

QUESTIONS ABOUT AMERICA

GANDHI'S greatest contribution, so far as the West is concerned, is perhaps the "leverage" his program provides for discussion of what changes might be possible and desirable for other parts of the world. Without Gandhi, certain radical ideas and proposals could obtain no hearing at all; but we are not without Gandhi—he lived, worked, and in a measure *proved* that some of his ideas at least are workable. Hence in any consideration of social change, Gandhi's ideas must be taken seriously.

In MANAS for Dec. 2, 1953, Roy Kepler discussed "The Promise of America," finding occasion to compare elements of the Gandhian outlook with a possible course for America. We now have a letter in comment on this article, which we print together (separated by asterisks) with Mr. Kepler's reply.

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It is true, as Mr. Kepler remarked in his Dec. 2 article, "that most of the world's population seems bent on trying" the way of social abundance, rather than Gandhi's way of "abstinence and asceticism." But this fact is no answer to the questions which the pursuit of "social abundance" raises:

(1) Are there sufficient resources in the world to support abundance for everyone? Today, the United States is notoriously dependent on Southeast Asia and Africa and South America for the raw materials which support our high standard of living. Is not the major problem facing Europe today the readjustment in standards of living made necessary by the loss, or the imminent loss, of colonies? For, as these underdeveloped areas, also seeking abundance for themselves, progress, they will be less disposed to part with raw materials, and Europe, and eventually the United States, instead of enjoying virtually all that is produced, will have to live only on a just portion.

(2) Does not the pursuit of "social abundance" inevitably encourage the philosophy of self-

indulgence? It seems to me that this deification of appetite is responsible for the "Great Illusion" (so well discussed in MANAS Dec. 9), and is the very basis of materialism. It is responsible for cheapness and vulgarity of popular culture, and perhaps ultimately provokes most of our social maladjustments—juvenile delinquency, marital unhappiness and the rest. Is there any evidence that we can pursue abundance, and yet escape these?

(3) Do we really know how to prevent an economy of abundance from breaking down? In his last article, Mr. Kepler says yes. The only solution I've heard of is Keynes' use of deficit spending, balanced by taxation and accumulation in good years. What one of our political leaders accepts this theory? The federal government cannot accumulate now because of the huge arms expenditures. Would it do so even if it were free from arms expense? To my knowledge, there is not a single state government which is gathering a surplus to be used for hard times. Will limitation of credit extension, the federal guarantee of bank deposits and all the rest prevent collapse? I am not qualified to judge, but I am skeptical. Of course, totally planned economy can avoid pitfalls, but we have not yet learned how to get a planned economy without getting centralized political control and loss of liberty.

These are some of the problems which attracted Gandhi's attention and which contributed to the development of his thinking.

Gandhi's Utopia is probably familiar to you: a system in which the village is the economic and political center, each village or group of villages aiming at the highest degree of self sufficiency, with authority resting in elected village councils. Freedom would be based on self-sufficiency, and pacifism on an absence of interest in foreign markets.

I should be interested in why Mr. Kepler himself has summarily dismissed Gandhi's Utopia.

Mr. Kepler calls Gandhi's way "asceticism." Perhaps he misreads Gandhi altogether. It is sometimes true that Gandhi appears to accept asceticism as an end in itself. But it would be much truer to use the word "self-control" and to say that Gandhi believed that the life worth living, the life abundant in peaceful, non-violent human relationships, must not be a life of self-indulgence.

Gandhi was not, as so many assume, an unqualified enemy of the machine. He offered prizes to those who could develop a more efficient spinning wheel, and was full of praise for the Singer sewing machine. Any machine, hand or electrically driven, was admissible to his Utopia, provided it fitted into the home or village, where men would be masters over it, and not mere appendages to its mechanical operation or victims of a complex economic structure large machines make possible.

It is thus incorrect to describe Gandhi's Utopia as impoverished materially. Packards, TV sets, skyscrapers might be absent. But would they be missed?

Gandhi framed his Utopia in a country with abundant human resources and relatively meagre raw materials. Is not the United States approaching a similar condition, in view of the new automatic factories science has made possible, and the probable gradual loss of raw materials, either as they are exhausted from the earth's crust, or as the backward nations withdraw their sale?

Of course, American conditions differ from Indian. Gandhi cannot be transplanted here. But there are some Americans who have begun thinking in terms of the decentralized economy, which is the first step. And perhaps, unknown to me, there are others who have gone very far to think out America's problems with the insights which Gandhi provides.

WILLIAM B. GREENE

Toledo, Ohio

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With regard to Mr. Greene's first question, I am, of course, in no better position than he to give an authoritative answer. In general, my inclination is to guess (predict?) that there are sufficient resources in

the world to support (relative) abundance for everyone—including a large number of everyones not yet born. History would seem to support the argument that as underdeveloped areas are developed, more, not less, goods become available for consumption and use. For example, there was once a time when a tribe of Indians numbering about 500 felt it necessary to force the younger members to leave the area, since, in their opinion, it could not support a larger number of people. In terms of the kind of social organization and technology they possessed, they were right. But today that same geographical area—the present site of the city of Chicago—supports a population in excess of three million.

So, while it is true at this moment that certain Western European countries are forced to "readjustments" of their living standards as a result of the loss of colonies, it is interesting to note that the present living standards are, generally, the highest ever attained in Europe despite the loss of colonies. The adjustments, therefore, are not a lowering of standards but, of necessity, an attempt to find new methods of social organization and new technological methods which will make it possible to maintain (or improve) the living standards. In my opinion, "the main problem facing Europe" is not "the readjustments in standards of living made necessary by the loss, or the imminent loss, of colonies," as Mr. Greene suggests, but rather the socio-psychological question of whether European countries will be able to adapt their thinking and methods to the necessity of operating without colonies. Britain and Holland have both shown a certain degree of flexibility and have oriented themselves to try to win by quality markets they once could command. France, on the other hand, seems to be having difficulty making the psychological adjustment *and* therefore lags in making the necessary changes in technology and new social organization.

So much has recently been written by conservationists telling us of the imminent end of natural resources that one is sometimes tempted to succumb altogether to their counsels of fear and doom. Yet, evidence is at hand that new technology

is already available which allows us to make better use of old sources of raw materials, to create new ones, and, in some cases, simply to replace old materials with new ones.

If the conservationists, who are not always aware of the new technology and new methods of social organization which will allow us to use materials for relative abundance, win the propaganda argument with their neo-Malthusian contentions, we will be forced to accept some other of their logical conclusions: "There isn't enough for all, therefore let's insure that we'll get ours. Let *them* take care of themselves." This is the way to divide the world for sure between the Haves and the Have-nots.

Finally, the fact that the United States might someday have to live "only on a just portion" of what is produced in the world doesn't sadden me in the least. As a matter of fact, however, I have a hunch that, as far as essentials go, neither the U.S. nor any other country will be too badly off materially in that future day when presently "underdeveloped" countries are processing most of their own raw materials.

With regard to Mr. Greene's second broad question, the answer, it seems to me, lies with whether we "pursue abundance" as an end in itself, or as a means to other ends. Gandhi counseled us not to disdain the fruits of our labors as long as we do not *seek* the fruits. I find it difficult sometimes to know exactly what phrases like "the very basis of materialism" really mean. One can indulge one's self in other ways than with things and possessions. At the present moment it would not be difficult to sustain the argument that Americans are among the least materialistic of peoples, that avarice is much more a characteristic of Europeans, and that Americans make money, not to accumulate it, but to prove their manhood—a viewpoint recently expounded at length by W. H. Auden.

"Self-indulgence" and "materialism" may be responsible for our popular culture and other social maladjustments, but if so we would be hard put to explain marital unhappiness as well as vulgarity and cheapness in the popular cultures of other societies which do not possess our material abundance. I find

it difficult to assent to the view that *all* social maladjustments are ultimately provoked by materialism. To paraphrase Mr. Greene in his view on abundance, is there any evidence that we can pursue a course of scarcity, and yet escape social maladjustments?

As to the third question, I cannot be certain that we know how to prevent an economy of abundance from breaking down, but like Mr. Greene I have heard of Keynesian economics and variations thereof. I believe that Mr. Greene will find that I said that there is no *economic* reason that we should have a depression, and that if we ever have one it will be for other than economic reasons such as that suggested by Mr. Greene, that some of our present political leaders do not accept Keynesian theories. This may be said to be a psychological or ideological reason, but it could have economic consequences.

It seems to me preferable to *assume* our ability to maintain an economy of abundance without loss of liberty, and then to work to achieve the kind of society that can do that, rather than to assume its impossibility and then to propose solutions so radical *vis-à-vis* a given society that they are unachievable or, if achieved, would be at a cost not worth the price.

Gandhi proposed a decentralized, village economy in a non-industrialized society with more than 750,000 decentralized villages complete with local governments and a tradition to support it. Mr. Greene is right in his view that Gandhi advocated self-control to others rather than complete asceticism. And it is true that he was not unqualifiedly against machines. It might be pointed out that I am not unqualifiedly *for* machines, *or* abundance. By abundance, I do not mean necessarily Packards, TV sets, or skyscrapers. Rather I mean a situation in which people can be relatively assured of adequate food, clothing, shelter, and still have enough surplus to support leisure activities for the great bulk of the society. A society in which men, women, and children do not have to work constantly just to keep body and soul together.

Finally, while it is true that Gandhi envisioned a society to fit abundant human resources together

with relatively meagre raw materials, it does not seem that the United States, presently, or in the foreseeable future, will be in a similar condition. For even if it is true that raw materials will be exhausted from the earth's crust, or withdrawn from sale by formerly undeveloped nations, the United States adds one very important factor not present in the Gandhian formula as presented by Mr. Greene: *a highly developed technology*. This factor alone can make the difference between meagre resources and abundant resources.

The situation we have to deal with is not that the world is going to leave the city to return to the village, but that throughout the world (including India) people are leaving the village to go to the city. Here in the United States yet another development is detectable, and possible—the "suburbanization" of a growing number of people. In this respect, Frank Lloyd Wright may be more nearly our prophet than Gandhi, for he is pointing a way to a kind of industrialization that is much more akin and possible to our society than the simple life of an Indian—even when equipped with Singer sewing machines.

In short, I agree with Mr. Greene that some kind of decentralization is necessary, but I don't think we will achieve it in the development of self-sufficient villages. I doubt that Mr. Greene, or Gandhi, or anybody else will ever be able to convince many people that they should so simplify their lives that they can live self-sufficiently in their village in Bengal, in Nevada, in Sicily, to the mutual advantage of all.

There is something confusing, in my opinion, about Mr. Greene's thoughtful letter. I find it difficult to put my finger on what it is. It is written in the most friendly and inquiring spirit; its purpose is honest, but, overall, it relies, I think, on fuzzy thinking: at one point he says, "I should be interested in why Mr. Kepler has summarily dismissed Gandhi's Utopia." Five paragraphs later, he writes, "Of course, American conditions differ from Indian. Gandhi cannot be transplanted here."

At one point he tells us that Gandhi's "asceticism" might better be called "self-control," but he assumes that when I say "abundance" I mean

monopoly, over-indulgence. Asceticism must be qualified; abundance unqualified.

Nevertheless, this letter opens a useful area of discussion. Its writer challenges some of my assumptions, and it is obvious from his questions that I have challenged some of his. Let us hope that others will join us in this common search.

ROY C. KEPLER

Berkeley, Calif.

REVIEW

THE BRAIN—AND BEYOND

W. GREY WALTER'S *The Living Brain* (Norton, 1953) bids fair to command even more attention than the Sir Charles Sherrington Gifford Lectures of 1940, *Man on His Nature*, also on cerebral physiology. Like Sherrington, Dr. Walter stands at the peak of eminence in his field in Great Britain, but as an experimentalist rather than a surgeon. The measurement of electrical emanations from the various cerebral centers—"brain waves"—has become a specialized science of itself and Walter serves as editor of the international *EEG Journal* (electroencephalography).

A *Book Find News* reviewer describes *The Living Brain* as "a masterly popularization of a brand-new, immeasurably significant science: electroencephalography, the science of mirroring the electrical impulses inside the brain. Since the function of all nerve cells is fundamentally electrical, a living brain emits electrical waves in complex patterns whose characteristics vary with the different kinds of brain activity. As we devise more and more sensitive recording and amplifying equipment, it becomes increasingly possible to observe and to measure these electrical emanations under various conditions, and to make hypotheses about the mechanism of thought. Such observations and theories form the scope and subject matter of electroencephalography."

Here, however, we are particularly interested in Dr. Walter's espousal of points of view developed in our recent "Books for Our Time" article on Dr. J. B. Rhine. The vast number of brain-wave experiments conducted since the Sherrington book have apparently tended to deepen, rather than lessen, the sense of mystery the physiologist feels as he approaches this threshold of "mind." As Dr. Walter puts it:

The physiologist, viewing in his modest workshop the inexplicable electric tides that sweep through the living brain, knows that the bobbing of his float must mean some Leviathan is yet uncaught;

some great idea nibbles his bait and slides darkly behind the laughing waves.

The following paragraphs should be particularly interesting to any who have listened to physiologists declare that even *if* extrasensory perception may be regarded as an established fact, all its phenomena can ultimately be explained in terms of familiar physical forces. For Dr. Walter, though refraining from any definite theorizing on the nature of mind, is quite sure that this opinion is erroneous. Between the lines, too, we may read that here is at least one physiologist who does not take ESP lightly. He writes:

Nobody has yet offered a plausible complete explanation of the hypnotic state. It has often been suggested by those seeking a material basis for otherwise unaccountable behaviour that the electrical activity of the brain might be the mechanism whereby information could be transmitted from brain to brain, and that the electrical sensitivity of the brain might be a means of communicating with some all-pervading influence. Quite apart from any philosophic objection there may be to such argument, the actual scale and properties of the brain's electrical mechanisms offer no support for it. The size of the electrical disturbances which the brain creates are extremely small. In fact, they are about the size, within the brain itself, of a received signal which is just intelligible on an average radio set. More crucial even than this, their dominant frequencies are far below the range of radio channels, below even the scale of audible frequencies. At ten cycles per second, the average frequency of the alpha rhythms, any electromagnetic signal transmitted through space would have a wave length of thirty million metres.

The familiarity of radio signalling around the world has popularised the notion that any signal once generated may be propagated indefinitely through the chasms of space, so that all events have an eternal quality in some attenuated but identifiable form. This is not even approximately true; for any signal, however propagated, weakens with its passage until its size falls below the level of noise and interference in some locality. Beyond this point it can never be detected, however great the resolution and selectivity of the receiver. If we consider the largest rhythms of the brain as casual radio signals, we can calculate that they would fall below noise level within a few millimetres from the surface of the head.

Even if we ignore these physical characteristics, the observations reported on extra-sensory phenomena seem to exclude any such approach; for there is no evidence that screening of the subject, or distance between sender and receiver, has any influence on the nature or abundance of the effects described. Furthermore, it seems to be one of the cardinal claims of workers in this field that a signal may be received before it is transmitted. If we accept these observations for what they are said to be, we cannot fit them into the physical laws of the universe as we define them today. We may reject the claims of transcendental communication on the grounds of experimental error or statistical fallacy, or we may withhold judgment, or we may accept them gladly as evidence of spiritual life; but it does not seem easy to explain them in terms of biological mechanism.

So, with the addition of Dr. Walter's respected opinions to the ideas of men in other fields, it may be said that various lines of speculation are now converging on the view that the "root" of man is something far more subtle and complicated than either the religionists or the physicalists have imagined.

While the passage just quoted is one of a few philosophical asides comprising but a small portion of *The Living Brain*, Dr. Walter is quite obviously a man who feels at home in broadly evaluative thoughts, and his analysis of the limitations of the modern climate of scientific opinion seem repetitive of similar comments which have appeared in MANAS. In his closing chapter, for instance, he emphasizes the fact so often noted here that "the rate of accumulation of knowledge has been so colossally accelerated that not even the most noble and most tranquil brain can now store and consider even a thousandth part of it." He then observes that this fact of itself places "humanity" in a critical state:

The professor in his lair can always find an expert or an abstract to patch the gaps that inevitably yawn in his knowledge as his subject swells; but, to provide his auxiliaries, other professors must train the experts to write the abstracts—and bewilderment mounts in rapidly widening spirals. The economics of information has its Gresham's Law, too—half-truths drive out full understanding.

Continuation of the sectarian process of specialisation could only lead to one result, the creation of an irresponsible scientific priesthood, preoccupied entirely with its liturgy and its mysteries; and, in due course, to a popular revulsion from scientific knowledge and a slump of scientific credit.

The root of this evil is that facts accumulate at a far higher rate than does the understanding of them. Rational thought depends literally on ratio, on the proportions and relations between things.

Thus a physiologist becomes a philosopher, not as some sort of extra-curricular activity but rather through reflection on the implications of his own scientific studies. Here, therefore, MANAS again has opportunity to call attention to the fact that the deepening perspectives afforded by current scientific investigations tend to focus on strange subjects which also concerned the ancients. Dr. Walter, for one, recognizes that he borders on "religious experience" when he describes the experience of "homeostasis"—the capacity of isolating "in one section of the brain, an automatic system of stabilisation for the vital functions of the organism." Now the interesting thing to reflect upon, continues Dr. Walter, is that "with this arrangement, other parts of the brain are left free for functions not immediately related to the vital engine or the senses, for functions surpassing the wonders of homeostasis itself." He continues:

As new horizons open, we become aware of old landmarks. The experience of homeostasis, the perfect mechanical calm which it allows the brain, has been known for two or three thousand years under various appellations. It is the physiological aspect of all the perfectionist faiths—Nirvana, the abstraction of the Yogi, the peace that passeth understanding, the derided "happiness that lies within;" it is a state of grace in which disorder and disease are mechanical slips and errors.

COMMENTARY
A LAST WORD

THE editorial prerogative of having the "last word" is often attractive, and proves irresistible in the case of the discussion between Mr. Kepler and Mr. Greene. For it seems to us that the contestants in this debate are not divided so much in fundamental views as on the role of productive facilities. Mr. Greene seems to think that the impressive productive plant developed by the United States is the high road to materialism and self-indulgence, while Mr. Kepler proposes that, although there is support for Greene's view, there is no inner logic in manufacturing skill which makes such a result inevitable.

Further, Greene seems to be arguing from a "perfectionist" stance, while Kepler endeavors to examine existing currents and forces in American life which might be turned to better advantage. But it is useful, it seems to us, to think about the transformation that would be accomplished in American life by the subtraction of "Packards, TV sets, and skyscrapers," right at the same time that one acknowledges that a reform program which requires the sacrifice of these things has little or no chance of being adopted. Then, we also need to admit that while we may have a real choice as individuals concerning the luxuries and material comforts of the West, if we are proposing that they be abandoned by "other people," we are really proposing either a program of extremely long-range cultural education for the entire population, or an aggressive and perhaps righteously Calvinist drive against "self-indulgence"; or, finally, we may be proposing, simply, that austerities are sure to overtake a land where "wealth accumulates, and men decay," and that we might as well get ready for the simple life.

The important thing, here, it seems to us, is to take into full account the point of view from which such commentaries are offered. There is ample room for "counsels of perfection," and an equal need for discussions which look for

directions in which an existing society may actually *move*, given leadership and stimulus. There is no reason to assume that the writer who approaches his subject from the latter viewpoint is insensible to the high ideals of the perfectionist, nor, on the other hand, that the man who tries to imagine ideal social relationships is lacking in "realistic" grasp of the long road which lies ahead.

As a final note concerning American parallels of Gandhian thinking, those interested should look into the work of Ralph Borsodi, in particular *Flight from the City* and *This Ugly Civilization*, both of which deal with aspects of the problems discussed by Mr Kepler and Mr. Greene.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

EVERYONE believes in magic. The important question is not whether magic is "real," but whether the magic you believe in really works. One view of magic, which we have adopted, runs something like this: In all human beings, although not *active* in all human beings, is a principle of balance which tends to correct for the errors which are made by parents, teachers, and "societies." Just as an animal, when made sick by bad food, will unerringly seek out the antidote that is found in nature, so a human being, even a child, is potentially able to react to a bad environmental influence in a way that will correct for the influence. The power of the child or the man to make this sort of adjustment we choose to call a "magical" power, at least until some clarifying explanation is available. It would be much worse than the "superstition" of believing in magic to remain unaware of this human power, since it is in fact the foundation of every truly liberal opinion and is the sole support of the claim that man is and ought to be *free*.

A Viennese teacher and educator, Mme. Helene Scheu-Riesz, founder of the Sesame series of "books for all time," also believes in magic, although, perhaps, in magic of another sort. She tells the story of her convictions and her work in a small booklet, *Open Sesame*, published in 1947 by the Island Press Cooperative. Her basic belief is in the civilizing influence of fine books for children—and, be it added, she has little use for a children's book which cannot be enjoyed by parents as well.

This booklet will excite every lover of both good reading and children; more, it will show, we submit, that even in defective social systems there is opportunity for revolutionary changes in educational programs, so long as there are people who will propose and fight for them and other people who will recognize and support them.

Mme. Scheu-Riesz began her career as an educational reformer in Vienna in the gloomy years following the first world war. Defeated by the Allies and stripped of her territories, Austria was an economic absurdity, Vienna a capital without a country. Viennese children shivered in the streets, cold and hungry. With the help of the Quakers and other private agencies, Mme. Scheu-Riesz obtained the use of a public-school classroom in which to serve hot cocoa to the hungry children after school hours. The plan was so successful that soon there were twenty "cocoa rooms" in Vienna. Since it seemed cruel to send the children back into the streets as soon as their cups were empty, the organizers of the project decided to turn the cocoa rooms into reading rooms. They were surprised, however, to find that even big boys of fourteen, ready to leave school, wanted picture books. They were interested only in kindergarten readers. This discovery was the start of the Sesame idea, for Mme. Scheu-Riesz found that if she read fine folk tales to the children, they clamored for more. Even after no more cocoa could be found, the children insisted on coming back for their reading hour. Then George Cadbury, the English Quaker (Cadbury chocolates), sent chocolate bars to the Viennese children, to be enjoyed during the reading hour. (So poor was Vienna that the ten-year-olds had never seen chocolate before and didn't know it was intended to be eaten!) Before he died George Cadbury gave Mme. Scheu-Riesz enough money to start a publishing house for the distribution of good literature for children—Sesame Books. She describes the beginning:

We had called our reading rooms the Sesame Reading Rooms, in memory of Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*, part of which I had translated and put into a little book for the children. It explained to them the symbolism of the magic phrase, "Open Sesame," recounting the *Arabian Nights* story of Ali Baba and the cave in the mountain where priceless jewels, gold and silver, and works of art were hidden. If a man knew the password, he could enter and take whatever he was able to carry. Exactly such a treasure is hidden in books. Its riches are never depleted. The more you take out the more remain to come back for.

And the key that unlocks this mountain of immeasurable riches is the alphabet. The magic that opens it is the knowledge of reading.

How were the books selected? Mme. Scheu-Riesz lets Ruskin explain:

"Life being short and the quiet hours of it few, we ought to waste none of them in reading valueless books," Ruskin said in *Sesame and Lilies*. Even among good books he sharply divided between the "book for the hour" and the "book for all time":

"These bright accounts of travel, good-humored and witty discussions of questions, lively or pathetic story-telling in the form of a novel, firm fact-telling by the real agents concerned in the events of passing history—all those books multiplying among us as education becomes more general, are a peculiar possession of the present age. We ought to be entirely thankful for them, and entirely ashamed of ourselves if we make no good use of them. But we make the worst possible use of them if we allow them to usurp the place of real books."

He then spoke of the many parents who had been writing him for advice about their children. They all wanted them to have an education that would fit them for "advancement in life"—by which they meant an equipment for achieving financial success and the chance of getting "into good society." He pointed out how people crowded and jostled to catch a glimpse of the king or a famous scientist or a poet, how they would give anything to shake hands with a president or to have an audience with a cabinet minister. Yet all the while an august company of the truly great—kings, poets, scientists, cabinet ministers—is waiting for them on the bookshelves, not to grant an audience, but to ask for one. And this company of the great offers not superficial chatter and small talk but the essence of their lives, their best thought, their dreams and discoveries, in the most carefully polished form.

"The author has something to say which he perceives to be true and useful, or helpfully beautiful. So far as he knows, no one has yet said it; so far as he knows, no one else can say it. . . . In the sum of his life, he finds this to be the thing, or the group of things, manifest to him—this the piece of true knowledge or insight which his share of sunshine and earth has permitted him to seize. He would fain set it down forever, engrave it on rock, if he could, saying: this is the best of me; for the rest I ate and drank and

slept, loved and hated like another. . . but this I saw and knew—this, if anything of mine, is worth your memory."

Because the boys and girls in our twenty Viennese reading rooms had become so fond of books, we used some of George Cadbury's Christmas present to give them the beginning of little private home libraries of their own. We had ten penny booklets printed—two thousand of each title, ten for every child. The first was the story of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*; the next *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, retold from Shakespeare's play; then French, English, Norwegian, Chinese, and Czech stories. Each book had a little picture on the cover—an Albrecht Durer print or a modern drawing, some of them designed by pupils of the famous art class for children run by Professor Cizek.

The bestowal of the books made another happy Christmas party. These boys and girls had never owned books before, except school books of the type that kill rather than encourage the love of literature. So this ownership of an attractive little library, which they by now had learned to use and to enjoy, meant a great deal to them. When, a year later, we came with another ten books, some of the children knew many of the stories in the first ten almost by heart, and they proudly showed their paper-covered volumes, well-thumbed but still holding together because they had taken such good care of them.

We don't, at present, know a great deal more about the Sesame Books program, except that it is still in existence and expanding its plans for publication of fine literature for children and perhaps for adults as well. However, it seems important to remark that an interest in Sesame Books ought not to abate with the realization that massive printing facilities for children's books are available in the United States. Even numerous editions of children's "classics" would not approximate the Sesame idea, for the heart of the Sesame program is the educational inspiration it embodies. These books brought the thrill of discovery to Viennese children. It is quite possible for children in a country surfeited with fine editions of the same books to miss that discovery entirely. What is needed is the devoted perception on the part of parents and teachers of the importance of such books, and the ability to

awake a love of them in children. Mme. Scheu-Riesz is one who helps to supply that perception and that ability.

Her experiences with school boards are astonishing—astonishing in two ways, first, by revealing the utter poverty of reading programs in countries which are supposedly highly civilized; second, in the success she met with in instituting reforms and getting fine children's books into the curriculum. It was a moment exciting beyond measure when, during a session with the Vienna School Board, Mme. Scheu-Riesz showed her first ten little books to the members and they decided to adopt them as readers for the Vienna schools. There was thrilling confirmation of this decision when the President of the publishing firm that was printing hundreds of thousands of the "Vienna Primers" then in use ran to the telephone and stopped the printing presses, and the President of the School Board whispered in Mme. Scheu-Riesz' ear, "We have gained one victory."

Then there is the chapter in the booklet, "Who Killed the German Mind?" Years ago (1902), a German schoolteacher, Heinrich Wolgast, attributed the deterioration of the German mind to the readers then used in the public schools. He pointed out that Germany was a country rich in literature for pre-school age—folk songs, nursery rhymes, folk legends and stories—yet the masses were devouring penny thrillers! For this he blamed the school reader, which Mme. Scheu-Riesz described as "a concoction of tidbits, often trashy as well as tedious; the kind of thing that kills the child's taste for the best literature." She added: "It [the reader] is also the vehicle whereby anybody in power—school superintendent, director, teacher, or whoever writes these books on order—can imbue whole generations with their own political, cultural or moral prejudices." Wolgast asserted that the first law for children's reading is that "a book given to children must be a work of inspired art." This was the beginning of a cycle of reform in the reading programs of the German schools.

Other passages analyze the children's reading in England, to the great credit of British judgment, and the benefit of American children, since English selections soon reached the United States. Another paragraph about Germany, however, is worth repeating:

What about Germany? It was once called a nation of poets and thinkers. There, too, the children shared with their parents the great legends and stories and sagas handed down through the ages—till about a century ago the "Age of Enlightenment" discovered education as a science. That age gave to the world Pestalozzi and Froebel, but also the juvenile as a separate division of literature. Books were specifically written for children with a view to improve their manners morals and minds, and they invariably had that intent sticking out all over them. They failed to improve because most of them were boring; they frightened children away from books, frightened them right into reading trash. Instead of inspired art they were given either sermons or sweetly sentimental stuff that talked down to them; it made them turn to the lurid vulgarity of cheap horror stories which at least satisfied their hunger for dramatic excitement. Germany, being intent on educating the masses, went to the extreme in the replacement of literature by the educational juvenile.

Whole volumes of philosophy, history, and education are implicit in these few quotations, and there is much more in the little booklet, *Open Sesame*, of 48 pages by Mme. Scheu-Riesz. While the author says nothing concerning her opinions about human nature and religion, what she says about children and reading for children and for everyone makes us suspect that we would find it easy to agree with her. Meanwhile, let us hope that the Sesame Books prosper, and that some of the titles, at least, are available in English translation, so that interested parents in the United States will have opportunity to give their support to a work which is guided by this kind of intelligent devotion.

FRONTIERS

Philosophy Is Where You Find It

IT may seem a bit odd to find material for discussion in a "Western" movie—even a high-grade Western—yet, for two reasons, William Holden's homespun philosophy, "A man has got to be bigger than what he does," a line in *Escape from Fort Bravo*, keeps running through our head. First, there is a profound truth in this idea. A man *ought* to be bigger than what he does. If he isn't, then he is pushed from pillar to post by external forces which determine his life which becomes a series of "functions" in some larger scheme of relationships instead of *his* life.

The second reason why the idea is interesting is that it represents a kind of folk-wisdom which seems to have no relation to the world of modern learning. Our language and "folk" inheritance is filled with such intuitive expressions about the nature of things, passed along from generation to generation without even casual notice from academic psychology or philosophy. These disciplines are wholly lacking in a natural vocabulary for entertaining such ideas—ideas which may, as a matter of fact, contain more value than all the batteries of tests and experiments of the psychologists, and the elaborate formulations of professional philosophers.

In a genuine culture, it seems to us, there would be unbroken continuity between popular wisdom and scholarly reflection. The relationship might be something like that which obtains between the simple beauty of folk music and a great symphony employing folk melodies for its themes. But we have no expansion of the workaday, intuitions of daily life in our learned theories about man. Instead, very largely, we have theories which cannot possibly be applied in daily life. A man like the Lieutenant in *Escape from Fort Bravo* could not feel that his understanding of life is deepened, his natural wisdom extended, from studying what the professors have to say. He would probably think

them pretty withdrawn from life, and they would regard him as naively taken in by the attraction of shallow platitudes.

Much of popular wisdom is, no doubt, made up of shallow platitudes. But some of that wisdom is much more than platitudinous. This, if nothing else, will explain why the good novels of today have far greater vitality than most current philosophical writings. The novel deals with the relation between a man's ideas and his life, and how it changes through experience and growth. The same explanation applies to the sudden rise of psychoanalysis and psychiatry to positions of importance in our culture, for both, as distinguished from traditional, academic psychology, are concerned with the actual living processes of human beings—both came into being as practical attempts to make living a tolerable affair for human beings.

As a matter of fact, a case could be made for the claim that at least one school of academic psychology—Behaviorism—is little more than a rejection of the idea that a man has to be bigger than what he does. The Behaviorists say that a man is what he does—his behavior. Behaviorism is frankly and aggressively anti-metaphysical. It insists that after you have told what a man does, you have finished with what he is—there is nothing more to say. Thus Behaviorism, so far as we can see, is a frontal attack on the human spirit. Originating in the great anti-theological movement of the past two or three hundred years in science, Behaviorism, along with other schools of scientific thought, ended by turning against metaphysics as well, since metaphysics and theology obviously have close similarities.

We may be mistaken, but it seems to us that Behaviorism is slowly losing its followers in modern psychology—that its "dead end" character is increasingly recognized and that its importance is more as an "influence" than as an actual direction of psychological thinking. Meanwhile, however, the Behaviorist conception of the nature of man seems to have overtaken a much more

decisive region of our national life--the region of politics. There is actually little difference between the Behaviorist definition of man and the claim that a man's value is absolutely determined by his political acts and thoughts. Under political Behaviorism, if he is a teacher who once repeated criticisms made of capitalist economics by the Communists, or if he has been, or is, a socialist, his value as a man—which happens, in this case, to be also his value as a teacher—is held to be lost entirely. He is not judged as a man, but as a unit of a certain political coloration. If his color deepens, or seems to deepen, he is tossed into the discard. On these terms, a man is not bigger than what he does, or thinks—and we need not be very careful in determining what he does or thinks. The coarser and more standardized the means of finding out, the more quickly shall we be able to "protect ourselves" from him, if need be.

The witch-hunters did not, of course, study Behaviorism in order to formulate their policy toward those suspected of "subversive" tendencies. Both Behaviorism and witch-hunting have arisen from far deeper currents of causation in our culture—currents which also gave birth to the communist movement itself. For in Communism it is easy to see a further claim that a man is not bigger than what he does—or thinks. A man, according to Marx, becomes a man through *labor*. His *labor* creates his value, so that all human values derive from the labor men do. Marx's real revolution against the West was "in his refusal to assume that the difference between man and animal life is *ratio* or thought, that, in Hegel's words, 'man is essentially spirit'." (Hannah Arendt in *Partisan Review* for January-February.) In the abstract, the West's fear of Communism lies here, in its attack on the idea that man is *more* than what he does. Yet so far have we come from the idea of man as spirit that political Behaviorism, no better than Marxism in its estimate of man, seems to us to be our best weapon against communism!

In the *Nation* for Jan. 23, Dorothy Frank (education chairman of Women for Legislative

Action in Los Angeles, and a leader in the fight to retain the UNESCO program in that city's public schools) gives an instance of how political Behaviorism works in practice:

Just the other day the man down the street (we bought our homes at the same time, exchanged complaints about painters and plumbers, and learned we had chosen the same wallpaper for our breakfast room) gave me an icy look. I suddenly realized his hostility had been growing for some time. When I insisted on knowing what he had against me, he pointed out that I had openly staked my claim in UNESCO. Said he, "You're on a dangerous road with dangerous company. That's why my wife won't allow your daughter (she's a dangerous seven) in our house any more." Glaring at me, he added: "Why can't you stay in the middle of the road like me?" I promptly asked him where his middle of the road was, because I thought that's where I'd been all the time. What could be more compatible with all the tenets of our democracy than the goal of international cooperation and peace? I was glad when he finally described his position. He was on the two-hundred-year-old highway with "no foreign entanglements," which he claims got him to his present good location. . . .

The issue is not whether or not George Washington's Farewell Address applies in 1954, but whether or not we need to be grateful to Mrs. Frank for wondering about it, and trying to be "bigger" than a single interpretation of "Americanism" and the "right" foreign policy for the United States. It seems strange, but a fact, that for some people, the most terrifying thing about human beings is their capacity to be different, to try to think for themselves. The blue-coated lads killed a lot of Indians in *Escape from Fort Bravo*. They didn't believe in non-violence. But one of them believed that a man has to be bigger than what he does, which is also the faith of Gandhi's credo. Somehow, this faith seems the most important thing of all.