokes and catchwords echoed by adolescents. The temptations of the old-time pool room and the indulgences of the corner saloon seem innocent by comparison, for this new corruption does not begin in the human weakness of the town's ne'er-do-weels, but in the directors' meetings of large corporations.

Perhaps the greatest crime of modern civilization is its bland commercialization of human emotions and its half-conscious blurring of all moral issues in the interest of an indistinct and thoughtless impulsiveness which makes conspicuous consumption the most prominent rule of life. The saturation of our culture with habits which support this commercialization and the omnipresent justification of these habits with pseudo-reason in the pages of popular reading matter turns the mood of commercialization into a kind of intellectual "smog" which reaches into every corner of society, making what we think and do and feel in response to commercial stimuli seem the "normal" thing. Is it any wonder that serious young writers, sensitive enough to feel sick from this common disease—a symptom which the tough majority may not be able to notice in themselves, except as a kind of emptiness for which other causes are blamed—should retch and writhe in protest, when they cannot avoid the poison all around them?

There is of course a historic *mystique* in the doctrine of a sublime impulsiveness—of giving oneself to the "natural" inclination of the moment. The influential Romantic movement of European history, itself a reaction to cold, calculating rationalism, has contributed its justification of spontaneous freedom to Western thought, but romanticism, for all its charm, becomes nothing but odious when served up by advertisers on calendared paper for the purpose of showing their stockholders a profit at the end of the year. A passage in Irving Babbitt's *Rousseau and Romanticism* gives light on the Romantic movement and the emotional and even philosophical longings it has served:

The cult of intoxication has as a matter of fact appeared in all times and places where men have sought to get the equivalent of religious vision and the sense of oneness that it brings without rising above the naturalistic level. True religious vision is a process of concentration, the result of the imposition of the veto power upon the expansive desires of the ordinary self. The various naturalistic simulations of this vision are, on the contrary, expansive, the result of a more or less complete escape from the veto power, whether won with the aid of intoxicants or not. The emotional romanticists from Rousseau down have left no doubt as to the type of vision they represented. Rousseau dilates with a sort of fellow feeling on the deep potations that went on in the taverns of patriarchal Geneva. Renan looks with disfavor on those who are trying to diminish drunkenness among the common people. He merely asks that this drunkenness "be gentle, amiable, accompanied by moral sentiments." Perhaps this side of the movement is best summed up in the following passage of William James: "The sway of alcohol over mankind is unquestionably due to its power to stimulate the mystical faculties of human nature, usually crushed to earth by the cold facts and dry criticisms of the sober hour. Sobriety diminishes, discriminates and says no; drunkenness expands, unites, and says yes. It is, in fact, the great exciter of the *Yes* function in man. It brings its votary from the chill periphery of things to the radiant core. It makes him for the moment one with truth."

The American distiller who named one of his brands "Golden Dream Whiskey" was evidently too modest. If an adept in the new psychology he might

have set up as a pure idealist, as the opener up of an especially radiant pathway to the "truth."

The primitivist then attacks sober discrimination as an obstacle both to warm immediacy of feeling and to unity. He tends to associate the emotional unity that he gains through intoxication with the unity of instinct which he so admires in the world of the subrational. "The romantic character," says Ricarda Huch, "is more exposed to waste itself in debaucheries than any other; for only in intoxication, whether of love or wine, when the one half of its being, consciousness, is lulled to sleep, can it enjoy the bliss for which it envies every beast—the bliss of feeling itself one."

In a *managed* society, where the managers are psychologists of either commercial or totalitarian background, the specious "unity" is obtained in various artificial way—by belonging to the crowd of people who "own" what everyone else owns, or as nearly as possible; or in the commonly accepted dogmas of national superiority—or perhaps it is the dogma of "revolutionary mission." The outward forms are unimportant; the real identity of such societies lies in the common responsiveness of their members to manufactured provocation to "impulsive" activity.

The "affirmation" that is worth talking about will not be found in obedient reactions to button-pressing editorials, even when these are lined with verbal tributes to the values which affirmation must declare. Genuine values can have only a mummified presence in a culture which so willingly submits to the dehumanizing processes of commercialization.

## *REVIEW*

### CONSCIENCE AMONG WRITERS

A LITTLE breast-beating on the matter of social responsibility is to be found among the members of any generation of intellectuals, so that it would be unwise to make extravagant claims about the passages from two novels we reproduce in this issue. However, signs of uneasy conscience among writers, always worth noting, seem to be increasing, as well as the number of those who apparently feel a strong urge to say to the public—or to colleagues—something off the beaten track. Scores of well-paid correspondents have been travelling around the world by first-class air line since the termination of World War II, and these men and women capable of sharp intellectual penetration are daily observing vast discrepancies between the superficial glitter of a U. S. "help-the-world-to-democracy" policy and the actual amount of sympathetic understanding possessed by its administrators.

Protests against smug nationalism are, of course, much easier to launch in a novel than in a syndicated column, but the facility of the medium need not dim our appreciation of what is said. Take for instance such discussions of Socialism and Communism as appear in the novel *Shriek with Pleasure*, written by a former *News Week* correspondent who covered the Nuremberg trials. Now living in the south of France, Toni Howard has evidently acquired a European perspective on the "America vs Russia" struggle for power. During one of the few important conversations occurring in *Shriek with Pleasure*, a French survivor of the Resistance Movement endeavors to influence the uncomplicated opinions of a young American newspaper correspondent:

Charles leaned forward in his chair. "*Attendez*. I am a Socialist, Mr. Hawks, since I am twenty-one years old. We Socialists in Europe have been fighting the Communists beak and claws from the moment that we saw that they had abandoned all democratic principle—and for that reason. Now you have taken our ideological quarrel and made it into a nationalist one, and you are surprised that we do not get so hysterical as you. But in reality you are beginning very late to fight, and for the wrong reasons, and in

the wrong way. We have been at this a much longer time. And we know, *d'expérience brutale*, that one cannot fight Communism with hysteria.

"In fact," continued Charles, "we think our complaint against them is much stronger than yours. You are against them as a nation against another nation, because they are almost as powerful as you and because they are interfering with the free play of that democratic-capitalist system of yours. We are against them as a method and an idea, because they betrayed the working classes of Europe."

David was getting angry. "That isn't true!" he said, his forehead flushing with the heat of his argument. "We are against them because they represent and support the most brutal and cynical dictatorship the world has ever seen!"

Charles sat back a moment or two. "No," he said finally, and his face in the firelight was shadowed with contemplation. "You must excuse me if I do not agree with you. That dictatorship is no more brutal and cynical now than it was from 1941 to 1945, and during those five years you indirectly supported it yourselves by allying yourselves with it. Additionally, that dictatorship is no more brutal or cynical than Hitler's, and you did business with Hitler for eight years. No," he said again, shaking his head. "I believe that as a nation you know what you are doing. But I do not believe that as a people you know why you are doing it.

"After all," continued Charles, "the only thing that can defeat communism is democracy—real democracy, not just the symptoms of it. I was a Communist once myself. I know them. There is no ruse they will not use to get their system established. But if once you begin to adopt the same ruses—"

"Then you've had it, eh?"

"*Absolument foutu*," said Charles. He tapped his pipe out against the ashtray. "That's what I mean when I say hysteria won't work. Extremes are like rabbits, they always produce more extremes. Why not do something more rational?"

Elementary, all this, for European intellectuals whose backs were literally to the wall during years of Nazi occupation—or still are during communist penetration—but nevertheless a strange and complicated language for most American readers. We wonder whether such passages stand out in the minds of many readers, or whether they are skipped over as interruptions of an exciting plot.

Ira Morris' *The Bombay Meeting*, recently reviewed in MANAS for its insights into the complex political and social situation in India, contains some provoking passages on the general subject of the responsibility of intellectuals—in this case bearing on the bored or cynical attitudes of "old professionals" rather than exposing the brash assurance of youth. A group of writers, meeting in Bombay for international conclave, discover that they must make a choice between accepting a man of purely commercial tastes as president of an association to which they belong, and putting forth one of their own number to stand for untrammelled expression. At this moment each one has an excuse for remaining in his own personal shell. They don't want their income controlled by the busy organizer, "Marchand," but they are also unwilling to enter a struggle which, if unsuccessful, may cut them off from lush publishing contracts:

"We are *all* guilty!" Claudia said. "We sit at our little desks, scribbling nonsense, while the Marchands are busy snatching control. We can't even stop them from running our own organization, how can we hope to stop them from running the governments of the world? The truth is we don't care a hoot, though we can't admit that. Of course we'd rather not have Marchand in a strategic position, but if stopping him means personal sacrifice, we leave it to the next man. This is a case in point. Is there anyone here who'd be willing to take on this job?"

There was a moment of embarrassed silence.

"Ah, you see!" cried Claudia triumphantly. "Not a single volunteer, not even myself! We're all too busy following the pleasant pattern of our lives, and even if our absorption were to cost us those very lives, we'd keep composing sentences as they marched us off to the concentration camps. We are careerists, and we care neither about humanity nor the world's future, but only about the sales figures of our next books. Really we writers are a worthless lot—we deserve our Marchands and our McCarthys and worse—if there could be anything worse. We are guilty, most guilty, for ours should be the voice of the people, but all we can do is—squeak!"

"In a couple of days I'll be back in London, ready to launch out on another acidy novel, offering as little hope to humanity and my poor readers as a glass of concentrated lemon juice; Sam Howard here will begin another sequel to a sequel, counting on his

first book to sell his last; Werner, the professional refugee, will keep writing about refugees, though by now their problems bore him and everyone else; Mr. Plansky will embark on a revision of his faded notes, or perhaps make a few new notes, in the unlikely event that inspiration strikes him.

"We'll all be back repeating the things we've been saying so skillfully and ineffectually for years and years and years. Not even our crammed month in this fantastic India will give greater scope to our future writings; in fact, I doubt if any of us will carry away more valuable impressions than the average Cook tourist. As to our Indian colleagues, they will continue to write their mystic poetry in a dozen languages, or else—poor devils—try to compete with us, who are smarter and more dishonest."

The similarity between the psychological situations depicted in *Shriek with Pleasure* and *Bombay Meeting* is certainly close, even though the settings and occupations of the writers are different. When a roving correspondent deserts his calling to write a book about Gandhi—as Vincent Sheean did with *Lead Kindly Light*—he is lampooned by contemporaries for his "sudden donning of shining armor" and his almost religious devotion to the person of Gandhi. Yet we suspect that Mr. Sheean, and an increasing number in some way like him, fully find themselves only when they stop being smoothly "professional" in the accepted sense of this term.

If we of MANAS have shown ourselves favorably disposed to the unusual thoughts expressed in many modern novels, it is probably because so many of the writers have commenced doing "fiction" principally because they can find no better way for expressing challenging ideas. And here it is pertinent to remind ourselves that the "intellectual" is of greatest use to his readers when he steps from majority opinions and offers new, unorthodox perspectives.

## COMMENTARY

### HOW OTHERS ARE DECIDING

THE great project of the enlightened American, these days, is to do what he can to persuade his fellow Americans to grasp how the rest of the world thinks, and why. We recently took note here of the American Friends Service Committee publication, *Speak Truth to Power*. Now another wing of the Quaker movement—that represented by Pendle Hill, "a community for religious and social study and cooperative living"—is heard from in regard to international problems, through a Pendle Hill pamphlet, "From Where *They* Sit." This pamphlet is the result of a tour of visits by Dorothy Hutchinson to many far-off places—to the homes of people in the Netherlands, Germany, the Philippines, the Arab States and Pakistan, Israel, India, and Thailand. For many readers, the major importance of the pamphlet will lie in its simple account of how the choice between "East" and "West" is seen by many millions of the inhabitants of other lands. Mrs. Hutchinson writes:

We in America, who abhor Communism and its totalitarian methods, marvel at what seems to us the gullibility of people to whom these things seem attractive. It is easier for us to classify them as suckers than to take a straight look at *why* they are attracted. People in the underdeveloped parts of the world told me why they believe Communism has shown itself capable of delivering benefits which they desperately need.

They spoke of the rapid rise of the USSR to a first-class industrial and military power, capable of competing with the United States; they pointed to the land reforms in China and the sanitation program which has eliminated festering disease. When Communist ruthlessness is mentioned, they answer that ruthlessness is nothing new. However, they point to Nehru's victory over the Communists in Andhra, won by declaring a *democratic* program to obtain the same social goals as the Communists promised: land reform, industrialization, and an end to exploitation. The people of the world, Mrs. Hutchinson points out,

want the reforms, and would rather have them by democratic means, but they intend to get them, *one way or another*. She says:

Hence to many anti-Communists in Europe, the Middle East and Asia, our military approach to the threat of Communism seems irrelevant or worse than irrelevant. To them it seems that every dollar we spend, or insist on their spending for arms is just that much which cannot be spent on the economic improvement which they believe is necessary if democracy is to survive.

The cost of ignoring this warning may be much greater than Americans can afford.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

A STRIKING perspective on child-rearing is found in an article in the August issue of *Psychiatry*. The author, Yehudi A. Cohen, is a social anthropologist who spent six months living among the people of Rocky Roads, an isolated mountain community on the island of Jamaica in the British West Indies. The Negroes of Rocky Roads have evolved a stern program of training for their children which seems to produce "independent, relatively well-to-do farmers raising varied crops which they sell for cash in weekly urban markets." This is not to suggest that the Rocky Roaders are "successful" parents, nor that they or their children are happy, harmonious people. What is of interest is not the difference between American theories on bringing up children and the "theories" of the Rocky Roaders, but the frightening similarity as to basic goals.

The prime motive of the Rocky Roaders is economic security and eminence, and this motive is nakedly pursued. Discipline is obtained by flogging both boys and girls. The Rocky Roder child is systematically left in hunger, which is apparently an "educational" measure rather than a result of food shortage. To quote from Dr. Cohen's article:

The constant and prepotent aim of life in Rocky Roads is the maintenance of economic "independence"—that is, wealth or self-sufficiency. Around the time of adolescence this motivation becomes fully crystallized, and assumes the proportions that it will have throughout life. More accurately, this is the time that the Rocky Roder first becomes capable of verbalizing these strivings. Whenever a boy of thirteen or younger was asked why he saved whatever pennies he earned, he put his motivation in terms of parental encouragement in this direction. At fourteen years and older his motivation is in terms of himself: "Me want to be rich, man! Me want to be rich." Earlier he would have said: "My daddy flog me if me no save."

While there are many complex psychological factors covered by Mr. Cohen, one is of special interest:

The amassment of wealth is an isolating process in any society and invariably results in a structuralization of interpersonal relationships which is atomistic. At the same time, such isolation, especially with respect to food, reinforces the person's conviction of the impoverishment of the world and of his impoverished and isolated position in it. . . .

Almost all anxieties, fantasies, conflicts, inhibitions, and feelings of guilt among the folks of Rocky Roads center about food and money. Thematically, food and money constitute the basic motivating factors in religious ideas and practices, interpersonal and interpunitive aggression, marriage, the formation of nonsexual friendships, and political behavior. Significantly, most dreams are interpreted by the Rocky Roaders as omens of economic success or failure.

The people of Rocky Roads live in a perpetual state of anxiety over their economic welfare. . . . Actually, eighty per cent of the people in the community live above the subsistence level, and no more than three per cent of the adults can be classed as dependent upon others for their physical survival. Thus these economic anxieties are completely out of proportion to objective reality.

Manifestly, the people of Rocky Roads live out their lives wholly untouched by any sort of educational theory. They live lives of unashamed acquisitiveness. Until the impersonal authority of the acquisitive ideal takes hold of the young Rocky Roder, he is made by his parents to fulfill its requirements, and his devotion to acquisition, from the time of adolescence, is watchfully encouraged by the older generation. He achieves independence, but continually fears its loss. The Rocky Roaders impose a terrible punishment upon the economic failure. The dependent adult is—

relegated to the lowest social stratum of the community; and if he finally loses the struggle and becomes completely dependent upon an outside agent for his physical survival, he perceives himself as impotent before the demands of his organism, and worthless before the world. He lives in a state of perpetual anxiety which renders him completely immobilized. He sinks into abject apathy,

despondency, and utter helplessness. The incessant complaint of the dependent adult is that "No one knows me any more."

The question which the reader of Mr. Cohen's paper may be driven to consider is this: Is the environment of the children of the more civilized and industrialized United States really superior to that of the Rocky Roaders? The acquisitiveness of the Rocky Roaders, of course, is unhidden by euphemism or pseudo-piety. Their lust for money is without hypocrisy. The authority which rules their lives is plain for all. It is perhaps a simple, uncomplicated barbarism. But if you turn from this account to Karen Horney's *Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, to read of the conflicting "authorities" which preside over many American homes, it is possible to wonder if there has been a great deal of improvement. Are we—of the "advanced" democratic society of the West—so very much better off than the Rocky Roaders? Is sophisticated ambivalence superior to single-minded barbarism? Is loss of a sense of personal significance better when you equate it with social success?

The comparison is of course strained in some ways. There are numerous deviationists and rebels against even anonymous authority in the United States, while no one, apparently, dares to challenge the overt authority of the Rocky Roaders. But the Rocky Roaders have this advantage: They are clear on what they are after. A certain pattern of achievement characterizes their lives.

With all our studies of education and surveys of social conditions, we do not begin to have the clarity of purpose possessed by the Rocky Roaders. We want, of course, or *say* we want, a higher purpose. But we are not lucid as to what that higher purpose ought to be, nor have we any firm notion of what the fulfillments of human life should be. So the invisible authority of custom and variously-concealed acquisitiveness supervenes to fill the void.

This is a long way to go to reach a simple conclusion: the conclusion that elaborate educational theory, scholarly research, and fabulous sums spent on the upbringing of our children—that all these things are worse than useless when there is no philosophic temper to give them deep meaning and validity. Our theories may be greatly in advance of the Rocky Roaders', but our way of life may actually be more confused. If there are any Communists in the house, may we also add that any sort of economic goal is only that, and the more rigorously pursued as the end and aim of life, the more conducive to ruthless methods of enforcing conformity.

## *FRONTIERS* "A life of its Own"

IN *They Thought They Were Free*, Milton Mayer tells the story of his friendship with ten former members of the Nazi Party. There was nothing special about these ten. Mayer believes that they could be taken to represent "some millions or tens of millions of Germans." He became acquainted with them during a year spent as a visiting professor at the University of Frankfurt. He writes in his Foreword:

Now I see a little better how Nazism overcame Germany—not by attack from without or by subversion from within, but with a whoop and a holler. It was what most Germans wanted—or, under pressure of combined reality and illusion, came to want. They wanted it; they got it; and they liked it.

I came back home a little afraid for my country, afraid of what it might want, and get, and like, under pressure of combined reality and illusion. I felt—and feel—that it was not German Man that I had met, but Man. He happened to be in Germany under certain conditions. He might be here, under certain conditions. He might, under certain conditions, be I.

If I—and my countrymen—ever succumbed to that concatenation of conditions, no Constitution, no laws, no police, and certainly no army would be able to protect us from harm. For there is no harm that anyone else can do to a man that he cannot do to himself, no good that he cannot do if he will. And what was said long ago is true: Nations are made not of oak and rock but of men, and, as the men are, so will the nations be.

Mayer found himself "liking" the ten former Nazis; he couldn't help it. In the abstract, this may seem either incredible or impossible. You have to read the book to see how it works, and reading this book would be a worthy enterprise. (It was published this year by the University of Chicago Press.)

Mayer doesn't try to offer final judgment of the ten Nazis. This book is an examination of human nature as it behaves "under certain conditions." The implied conclusion of the book is that the overtaking of the German people by

Nazi rule was a historical phenomenon which only heroes could have successfully resisted. The Germans were not heroes. They did not resist (except for a few—too few), and Mayer finds it difficult to condemn them for this.

There is no effort, on the other hand, to minimize or ignore the crimes which took place in Germany. Mayer is an American of German descent. He is also a Jew, although none of the ten Nazis he became friends with knew it. Mayer tried to look at what happened in Germany through their eyes, and they couldn't have helped him to see through their eyes if they had known that he was a Jew. They would have been angered or confused or embarrassed. They are still anti-Semitic and will probably remain so until they die.

One of the things Mayer makes clear is that the history of the Nazi movement is filled with bewildering contradictions. This passage will illustrate:

Take the late Ernst von Weizsacker, promoted by Nazi Foreign Minister Ribbentrop in 1934 from Minister to Switzerland to State Secretary for Foreign Affairs. He not only became a Nazi; he accepted the rank of brigadier general in the black-shined Nazi SS. As Ribbentrop's State Secretary, he signed documents by which thousands of Jews were deported to slavery and death. At Nuremberg the American prosecutor called him "the Devil's State Secretary" and "the executive officer of Murder, Incorporated." An American tribunal convicted him of crimes against humanity.

There, certainly, was a Nazi. But at his trial, the diplomats of all the Allied countries (including the United States of America) testified to his hatred of Nazism; and the surviving leaders of the anti-Nazi resistance in Germany testified to his support and encouragement; distinguished allied churchmen, scholars, scientists, and International Red Cross executives testified to the relentlessness of his efforts to mitigate or circumvent Nazi directives; a procession of German Jews and Jews of Nazi-occupied countries testified that his illegal assistance to them had saved their lives. Bishop Primate Berggrav, leader of the Norwegian resistance and President of the World Council of Churches, said, "don Weizsacker was not a Nazi; he was an anti-

Nazi. I know this man in the essential character of his soul. I saw him suffer and serve. If he is condemned, we are all condemned."

Why did so many of these "anti-Nazis" join the Nazi Party? They joined, Mayer points out, for the same reason that many lawyers who disapprove of the American Bar Association policies nevertheless join the ABA; for the same reason that doctors who vehemently disagree with the policies of the American Medical Association are found on the rolls of this organization—in order to pursue their profession. Many Germans joined the Nazi Party simply to hold their jobs or to get better ones. Mayer tells the tragi-comic story of Schafer, a railroad worker, who joined the National Socialist Party after learning that his boss had joined. Years later the worker found out that his boss had really been an anti-Nazi, and had joined only because *his* boss, the section superintendent, was an ardent Nazi. The local boss tried to get Schäfer fired when the latter became a Nazi, believing that he had done so from political conviction, but the section superintendent blocked this move, as it was his policy to protect Party members!

From a philologist, a colleague at the University, Mayer gained another picture of the slow rot of German morale. The German intellectuals, unlike Mayer's ten Nazi friends, who were "little men," *knew* that something was wrong, but didn't know what to do. Mayer reports the conversation:

"You see," my colleague went on, "one doesn't see exactly where or how to move. Believe me, this is true. Each act, each occasion, is worse than the last, but only a little worse. You wait for the next and the next. You wait for one great shocking occasion, thinking that others, when such a shock comes, will join with you in resisting somehow. You don't want to act, or even talk, alone; you don't want to go out of your way to make trouble. Why not?—Well, you are not in the habit of doing it. And it is not just fear of standing alone, that restrains you; it is also genuine uncertainty. . . ."

"And one day, too late, your principles, if you were ever sensible of them, all rush in upon you. The

burden of self-deception has grown too heavy, and some minor incident, in my case my little boy, hardly more than a baby, saying 'Jew swine,' collapses it all at once, and you see that everything, everything, has changed and changed completely under your nose. . . . You see what you are, what you have done, or, more accurately, what you haven't done (for that was all that was required of most of us: that we do nothing). You remember those early meetings of your department in the university when, if one had stood, others would have stood, perhaps, but no one stood. A small matter, a matter of hiring this man or that, and you hired this one rather than that. You remember everything now, and your heart breaks. Too late. You are compromised beyond repair.

"What then? You must then shoot yourself. A few did. Or 'adjust' your principles. Many tried, and some, I suppose, succeeded; not I, however. Or learn to live the rest of your life with your shame. This last is the nearest there is, under the circumstances, to heroism: shame. Many Germans became this poor kind of hero, many more, I think, than the world knows or cares to know."

Reading Mayer's book about the Nazis and how many of them became Nazis is something like reading a book written for the layman on insanity. As you read, you begin to feel uncomfortable. The symptoms of madness are curiously like your own behavior, in certain small respects. You gain a strong sympathy for the madman, who, quite plainly, is your brother under the skin.

Mayer's book, of course, was written with something like this purpose. He is not accusatory, however; he is not interested in accusations, but in comprehending the behavior of human beings. And understanding the behavior of other human beings is quite impossible except for those who begin to understand themselves. The only real criticism of the Germans that Mayer offers is this: "The German incapacity for calm, consistent insubordination—for being first and last a free man—is the key to his national history."

Books to go with Mayer's book are Dwight Macdonald's *The Root Is Man*, which includes the essay on German war guilt, "The Responsibility of Peoples," and Pearl Buck's *How it Happened*. All three of these works are completely free of what

may be called the "political motivation," and have, therefore, the refreshing and liberating mood of impartial inquiry. This quality of independence places them in striking contrast to all modern totalitarian psychology and, in particular, the German totalitarian psychology. Mayer quotes from a contemporary German a searching diagnosis on this point:

"The German tragedy," said Reinhold Schneider, one of Germany's great living men of letters, "is as deep as ever. It is that nothing can be regarded as having a life of its own. Everything—whether music, or art, or religion, or literature—is judged almost exclusively on its conceivable political bearing. The most tortured and far-fetched conclusions are drawn from productions that were only created out of the urge to create or, if they had a goal, to enhance the outreach of the human spirit. Of course I am aware of the social responsibility of the artist, but to go over to the Marxist thesis, as the West seems to be doing, that everything is only an incident to a great political, and ultimately economic, movement, is to sell out something that will impoverish the world, certainly to sell out that early hope that something new in the human plastic might emerge out of Germany's pain."

Milton Mayer's book, *They Thought They Were Free*, is a work with "a life of its own," and worth the time of all those who value this principle.