

BACKGROUND FOR EDUCATION

AN article printed here last July 15—"An Educational Ideal"—apparently became the basis of some long thoughts on the part of a reader, for we have just received a letter of comment and question concerning what was said. While the points raised have to do with what might be termed "nuances" of educational inquiry, rather than central problems, a consideration of them may be of general interest.

"An Educational Ideal" spoke of the unusual child who seems to have a natural talent or interest in music (playing the violin was taken as an example), and does not have to be coaxed or coerced to "practice." Our correspondent observes:

While it is true that at some time the prodigy desired to learn and made the necessary sacrifice, at the present time he may be following the line of least resistance, "indulging his talent," so to speak. In this case, his skill might be more a matter of habit than of growth. But then, would not the activity still provide a basis for learning the secret of getting an education anew, since he now puts forth effort which, if he had been without talent, he might not have felt inclined to make?

This reader quotes from the article this phrase: "Such a child has somehow already learned the secret of getting an education, at least in respect to playing a fiddle." To avoid mystification, we ought to recognize that both this sentence and the suggestion by our correspondent, that the child "at some time . . . desired to learn," seem to contain an element of propaganda for pre-existence or reincarnation. When did the talented child gain his aptitude?—is a natural question. It is not metaphysical speculation but rather astonishing facts which define the matter to be explained—facts such as the following:

Mozart was taking lessons on the harpsichord at the age of 3; Bellini composed at 6 and Chopin produced his first work at 7; Mendelssohn appeared

in public concerts at 10 and had produced 50 pieces before he was 12. Beethoven was doing concert work at 8, was a church organist at 11 and a rehearsal conductor of an orchestra at 12.

So, even at the risk of obscurantism, it seems appropriate to think that such children had "somehow already learned" the arts which they practiced so easily in comparison with other youngsters. Perhaps we had best confess a sympathy for the reincarnation hypothesis and go on to other considerations, which remain, regardless of how child geniuses are to be explained.

The differences among even talented children are so various as to practically defy classification. One child may have skill and only a casual interest in an instrument, while another may have both talent and creative *drive*. For the first, vanity in performance may supply the chief impetus, for the second, genuine love of origination and of the beauty that results. Every teacher has had the experience of being tempted to a vast irritation by a child with rich natural endowments, yet superficial habits—a child who, in our correspondent's phrase, "indulges his talent."

Here, the educational problem centers around family and cultural ideals. What sort of "appreciation" do the intimates of the child—his parents, teachers, and older friends—evince for what he can do? Is there prideful display of the young one's special ability? There is no better way to corrupt a child's later life. "Corrupt" may seem a strong word, yet the reason why an individual chooses to practice an art may be among the most fundamental motives in the child's existence. In such circumstances, one may long for the moral wealth of Greek mythology, as a support for cultural ideals.

According to Grecian fable, Orpheus was a great musician and poet who had the power to

melt the heart with his songs. He was, without the weight of piety, a pagan St. Francis. When seeking his lost bride in the regions of Pluto, he played to the inhabitants of Hades. And then, as ancient verses have it, "the wheel of Ixion stopped, Tantalus forgot the thirst that tormented him, the vulture ceased to prey on the vitals of Tityos, and Pluto and Proserpine lent a favoring ear to his prayer." As a companion of the Argonauts who went in search of the golden fleece, Orpheus struck his lyre so sweetly that the music "was fabled to have been such as to move the very trees and rocks, and the beasts of the forest assembled round him as he touched its chords."

One of the charms of Greek religion is that it had a poet and singer for its founder. As *Anthon's Classical Dictionary* explains:

The poets and fabulists have attributed to Orpheus many great improvements in the condition of the human race. Indeed, his having moved even animals, and trees, and the flinty rocks by the sweetness of his strains, would seem to indicate nothing more than his successful exertions in civilizing the early races of men. Nearly all the ancient writers state that Orpheus introduced into Greece the doctrines of religion and the worship of the gods. The foundation of mysteries is ascribed to him. Herodotus speaks of Orphic and Bacchic mysteries. These mysteries seem to have been different from those of Eleusis. The establishment of social institutions, and the commencement of civilization, are, as we have just remarked, attributed to Orpheus. Aristophanes says that he taught men to abstain from murder. . . . It is stated of Orpheus by some ancient authorities that he abstained from the eating of flesh, and had an abhorrence of eggs, considered as food, from a persuasion that the egg was the principle of all beings. Many other accounts are given of him which would seem to assimilate his character to that of the early priests of India. . . .

We have quoted more than we intended, and readers may by this time be wondering what all this has to do with education. A great deal, we think. A religion which grows out of practice of the arts must be a joyous religion, and an art which is pursued in the glow of such traditions will have high purpose and deep inspiration. The

child who knows the tale of Orpheus, and whose earliest, happiest years are untarnished by modern sophistication, may quite imaginably aspire to sing and play in the Orphic tradition. The musician has a glorious role in the natural world of natural man. He can set the very chords of mother earth to vibrating. He has the subtle touch that may start human tears to flowing, or dam them with a burst of thrilling melody. He takes the tragic themes of the world and blends them into recurring forms of beauty. In his music, continents of meaning loom across the sky as banks of clouds shape the horizon into strange and wonderful invitations. He may give human suffering an epic grandeur, or lift up the heart with triumphant paeans. The artist mediates between the world of fact and the world of mystery and imagination. He is a priest without a dogma, affirmer of truths which grow under his hand.

These are secrets which even childhood may know about the practice of the arts. Alas for us that Orpheus sings no more, that children have not heard the pipes of Pan whistling across a meadow! Yet it is within the capacity of the teacher, and the father and mother who love the world as well as their child, to engender something of the spirit of these things. It is a matter of invention, of high and happy improvising, and the making of new myths and legends for the child to wonder at. The heritage of the arts and of literature gives us treasures to work with, devices to adapt. For education is itself an art and no mean thing to practice. And every child is worthy of the effort and the dreaming that may recreate a world of splendor in which the young may try their spirit and their strength.

Our correspondent writes further:

Another thing: "Is it too much to say that there is no education except in an atmosphere of serious thinking?" In context, this seems perfectly reasonable. But a small child does little or no "serious thinking," so I was wondering if his education consists then of a sort of conditioning for the time of responsibility and the full awakening of

his mental faculties when he may educate himself. . .

How misleading is language! A child has an infinitude of "serious thoughts," in the best meaning of these words. For what, after all, is serious thinking, but thought about those things on which the heart is set? In adult life, it is true, we have the notion that serious thinking is somehow prosy and dull—that an academic air and a pedantic vocabulary are the hallmarks of intellectual validity. It is fair to say, however, that serious thinking refuses to be frivolous or shallow concerning matters which involve the meaning of one's life, although this by no means suggests an unalloyed gaiety has no natural place in the serious individual's life. We have, it would seem, our tradition of religiosity to thank for such misconceptions.

The difficult balance we are called upon to locate in all questions of education is that delicate interrelation between the natural life and the deliberate choice of objectives worth striving after. A part of us lives in eternity, but another part of us belongs to the workaday world, where "progress" is made, where knowledge is accumulated and the harvest of experience distilled into wisdom. We can become so determined to "improve" ourselves and all others that we may forget the reality in ourselves that is as carefree as a mountain brook, and will never change, nor need be fussed over and tampered with. To lose sight of what we are because of a nervous passion to "become" is like the Christian's fear that he will not be "saved." Yet, all the time, a transforming process of becoming works its daily and hourly miracle in our lives. To be at peace, yet early up and doing, this is the paradoxical task which nature lays upon us. So also with children. It is not our task to hurry along their childhood to the dubious attainment of being "grown up." The interests of children—the area of their "serious thinking"—will change without our effort. Life takes care of that.

The "conditioning" of the child is indeed a necessary thing, but not, perhaps, so didactic an affair as we sometimes imagine. What we look at and talk about, what we laugh and sing about, whom we love and whom we admire—these are the inevitable conditionings of the child, from which grow riches of life or shrivelling poverty, or a drab, colorless monotone of conventionality.

Education is itself very much of a "myth" as it serves the child. At seven a child may thrill at the prowess of a legendary hero. Then, as the child comes to adolescence, new dimensions of the heroic role emerge. We often associate adolescence with obvious physical and familiar psychic transformations. But there are inner changes, too. A vision of the ideal *within* the ideal may dawn while man's or woman's estate is being reached. Not the achievement of Theseus—not the freeing of the maidens from the Minotaur's maze, not the slaying of Medusa—but the heart of the youth which pressed him each year to be worthy of his father's arms and shield, the *spirit* of achievement which could never be contained by any single exploit. Here is the true quality of manhood, an abstract ideal without a *final* limit.

The best education is in the worthy life of parents and teachers, who need to be about business which is their own and engrossing of their lives. What should a child think of adults who seem to have no interests except *him*? They may love him, but a love which ends with a single object, and goes no further—what, after all, is it worth? Teaching, then, is dreaming and thinking *with* children, neither for them nor at them. The heart's longings which are our own will supply the intangible "conditionings" that give life its savor and drop the seeds of like aspirations in the young.

We need, perhaps, above all to think of human beings as being very much of themselves, and needing less than we imagine in the way of a designed "education." The hidden structure of full humanity may lie in every child, waiting to take on the flesh and blood of a full life. The nourishment

is all there, in the world, in home and community, and it will be gained, in one way or another. What we can provide is a certain "style" in the growing process, a sense of form and meaning to work, leisure, and play. If we are willing to say to ourselves that something of wonder and greatness is in the child, waiting to appear, we shall not be so eager to "educate" as to invite. And the more generous the spirit of our invitation, the higher our dreams, the more of the wonderful human being in the child may be willing to emerge.

There are of course the drabs and the dullards, the sneaky ones and the sad and self-pitying ones. But even these will respond to the song of an Orpheus, and the wonder of a sad child is as precious as the lusty joy of a happy crowd. It is as much a part of education to learn to understand the weakness as to recognize and challenge the strength of children. They come to us by ways unmarked, and will some day depart, we know not whither. They are ours for a while, like birds of passage, and bring us, perchance, a touch of what we are to others.

Letter from **ENGLAND**

LONDON.—The Perfectionist who is beguiled into the belief that a great programme of social reform so soon as law fulfills its promise, is an accomplished fact, is now confronted by some rather grim facts. A planned economy, and a welfare state were to transform Britain into an economically stabilized unit whence all poverty is expunged and all share fairly the national income. But while it is true to say that the government headed by that underrated idealist Clement Attlee did many things making for a better England, much legislation fathered by that government has not yielded the promised results.

Recently, in the House of Lords, Lord Beveridge, the economist who, more than any other man, determined the shape of the England in which we live nine years after the end of the war, spoke as critic of National Insurance in action. For the truth is, that even that great economist, when making his giant plan at the desk, overlooked factors that now threaten to invalidate the theory upon which National Insurance and much else of planning is based.

Pensions were designed to assure the old people immunity from want. The weekly pension for those seventy and upwards is 32 shillings (\$4.48) a week. That was a sum upon which life could be maintained two decades or so ago. But to-day it is quite inadequate, and there are large numbers of old people, silent because humble or proud, who live most miserably upon this State dole. The obvious remedy—to increase the pension to bring it into line with the cost of living index—is not the simple expedient it appears to be. And for this reason: the proportion of gainfully employed in the total population is a shrinking fraction of it, while the numbers past work increase every year, and will, according to Beveridge, reach a maximum in 1977. At the present fixed pension rate this will involve a deficit of £417,000,000 in the funds of the National

Insurance and may be regarded as not quite practical politics. Put simply, it means this: that more people must be maintained by fewer, during the next three decades. The corollary might seem to be that the problem would be solved by harder work and longer hours and stabilized wages. That is the remedy some economists advocate. But hours do not tend to become longer, nor the rate of work faster, and the great Unions are forbidding overtime, and the workers are demanding more and more wages. All these trends must inevitably produce, within twenty years or so, a transformation in the English economic scene and the disappearance of much now taken rather too easily for permanent amelioration.

Slowly, people are beginning to realize that no social welfare State can survive in a world of which it is not a part-plan, and that, pleasant as it may be to work slowly with short hours for high wages five days a week, there remains inconveniently the problem of marketing the goods (and Britain survives only so long as she exports). The increasingly competitive character of world markets, now that the Germans (working with incredible industry) and the Japanese (working even harder) are offering their products in the world markets, is beginning to be felt by English manufacturers. The crux of the problem is to convince the workers that they are getting their fair share of the national income and cannot have more, but, on the contrary, must give more in work and tolerated austerity. This our people are not inclined to do, and so the situation is one which even those who have been responsible for the economic shape of the realm today are beginning to worry about.

Prophecy, always dangerous, precludes a forecast, save this: the present signs are all set at "danger." Whether the national genius will read them in time and apply its great resources in technical knowledge and raw materials to some sort of way out, is anybody's guess.

Meanwhile, while the general picture is not too fair, there is the curious anomaly of stock-market industrial share buying on a large scale, with a strong Bull market. City experts declare there is nothing to justify this optimism of investors. The boom remains a financial mystery, as do the enormous profits being made in many industries, notably, the detergent manufacturers, whose spendings on advertising are on so vast a scale as to produce protests in the House of Commons.

In conclusion, a mere aside, there is a most remarkable collapse of textile prices. This, it may well be, is the result of the world-flooding by Japan of a wide range of this category of essential goods.

ENGLISH CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW

WRITERS AND CRITICS

SINCE playwright-novelist Irwin Shaw's *Young Lions* and *The Troubled Air* were extensively reviewed in MANAS, we were interested to note a long interview with Shaw published in the Winter, 1953, *Paris Review*. Shaw confirms our own estimate of his intention in both books, saying that his characters are deliberately portrayed as "trying to find some reason for trying to stay alive in the world." In respect to *The Troubled Air* he explains:

I wanted to show the decent and average American faced with social pressures of which he doesn't approve—in this case Redbaiting in the radio world. I picked a man who was decent, with a kind of modest, half-exhausted desire to do good, a man trying to coast through life without being a sonuvabitch. I couldn't pick a more positive person, a mean man or a saint (I've never found a saint in the radio business anyhow). He had to be the decent average American faced with a quite un-American problem—to which there was no successful solution—and facing it with his only weapon, that of resignation—of the self-destroying and profitless, at least for the moment, gesture. But he doesn't resign immediately; he hedges and tries to qualify his position, a compromise that is his tragedy and his defeat.

The Troubled Air was attacked by the Communists as being reactionary and the editor of a minor book dub got my publisher to swear I wasn't a Communist before he'd consider the book. That's what happens when you try to put down more than one point of view.

Later in this interview, speaking from a literary perspective, as a novelist, Shaw comes to conclusions identical with those presented in last week's Review discussion of mental health as affected by the "Washington drive" for political conformity. Shaw writes:

We've lived in a sick world since 1914. It's no accident that Kafka has become so popular. He's enjoying the popularity of the prophet whose prophecies have come true. He prophesied the final emergence of the Victim as the arch-type of the modern man—the Victim who is slowly teased and

tortured and destroyed by forces that are implacable and pitiless and that cannot be understood. And since we have to live in this atmosphere of perpetual doom, it's natural that it should permeate one's writing. War has now been taken out of all human contact. We can hardly conceive or bear to think of the faculties now achieved for mass destruction. This isn't even the kind of killing with regret, with compassion, that I tried to write about in *The Young Lions*.

And here *is* an important note on the ethics of wartime killing, taken from Shaw's account of one of the characters in *The Young Lions*:

I tried to have that old man say what my only belief is about war—not to be proud of the thousands of bombers you send against the enemy and their cities, of the blind, indiscriminate, million-quality of your killing, no matter how necessary you may think it is. And when a soldier kills another soldier, he must kill with a sense of sin and tragedy. The sin is as much the soldier's as it is of the enemy he kills by his hand, and that is the way a soldier loves his enemy, moved by a curious sense of sin that belongs to them both. That's probably the fundamental thing I tried to say in the novel.

Shaw doesn't think very much of the critics, feeling that there are many psychologic facts about our times they are disinclined to face. For instance, when a Shaw hero goes down to defeat, "killed by the emotional climate of his country," the critics say this is not only "unheroic," but also too "pessimistic"—as if many potential "heroes" may not have died in exactly this way.

The No. 2 issue of *Discovery* (*Pocket Books*) contains a minor tirade on critics from another young novelist, Vance Bourjaily. He has noted that reviewers complain that the young writers write about such morbid and depressing things that no one could possibly want to read them. Typical comments are "They haven't any courage. They don't love life in America. Their characters are all neurotics. What can be the matter with them?" Speaking for "the younger writers," Bourjaily replies:

I think it is long past time we stopped letting the whole question go with a surly justification of our subject matter as inevitable, and entered a sharp—if necessary, insolent—defense of the work itself. I find

it unbecoming now that we are beginning to find ourselves as adults in a world over which we have as much control as anyone, for us to continue to respond with petulant acceptance of the condemnation, and with gratitude for the patronizing effort to excuse us on the grounds of atom nerves.

Surely we may ignore both the reviews and the symposia, and go to the works ourselves. If there are no critics incautious enough to tell us we are good when we are, let us tell one another. And let us tell readers.

In this frame of mind, we may attack the details of the opposing position with utter directness and without a hint of apology: . . . *morbidity, depression and neurosis are the very bones of literature and have been from OEDIPUS through HAMLET to CRIME AND PUNISHMENT. Fiction which found nothing to criticize about the life of its times would be dead indeed, for such criticizing forms the system of arteries through which even the best-natured fiction runs and has from Cervantes through Fielding to Mark Twain. And in criticizing this life and these times, we are not only behaving quite properly, we are displaying, as all good novelists must, precisely that courage we are said to lack. Finally, far from repelling readership, some of our best works have literally sold in the millions. . . .*

With these details cleared away, we can go now to the real assertion. We can say, if we believe it—and we must if we are to continue to write seriously at all—that: . . . *ours is as talented and vigorous a generation of writers as any, and especially as the one before it, against which we are most often measured.*

We entirely agree with the conclusions of the last paragraph, having felt that a number of novels published since 1941 show at least intermittent flashes of something one can call by no better name than genius. Bourjaily does, however, seem to make more of a necessity of morbidity than circumstances warrant. His own preoccupation along this line is evident in the title as well as the content of his best known work, *The End of My Life*, the story of a talented young man drifting downhill, never finding "some reason to stay alive." Also, Bourjaily's admiration of Norman Mailer—for our money a top contender for the most morbid writer around, omitting only a few well past the lunatic fringe—indicates how easy it

is to comprehend part of Dostoevsky and yet miss other qualities of the great Russian novelist. Dostoevsky has tremendous unsettling power, which drives men to question themselves, but this is a result which can never be achieved by morbidity alone. Some of Dostoevsky's characters exhibit great strength and integrity, too, and at least *some of them* are allowed to escape engulfment by terror and disillusionment.

It was certainly necessary, especially in Dostoevsky's time, to introduce realism to the novel, so that it might be more than simply light entertainment. The arts are, indeed, meant to "mirror life," obligated on occasion to deal with sordid and brutal aspects of experience, thus supplying a sort of compensation for escapist tendencies. The great novel, in other words, refuses to oversimplify, declines to gloss over, because its author refuses to water down the truth as he sees it. But while at least a bit sympathetic to Bourjaily, and especially so to Shaw, we here confess to the feeling that the critics probably *are* right on one point—though somewhat accidentally, we fear, and for the wrong reasons. Morbidity has become stylish, while what Dostoevsky did had nothing to do with fashion. Few moderns have the courage to end "on an affirmative note," as witness James Jones' conclusion of *Eternity*, despite the author's obvious general preference for thinking well of what people can do with themselves. But the matter of how a story ends is not, after all, the chief thing. What one needs to look for is the author's attitudinal preferences, especially in regard to human relationships. Some of our rough-tough writers are among the most lavish idealists of us all. Simple-minded optimists may be annoying to have around, but when affirmations respecting the better qualities of human beings come bubbling up from the midst of confusion and tragedy, they are to be respected. Shaw, Jones, and David Davidson have all earned our admiration on this account.

COMMENTARY

BACK NUMBERS OF MANAS

AN impending change in the storage facilities for keeping back number files of MANAS requires that the number of copies be reduced. Accordingly, for a limited period, readers and subscribers may purchase back numbers for five cents each. While our files are complete, there are none too many of certain issues, so that it is doubtful that there will be another such opportunity to secure all the back numbers of MANAS at this low price.

Readers who intend to take advantage of this offer are invited to do so as soon as possible, as a certain urgency attaches to the need to remove our files to another location.

This seems a good time to renew the offer to send packages of miscellaneous back numbers to friends who would like to have them as a means of encouraging others to subscribe to MANAS. If you have a use for miscellaneous recent numbers of MANAS (without charge), write to the editors, who will be glad to oblige.

As a matter of fact, MANAS secures new subscribers chiefly from efforts of this sort by friends. The MANAS budget will not allow the usual methods of sales promotion by means of extensive advertising through purchased mailing lists. Further, the best "sales talk" for MANAS, we have found, is a copy of the magazine itself. And the best prospects are the friends and acquaintances of those who already receive it. This, at any rate, has been the lesson of more than six years' experience.



This week's Letter from England makes one reflect on the plight of the elderly who are dependent upon a dole from the State to stay alive. While more generous allotments are available to those over sixty-five in the United States, an appallingly high percentage of persons over sixty are entirely without means of support

other than this form of social security. It seems evident that something is radically unsound about the economic habits and arrangements of our time, when, in the "most prosperous country in the world," so many of the elderly have virtually nothing to show for their lives of hard work. America's "mobile" and rootless population and the break-up of the family life may give a measure of explanation, but the unpleasant fact seems to be that anyone who lives in America has a very good chance of finding himself "used up" by the time he has lived beyond middle age. Age ought to be a time of fulfillment, of enjoyment of satisfactions which are both material and psychological rewards of a life well spent. Is it that our lives are not well spent, and that no amount of "generosity" from the public purse can right a wrong of this sort?

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

OUR occasional enthusiasm for "nature appreciation" as the basis for development of the youthful mind needs to be amplified. The simplest way is probably just to state our faith that both men and children, when traversing "primitive" terrain, may gain both a visual perspective and a psychological point of view different from those associated with the everyday affairs of family and community. For "nature appreciation" need not be restricted to botanizing, nor even to wondering about the analogies which may exist between the ways of nature and the ways of man. The mere experience of a world apart from houses, offices and automobiles has, for most of us city dwellers, interesting overtones.

When most men lived in sparsely settled territory they often accepted, unthinkingly—as unthinkingly as we accept the facts of urban existence—the nature and conditions of the world they lived in. Were everyone to do nothing but roam the woods and fields, a Thoreau could never be appreciated, nor would a Thoreau, in all likelihood, ever have existed. Men's minds expand by the perception of contrast. Contrast supplies the stuff of critical thinking, and without critical thinking there is no development of wisdom. The country boy whose mind began to discover itself in a city is paralleled by the city boy who needs the country life for stimulation. What "nature" can teach us, then, is the same thing that men can teach us, and in the same way—by presenting a variety of fresh experience for reflection. In our own time, therefore, the man who enthuses about "nature experience" may not necessarily believe that the way to true happiness is to live, like Ferdinand, for the sole pleasure of smelling flowers. He may be seeking, and find a series of contrasts which are balm for his soul and food for his mind.

The argument here is neither vague nor complicated. All a person needs to do, as a matter of fact, is to let the psychiatrists make his argument. Brock Chisholm, Karen Homey, Trigant Burrow and Erich Fromm, to name but four, have pointed out

that ours is a genuinely neurotic society, in which the malleable stuff of human personality is more apt to take on a distorted imprint. The Asiatics, as shown by a recent report in *Psychiatry*, have far fewer psychoneurotic disorders and obsessive compulsions—despite their lack of technical advantages. The fact seems to be that too much mechanical routine, too much "efficiency," dehumanizes man, and that there is something within human personality which rebels, even though subconsciously, at the excess.

Anyone taking a plane across the United States in daylight sees a symbolic panorama of the troubles our large cities spawn. Whenever a city appears on the horizon, the first indication is a poisonous, brownish-yellow haze. We see, from a distance, not the wonders of technology, but some of the results of too much technology crowded together in one place. The farms and woodlands in between seem of surpassing beauty in contrast, so that one wonders no longer at the arguments of the decentralists and nature enthusiasts. The first thing, therefore, we should like to have children see for themselves, in trips outside the city, is this dramatic contrast. As Joseph Wood Krutch has said, the natural world seems to exude an atmosphere of simple joyousness, which one seldom senses in the frenetic confines of a city. To feel capable of knowing "the best of two worlds," one first has to know that two worlds do indeed exist, and this is hardly possible without entering, at least occasionally, the realms beyond the city gates. A child who accompanies his father to the mountains, moreover, will be interested in why the change can seem so welcome to an adult, and may remember quite a bit of what is said by way of explanation.

Then, of course, there are the symbols which man has been deriving from "nature" since the beginning of history. A mountain pathway better represents the nature of human striving than a concrete pavement. There is a feeling of adventure which comes to one as he walks the lowliest trail, for there are always bends to be looked around, odd configurations of terrain. The path, moreover, is never quite the same from year to year, or even from season to season. While we follow the familiar

course each time, neither we nor the trail allows the illusion of unchanging identity. And then there are the opportunities, not only to find new paths and trails, but to break even from these natural confines to create a new course of our own. Small wonder that men who did this in youth were more "individualistic," less the automatons which sociologists like David Riesman warn us we are in acute danger of becoming. The life of the mind must either be conceived as a matter of conditioning or a matter of invention and creation. Those who hold it to be the latter are the natural philosophers among us, the men who know and can never forget that the world of philosophy exists, and is in a very true sense more "real" than the world of practical affairs. The reality consists in the fact that routines endlessly repeated—and most of our vocations immerse us in such details—do not bring a genuine sense of being "alive."

The expression, "back to nature," is, by itself, of course, a little silly. "We" never were altogether submerged in or identified with "nature," because our existence is defined precisely by our capacity to exist, at least at times, beyond the control of nature's insistent tides of motion. We are, in fact, in a certain sense, always fighting "nature"—opposing the "cosmic process" of Thomas Huxley. If we were to try to identify ourselves with nature during a blizzard, unadorned by clothing, we would perish. Likewise, without clothing, the sun would at times be too much for us. We cook our vegetables to make them more digestible, kill animals and cook flesh and build houses to protect ourselves from onslaughts of the weather. But it is given to man to select the balance—how much he can take of nature in the raw, or, rather, how much he wants to take. And just as there can be too much, so, it appears, can there be too little of exposure to the conditions we now call "primitive."

The heart of the matter is probably here. For when we snuggle too comfortably into thousands of man-made luxuries, we become dependent, fearful of losing any of them. The man without clothing or fire is at the mercy of elements, and gains independence as he remedies the lack. He needs something of planning and organization to give him

leisure leisure for thinking, for talking, for writing and reading. But if he has never participated personally in the conquest of nature—if everything is done for him by "society"—he again trembles because he inwardly realizes his own lack of self-sufficiency.

So the boy-scout manuals which endeavor to entice youngsters to take pack trips, cook their own food, etc., have at least one important value in our over-civilized culture. The manuals would be improved, in our opinion, if they also encouraged at least a summer period or two of simple productive labor. This would be another way of "getting back to nature"—getting back at least far enough to lessen the feeling of utter dependence upon what other people do for us. Gandhi was cognizant of this need in his own youth program. He was determined that every child, whatever his family's economic status, should be able to perform the tasks natural to the region in which he was born. If the villagers grew rice, he should become, for a while, a good rice grower, even if his father were rich enough to buy all the rice in the province. Later, when the child became a man, a doctor, lawyer or teacher, he would be likely to remember his contact with a life so different from his present one, and feel some sense of identification with other segments of the population.

All of these things, we submit, properly come under the heading of "nature study." The study is important for the reason that, above all, it is a study of man himself, self-induced by his exposure to unspecialized living. And if we cannot rig up a farm program for our youngster, occasional trips to the ocean or mountains or forests ought to be possible for nearly every family.

FRONTIERS

They Would Not Listen

ALMOST from the very beginning of publication, MANAS has exhibited a strong distaste for conventionality and "respectability," and from time to time a reader may wonder at this feeling, since it appears to him that the ordinary canons of respectability are at worst innocuous and at best serve to safeguard the young and inexperienced from falling into situations which often leave deep scars on human character.

The trouble with respectability is that its guardianship of what we call "morality" draws its restraining power from the fear of social disapproval, and not from reason. In time, a society which places great faith in respectability comes to identify morality itself with social approval, and when this happens, the end of the long road of cultural decay has been reached. When respectability has this role, contempt for its compulsions is deserved, and if, in the hands of immaturity, this contempt sometimes spreads into a disregard of balance and discipline in personal relations, we ought not to suppose that a stronger hand in enforcing the dictates of respectability might change things for the better. Actually, undue reliance on respectability is itself a deep-rooted form of insecurity which attacks those whose principles are weak. Its long-term effect is to blind people to the evils of hypocrisy.

What is difficult, in social criticism, is to evaluate the degree of hypocrisy which has already become conventionally acceptable in any given society. If the hypocrisy is widespread and powerful, a forthright appeal to positive ideals may fall on deaf ears. The social soil is now corrupted, and the long, slow process of psychological regeneration has to precede any sort of political movement which depends upon simple verities for its success.

One of the symptoms of decline through the worship of respectability is the unwillingness of the great majority to listen to critics of the existing

state of affairs. Critics never start out as revolutionaries, but they always end as angry, alienated men when their just complaints and strictures receive no attention. The Marxist movement, for example, was not the beginning of the European radical movement. Prior to Marx, there were a number of distinguished humanitarians who preached the politics of brotherhood and sharing. The class struggle, as the militant principle of Communist revolution, was a notion powered by a generation of disillusionment in doctrines of reform which rested upon *faith in man*. Only when that faith gained no response, when the "respectable" people of Western society ignored the charges of injustice brought by pre-Marxian radicals, did the doctrine of *hate*—so terribly expressed in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848—become the dynamic of social revolution in the West.

Thus love of "respectability" played its passive role in turning humanitarian fervor into hate. The "respectable" people would not listen to the radicals. The equation of respectability with righteousness made them unable to recognize the *rational* element in the appeals of the radicals. Reliance on respectability had made them unable to *feel at home* in the region of rational discourse, so that they feared nonconforming criticism instead of welcoming it as the means to better understanding of themselves and their society. In time, the West reaped the whirlwind harvest of its neglect of the rational side of social criticism, which came in the form of obsessing demons of irrational revolution—Fascism, Nazism, Communism.

The United States may be said to be one historical "degree" this side of the steep declivity of the irrational political authoritarianism which has devastated Europe. In America, there is still a "chance." But America, alas, has little interest in the charges of critics. The grip of conformity, of respectability, has seldom been so secure. For this reason, then, we ought to take the time to listen to those who have broken with the conformity of

today. Whether or not we "agree" with their principles and assumptions is beside the point. What matters is the fact that, having taken a position outside the circle of respectability, such critics are bound to see things which others overlook.

In the February, 1954, issue of *Resistance*, an anarchist periodical, David Weick writes concerning the recent proposal of the President to revoke the citizenship of "subversives" convicted under the Smith Act. Weick's article deals with much more than this incident, however, for his discussion amounts to a broad review of the social psychology of an approaching totalitarianism. He begins:

In the late stages of Nationalism, the practical philosophers of Government make a discovery. They find that they have been tolerating, as though divinely ordained, what is only a recent human prejudice: the notion that all subjects of a State are citizens with equal claim to protection by and from the law. The insight—the blinding illusion, rather—comes upon them that their nation is first and foremost a warring State, an army, that it has a great destiny and a great mission. From this perspective, an entirely new vision of *homo sapiens* ensues, and from the new vision, a new style of governing.

Allegiance and *loyalty* were once the obsession of a minority of rather boring fanatics of patriotism. Now they become prime concerns of the Government. A man is no longer a man, inalienably dignified by citizenship. It remains to be determined, by close inquiry, if he is entitled to "the duties and privileges of a loyal citizen." Does he range himself unequivocally on the side of the State? That is what counts. If he questions the majesty of the State, or the whole idea of survival by war, he is considered to have pitched his tent in the alien camp, he has confessed his worthlessness to the State, and it will do him no good to suggest that he has lived honestly and honorably, or to protest—as some do—that he is really a better patriot than the zealots of patriotism. It's all right to exploit the imperial crisis for private enrichment—if not too odiously. But a person exercises the faculties of speech and thought only at the risk of discovering that the guardians of the State find him unworthy of the rights and protection of the citizen—such as they are.

From no point of view is it a joke. These folk are enemies of the State. They are guilty of what, in the ascendancy of Nationalism, is unpardonable crime. . . .

The habit of judging people in terms of their respectability leads naturally to judging political opinions in terms of their conformity. Thus, as Weick says, one who "questions the majesty of the State, or the whole idea of survival by war," is cast outside the pale, not because his views are really irrational, but because they are *different*. To consider such views seriously would involve independent rational analysis, and this, people subconsciously realize, might involve *them, too*, in nonconforming views. It is a common occurrence, these days, that in conversation the fearful and respectable listen carefully for clues of unorthodox opinion in those they meet. They do not listen for the *sense* in what is said, but for clues which will enable them to *classify* the person who is speaking. Once the individual has been labeled "suspicious" or possibly "subversive" or "radical," it is no longer necessary to listen to him at all, but only to ignore him and warn one's friends against him.

Weick points out that the ideals of eighteenth-century liberalism—liberty and equality—have lost their driving force. Too often they are no more than half-conscious window-dressing for authoritarian innovations. Even the authentic liberal faith of today is confused, as Weick shows:

America *or* Russia! The Administration *or* the Opposition ! Totalitarianism *or* the Democratic State! Nationalism *or* the United Nations! Over and over again, . . . there is an evil, and there is its *apparent* contradictory; and how often do men of good will pour their energies and hopes into the "practical" alternative to the abyss! And it turns out that the alternative is not what they want, nor does it "work." When are the men of good will going to realize that the past is dead, the present is dead, and there is a future to create?

Not even the conformist of growing doubts would be able to see the follies of compromise with the totalitarian process as clearly as Weick

sees them. As an anarchist, he is free of hope that we can be saved by massive organization and powerful institutions. But to recognize the value in Weick's insights, one must take final leave of political respectability. Whatever else one may say of anarchism, it places no reliance at all on conformity and it despises "respectability." There is little wonder, then, that the creative social intelligence of our time seems often to arise in anarchist circles. One may even say that alienation is the price of social intelligence, these days.

Weick seeks a liberty which is based on the realization that "an individual is secure in life and dignity and a rough kind of equality, only when these are guaranteed by his integration, his full acceptance, in a human community." Now comes a passage of inescapably accurate criticism:

But which community? This is the point. The only existing communities are national pseudo-communities, the Nation-States. They are pseudo-communities because the integrating factors in the society are not personal, except in a negligible degree; primarily, the society is integrated by the economic market and by politics, as, in the main, are all European-American nations. To whom is the plea of inalienable citizenship to be made? It can only be to an amorphous public which, especially these days, acts collectively under the influence of demagoguery; or to the Government, . . . One looks in vain for any interest which would impel public or Government to "be soft," as the demagogues call it, to those who are out of sympathy with their all-consuming concern. Morality and appeals to reason are—as can be seen—not even brakes upon a tendency driven onward by the powerful irrationale of war. The aim of such appeals is praiseworthy, but without means of realization.

What makes men fear and turn to the refuges of respectability and conformity to escape from the necessity of thinking for themselves? Loss of positive ideals, on the one hand, and loss of respect for themselves, on the other. What present experience and the anarchist philosophers have to teach us is that these voids cannot be filled by the creation of powerful, punitive social institutions. The voids are in ourselves.