

## THE ASYLUM OF MYSTERY

A READER whose interests seem weighted on the scientific side wants to know "why the label 'spiritual' is always attributed to something that can't be explained." This question arose in connection with a MANAS "Frontiers" article (March 18) which reviewed the findings of modern psychic research, taking occasion to suggest that there ought to be a clear distinction between the "psychic" and the "spiritual," so-called. Our writer remarked—correctly, we think—that the psychic involves simply the superphysical, while "spiritual" is a word which ought to be reserved for the creative aspect of human beings.

Our reader's question, however, is worth looking into. First of all, is it a fact that difficulties of explanation surround the "spiritual"? Second, are these difficulties unique to inquiries into "spiritual" matters?

The difficulties, we think, are present and very real. But similar difficulties, if not such obvious ones, afflict more mundane avenues of inquiry. Finally, we should like to suggest that such mysteries are quite natural—are, in fact, among the unavoidable conditions of human existence. While it is easy to show that pretenders to absolute knowledge, particularly pretenders to knowledge through Divine Revelation, have long made sport of human credulity by insisting that what their special revelation does not disclose is a mystery withheld from human understanding by the will of God—which led Spinoza to declare that "the will of God is the asylum of ignorance"—it is also a fact that all important questions have an element of mystery in them, and it seems quite likely that anyone who tries to disparage the "mysterious" in human experience is as much of a pretender as the authorities on "God's Will."

Take for example the question of "matter," as opposed to "spirit": what is it? We don't mean Dr. Johnson's sort of definition of matter, when he kicked the cobblestone in the street of London, stubbing his toe to refute Bishop Berkeley's contention that matter is "unreal." We ask a scientist's definition of matter. In our experience, a good one is very hard, if not impossible, to find. The skeptical reader's attention is invited to Karl Pearson's *The Grammar of Science*, an old book, but a good one, wherein he will find thirty-one pages of closely argued reasoning on the subject, ending, in summary, with this conclusion:

The notion of matter is found to be equally obscure whether we seek for definition in the writings of physicists or of "common-sense" philosophers. The difficulties with regard to it appear to arise from asserting the phenomenal but imperceptible existence of conceptual symbols. Change of sense-impression is the proper term for external perception, motion for our conceptual symbolization of this change. Of perception the questions "what moves" and "why it moves" are seen to be idle. In the field of conception the moving bodies are geometrical ideals with merely descriptive motions.

If a more recent authority is wanted, there is A. K. Bushkovitch, who observed in the January 1940 number of *Philosophy of Science*:

Atoms, electrons, and electromagnetic waves are concepts (not to say fictions) invented for the purpose of describing the results of experiments and correlating them with each other. An experiment, however, is an operation in which instruments play fully as important a role as the material which is investigated; in fact, it cannot be performed and is unthinkable without the instruments. An experiment is, therefore, a study of the behavior of certain instruments under certain conditions, and the "elementary constituents of the universe" are merely auxiliary concepts devised for the purpose of properly describing the behavior of instruments in interaction with their surroundings. If we assert that this stone which we see is composed of atoms, electrons, etc., we mean merely that if placed into certain specified

interactions with certain instruments, these latter will behave in a predictable way. But without the instruments the statement is unverifiable and therefore meaningless. . . . we should no longer talk of understanding the secrets of the universe and learning the ultimate structure of matter. . . .

If it should be imagined that this writer is not "representative," the reader may turn to another sort of discussion of modern physical theory, "The New Dogmatism," by Francis B. Sumner, in the *Scientific Monthly* for October, 1937—a classical criticism of the mystifying aspects of the new physics; or to the *Atlantic Monthly* for July of the same year, in which Prof. Herbert Dingle, a scientist himself, exclaims:

The enigmas of modern physics are in no measure explained; they are simply dispelled. The reader is not enlightened; he is drugged. . . .

"But what," he may ask, "is this electron which you say is both a particle and a wave?" "Ah, you needn't trouble about that," is the reply, "we don't know ourselves: the electron is something unknown doing we don't know what." "But what, then, have you discovered? Why do you speak so contemptuously of the old science, which we understood in some measure, and say it is superseded by a great new revelation?" "Because we have found that, at bottom, everything is mathematics." "What, then, is mathematics?" "Why, my dear fellow, mathematics is the one sole characteristic of the Creator; would you presume to understand that? If you knew mathematics you would know everything; a mathematical formula, and nothing else, expresses the ultimate reality. You yourself are simply a mathematical formula—a mathematical thought in the mind of a perfect Mathematician. Is not that sufficient justification for contempt of a mere system of screws and fly-wheels which the last century talked about?" "Well, yes, I suppose; but I don't see how you have found out that everything is mathematics." "Why, by mathematics, of course how else, since mathematics is everything? The system of physics is a closed system."

The account may be light-hearted, but it is by no means impertinent. As a matter of fact, mathematics has been moving in on the modern mind for several centuries. Turning from "matter" to "gravitation," we find, when we think about it, that we have no notion at all what the force we

call gravitation really is—what, that is, causes it. The *law* of gravitation is nothing more than a mathematical construction and Newton clearly separated it from the actual *cause* of the attractions of bodies. For a number of very good historical reasons, however, gravitation itself soon became more popular as a primal cause than even "God."

This development of scientific thought is well described by Frederick Lange in his *History of Materialism*:

From the triumph of this early mathematical achievement [Newton's demonstration of gravity] there was curiously developed a new physics. Let us carefully observe that a purely mathematical connection between two phenomena, such as the fall of bodies and the motion of the moon, could only lead to that great generalization in so far as there was presupposed a common and everywhere operative material cause of the phenomena. *The course of history has eliminated this unknown material cause and has placed the mathematical law itself in the rank of physical causes.* The collision of the atoms shifted into an idea of unity, which as such rules the world without any material mediation. (Our italics.)

Lange, it may be said, wrote in the nineteenth century. But this is to his credit, since he was one of the few who then saw that the abstractions of mathematics had been obliged to do double duty as a "physical cause"! Much more recently, Arthur Eddington pointed out in *Space, Time, and Gravitation* that although the law of gravitation was formulated more than two hundred years ago, "it cannot be said that much progress has been made in explaining the nature or mechanism of this influence." He adds:

It is said that more than 200 theories of gravitation have been put forward; but the most plausible of these have all had the defect that they lead nowhere and admit of no experimental test. . . . Few would survive the recent discovery that gravitation acts not only on the molecules of matter, but on the undulations of light.

Finally, we may call as witness Albert Einstein, who earlier this year announced the completion of his long-sought "unified field

theory," designed to encompass all physical phenomena, from the peregrinations of atomic particles to the galaxies of endless space. Speaking at a news conference last March, Dr. Einstein said that he had "finished the work on the structures of the equations, but I have not been able to find out if there is any physical truth in it.

Unlike the modern positivists such as Bushkovitch, quoted earlier, Dr. Einstein believes that it is possible to discover truth about the nature of things through scientific inquiry, but he is quick to point out the difference between the abstract constructions of mathematics and the actualities of nature and life. So, to the reporters, he said of his unified field theory that he had not yet determined whether "it is true in the ordinary sense of the word," even though the explanation afforded by his theory, if explanation it be, is "mathematically correct."

The rest of the article (in the Los Angeles *Times* for March 16) is devoted to questions asked of Dr. Einstein about his career in science, and his answers. Since the latter refer to matters essentially the same as "spiritual" mysteries, it will be appropriate to quote what he says. Asked why he became a scientist, the physicist said that a childhood experience of a compass started him off.

"To me," said Einstein, "it appears as if those outside stimuli had had a considerable influence on my development. Man, however, has had very little insight into what is going on within himself.

"Seeing a compass for the first time may not have a similar effect upon a puppy's eyes or upon every child's.

"What is it that determines the particular reaction of a child? One may theorize about it more or less plausibly, but will scarcely reach a deeper insight. What is going on within us we do not know."

What does a physicist think of the relationship between physics and medicine and health?

"Well," he said, "physics has aided medicine by giving civilized man confidence in the scientific method. This method is very essential. It has also

furnished the physician his indispensable tools and concepts.

"On the other hand, it has often seduced the biologist into interpreting biological phenomena too primitively. The authority which physics has gained has seduced many in biology to make too primitive theories in this complicated field. So I will not give an example. This is too offensive."

Could we ask for a better vindication of the importance of spiritual mysteries?

The true scientist—and Dr. Einstein is certainly this—is more aware than anyone else of the limitations of his field, and of human limitation in general. Yet the true scientist is also a man of great faith—faith in the possibilities of human knowledge, and faith in the human capacity to reach to knowledge.

In conclusion, it seems fair to say that not all the things which can't be explained are said to be "spiritual" in character. The spiritual, to borrow Dr. Einstein's phrase, concerns "what is going on within us"—the mystery of human differences, the wonder of imagination, the secret of human hunger to learn the truth. To say that we know very little about these things is to repeat the obvious. Yet all the ultimate questions about *meaning* and *cause* and *origin* are equally mysterious—and doubtless equally important. And not less important is the fact that all truly human beings long to penetrate to the core of these mysteries, and that those who neglect this quest miss the richest and most rewarding experiences which life holds.

## *Letter from* **South Africa**

THE month of April 1953 has been significant for two events in South and Central Africa. On April 15, the National Party led by Dr. Malan won the general election in South Africa by an increased majority as compared with the 1948 election. The electioneering efforts of the so-called United Democratic Front were not able to stem the tide of Afrikaaner Nationalism. The results of the election were not unexpected to most non-European observers. The United Party has not advocated any clear policy which would make the electorate decide on a change of government. Except for pleading that the colour issue be dealt with on a level above that of party politics, the Opposition upholds the same principles of white domination as does the party in government. The Opposition has reacted in the same way as did the government to the campaign of defiance conducted by the African National Congress and the South African Indian Congress against the policies of discrimination pursued by the present and previous governments. This reaction is natural in a country where the superiority in numbers of the non-white population is regarded as an ever present threat to the survival of white civilisation. On the purely emotional level—and emotion plays a dominant role in South African politics—there is no reason why a government which has displayed real determination to maintain the status quo should be replaced. Although more individual votes were cast for the party that lost, the fact remains that no impression has been made on the voters who support the government.

Not many official pronouncements have been made by the government on the results of the election. It is natural, however, that the government will interpret the results as a renewed mandate from the people to forge ahead with the policies framed during the past parliamentary sessions. These include further "*apartheid*" legislation, removing from the common roll those coloured voters who still have franchise rights,

and attempts to ensure the "sovereignty of parliament" by taking away from the Appeal Courts the right to decide on the validity of measures passed by the Union Parliament. It is, of course, still a question whether these measures can be effected constitutionally unless a radical change is made in the country—*e.g.*, by forming a republic, which is actually the aim of the government.

It is interesting to note that Dr. Malan himself appears to have a rather arbitrary interpretation of what constitutionality is. Previous to the elections, when his party had a smaller majority than now, he and his government were determined to ride roughshod over the constitution in pursuing their objects. Now that he is assured of support that is only a little under the constitutional two-thirds majority in the House of Assembly, he has invited those members of the Opposition who "accept *apartheid* with sincerity" to give him the necessary twelve or thirteen votes to secure the majority required for amendments to the constitution. This, he says, would then obviate any constitutional crisis. Apparently, the constitution is only to be observed if and when circumstances permit.

The non-Nationalist section of the white population is certainly harbouring fears and misgivings as to the probable diminution of their entrenched rights. As far as the non-white sections are concerned, there can be no doubt that they may now look forward to a further intensification of the racist extremes in the policies of the government.

The second of the two events referred to at the beginning of this letter is the referendum taken in Southern Rhodesia on April 8 on the question of federation with the two territories of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The three are British colonies, and Southern Rhodesia has developed furthest along the line to self-government. The colour policy of Southern Rhodesia is similar to that in the Union of South Africa, a fact which has contributed in fair measure to the opposition

among the Africans in these territories to the federation scheme. The majority of voters in the referendum favoured federation, and the British Colonial Secretary has stated that this affords the opportunity to set up a multi-racial society in which racial antagonisms can be eliminated, and fair play be observed. While the whites see certain advantages, especially economic, in the scheme, most Africans regard the whole business with suspicion and fear. They do not feel that there is any guarantee of any enhancement, or, for that matter, protection, of their rights. There is always before them the example of the Union of South Africa, where, although promises were made, to the extent of entrenching certain rights in the constitution, later governments did not hesitate to wage onslaughts on these rights. The Africans are afraid of finding themselves in the position where their only value consists in the fact of their being a cheap labour reserve. No amount of talk about "Federation being in the best interests of the Africans themselves" can allay the real fears that lie deep down in the hearts of the Africans.

It is inevitable that world opinion will focus sharply on events in Africa in the years that lie immediately ahead.

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## *REVIEW*

### PERSPECTIVES OF THE "MATURE MIND"

HARRY OVERSTREET'S latest and much-in-demand book, *The Great Enterprise*, focusses the implications of his earlier work, *The Mature Mind*, on evaluation of the present conditions of world society. Those familiar with the first volume will expect much of *The Great Enterprise*, and they will not be disappointed. Mr. Overstreet writes so clearly that readers unacquainted with psychological and sociological jargon will nonetheless be able to grasp his contentions. On the other hand, *The Great Enterprise* is not the outgrowth of a single definite thesis, as was *The Mature Mind*, and the absorbing concept of "psychological maturity" becomes a bit submerged in generalities.

Overstreet throughout supports the contentions of Karen Horney, illustrating the many ways in which ours has become an extremely neurotic society, in danger of self-destruction unless the neuroses are cleared up. He provides, incidentally, one of the least involved and most universally applicable definitions of neurosis we have seen, a definition which also lends itself to obvious social and political application. He writes:

Through clinical experience, we have come to recognize one invariable characteristic of that sick condition of the mind we call neurosis: namely, rigidity. The neurotic person behaves in the same way over and over again, even in circumstances that in no wise call for such behavior.

What is thus seen in the large among the neurotic and the insane may be seen in the small among so-called normal people. In one way or another, we all tend to become rigid in some areas of our thoughts and emotions. Thus a person brought up within a certain environment may take on some major attitude that prevails there and may never seek to determine whether or not it is validated by reality.

Mr. Overstreet seems especially enlightening on the psychology of freedom and the psychology of punishment, on presently changing concepts in

education, and in succinctly effective opposition to loyalty oaths and emotional anti-communism. As those familiar with any of his other books will know, Mr. Overstreet is an inveterate coiner of phrases and, subsequent to his definition of neurosis, he discusses what he calls "area-rigidity," meaning the proclivity of immature human beings to remain completely inflexible in opinion on some subjects, while open and willing to learn on others. Discussing political phenomena, he suggests that we rob ourselves of freedom to the extent that we allow "area rigidities" to control either ourselves or our society.

The phobia of anti-communism is both an illustration of how the American mind has crystallized in certain areas of political thinking, and a proof that subsequently, as a result, as with the adoption of arbitrary creeds in religion, *we lose our real freedom*—freedom to think. Thus one of the age-old predicaments is created anew, and it matters little whether we call the area in which this happens "politics" or "religion." This also involves us in an obvious contradiction between democratic theory and much of current practice. Overstreet says:

Where a democratic nation begins to curtail competitive freedom—particularly in the area of ideas—and to put a premium upon conformity, it becomes to that extent less characteristically itself and less able to cope flexibly with the problems it faces.

Religions, also, as we know, have had a long and unhappy history of rejecting multiple choice. Each of the crusading religions has opposed other religions on a fixed assumption: there is no truth but ours. Each of these religions has, in characteristic fashion, lowered its curtain, refusing to let its adherents know other religions except to condemn them. The result has been a tragic history of animosity. . . .

Bringing these theoretical considerations to bear upon the present hysteria, Overstreet offers the most challenging paragraphs of his book:

It comes to this, then: if, today, an individual wishes not to be branded as a communist (and to have both his reputation and his source of livelihood taken

from him), his only safe alternative is *to stop trying to right human wrongs*. He must, in other words become a moral cipher—and turn over the gratitude and loyalty of the world's oppressed to the communists, thus helping them to win their victory.

This is the moral and practical predicament that is being forced upon us by certain overzealous anti-communists. In the blind excess of their anticommunist fury, they are killing the very spirit they declare themselves out to serve, and are helping the communists to take over. We noted in the preceding chapter that communists hated fascism without totalitarianism. Here we note what it specifically means when, in our own country, many among those who hate communism do so without hating totalitarian tactics.

Not everyone, in brief, who proclaims himself anti-communist thereby proves himself to be pro-democratic or pro-mankind—though the present confused situation may allow him to pin on such proud labels and wear them unchallenged. The chance to besmirch and ruin liberals has made a Roman holiday for those who have always hated liberals. Now their time has come. They have at their command a formula so simple that the veriest fool can use it: "*Cry 'subversive' when anyone proposed any change whatever in the states quo or the righting of any wrong.*" With this formula, they can keep all things safe for whatever privileges they enjoy; or lacking privileges, they can vent their frustrations with destructive impunity.

A natural correlation, here, is between aggressive emotionalism in the political sphere and other forms of "immaturity" expressed through ignorant hostility. Consider, for instance, typical attitudes regarding the punishment of criminals. In Mr. Overstreet's terms, the imposition of the death penalty upon the Rosenbergs might be regarded as due less to an inexorable operation of necessary law than to the invidious influence of the "hate-fear" reactions of a frightened populace. In the case of the ordinary criminal, the same factors invariably work, and, as Wardens Clinton Duffy and Kenyon Scudder have pointed out, we cannot expect to solve the problem of crime until we cease venting vengeful emotions upon our "outcasts," whether political or social. As Overstreet put it:

A judge, in short, might pronounce upon an offender a sentence of a few months or years; but society, grim with . fear and rage, would convert it into a life sentence. Something of this kind tends to happen, though less conspicuously, in a multitude of instances where—in home, classroom, or office—the offender against his kind is, by isolating punishment, turned into a pariah. The period of enforced "disconnection" may end; but the stigma and the inner frustration linger on. Here is something about psychological cause and effect that parents need to know if the punishments to which they resort are to be character-building rather than character-destroying. It is something that principals and teachers need to know; that army officers need to know; that, above all, prison guards and wardens, keepers of juvenile delinquents, and caretakers of the mentally ill must know. All of us need to know the basic psychological truth that in the degree that we disconnect man from his fellow man we make him less a man.

A society "grim with fear and rage" is obviously capable of giving any man of unusual opinion a "life sentence" of ostracism. A great danger of the present epoch is that while men express more and more a need to find understanding "togetherness" with their fellows—while the need for assisting the dispossessed and oppressed peoples of the earth is more clearly perceived, and while the formerly unsympathetic relations between religion and science are improving, we still have the unfortunate habit of hating the "deviants," perhaps more than ever. Matters of right and wrong are apt to be determined by mass emotions rather than by a conception of the individual integrity of reason and principles of justice. We are, according to Overstreet, watching the competition of "two contrasting visions of man." One is "the vision of *man made safe within a Plan,*" the other "the vision of *man made able to evolve plans.*" The trouble is that the Communists are not the only ones trying to make people safe "within a plan." Any system of conformity which excludes the uncompromising principle of *allowing* disagreements in the interest of free learning and progress for all, becomes a dead weight of blind reaction. In the final analysis, it doesn't matter

much what brand of totalitarianism men adopt. Whether it be political, economic, religious or social, the psychological effect will be the same—upon individuals—in forming their own ideas and beliefs, they will not enjoy that freedom of choice upon which the development of a genuinely "mature mind" depends.

Our only criticism of *The Great Enterprise* involves Mr. Overstreet's continued emphasis upon the social origin of personality. We feel that the strongest incentive to recognizing the "tradition of dissent" as a precious heritage lies in the affirmation of the uniqueness of each individual, and upon the fact that neither his ideas nor his reactions can be regarded as socially determinable. Mr. Overstreet sometimes seems unaware of the necessity for admitting some sort of *originally* autonomous nature in man, and to us this is a real oversight. In a time when there are more and more "emerging agreements" as to the values by which men should live, there is also a growing feeling of loneliness among those who have felt something missing, despite the comfort in sharing mass opinions. There are individual "opinions," in short, which sometimes tap reality, and which are so profound and important that they become more important than the feeling of security obtained from conformity with others' views. Yet these opinions alone are capable of overcoming "loneliness."

## *COMMENTARY* **PACKAGES ABROAD**

DURING recent months Americans have had ample opportunity to become familiar with conditions in South Africa. Newspapers repeatedly carry stories on the turbulence of political conditions there, and Alan Paton's book, *Cry The Beloved Country*, later made into both opera and film, has made the tragic situation of native Africans widely known. Then the May 4 number of *Life* was entirely devoted to Africa, "a continent in ferment."

There is little, perhaps, that individuals can do about the political problems of South Africa, beyond helping to make clear where the weight of American public opinion lies, but there is much that many can do to help the Africans to overcome the dire poverty imposed upon them by European "civilization. "

For example the editors of MANAS asked our new African correspondent, a native of Africa, what might be done to reimburse him—it being pointed out that although MANAS, which operates at a loss, cannot pay its writers, packages of food, clothing, and books are often sent to overseas contributors. He replied that while he could make educational use of American books and periodicals, the people of his country were in such great need of clothes to wear that he hesitated to suggest that books be sent instead. In other words, there is need for both.

For years, the MANAS staff has mailed abroad two or three packages a month in friendly reciprocation for "Letters" from other countries. We should like to send still more to Africa—both clothes and books—yet to do this will require considerable help. Since the staff is already loaded with essential tasks, we ask if readers in other parts of the country might like to send packages of clothing to some "depot" in this area—either Los Angeles, or Alhambra, where MANAS is printed; and further, if there is some reader in this general location who has space in a

garage or some other building which could be used to store the clothing, inspect it, and make it ready (pack, etc.) for shipment to Africa? Finally, are there readers living in Alhambra, Pasadena, or Los Angeles who would be willing to join with each other one evening a month to prepare the packages for mailing?

If you want to participate in this project, please drop us a line, so that the staff can determine whether or not enough help can be counted on to make this idea a practical one to carry out.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

SOME very interesting material is at hand, lending support to our view that the reading of "fiction" can play a vital role in psychological and moral education, and that both parents and institutions of learning could well give more attention to helping the young to develop critical perspectives on contemporary writing. A basic defense of drama—in any medium—is offered by Gordon Keith Chalmers' book *The Republic and the Person*. For Chalmers insists that, even for the average man, the dramatic portrayal of situations demanding moral choice brings more people to read stories or read plays than does the desire to simply "kill time."

We are, in other words, not as completely divorced from the concerns which made Greek culture great as so many despairing intellectuals seem to believe. Chalmers quotes a famous playwright:

Maxwell Anderson asked the ancient question in examining his own plays and the musical comedies, tragicomedies, and tragedies on Broadway. He put it this way: "Why does the audience come to the theatre to look on while an imaginary hero is put to an imaginary trial and comes out of it with credit to the race and himself?" He found the answer in the demand of the audience that the play prove "that men pass through suffering purified". . . .

As an educator, Chalmers is interested less in the artistic quality of cultural contributions than in what the majority of men are able to make of them. It is his contention that even indiscriminate reading will point to a profound historical truth—that there is a vast potential for spontaneous agreement among men of all ages, races and epochs on moral verities. "The area of common judgment," he writes, "about the great protagonists of history and of literature and about the evident influences at work in the human breast is considerable. This body of agreement, never precisely delimited, and always the subject of review and reappraisal, constitutes the best account we have of the norm of human conduct." Chalmers continues:

At their best, for purposes of ethical inquiry, history and letters here occupy common ground. The superiority of letters lies only in their responsibility to the universal, where history is responsible to the dated event.

A juvenile court in Brooklyn discovered that many delinquents suffer because they feel themselves unique, and they are comforted and stabilized when through the reading of novels required by the judge they are made acquainted with accounts which match their own against other experiences. The tension and nervousness from which we are supposed to suffer, anxieties and fears from which we constantly run to the psychiatrist's couch, are appreciably decreased by contact with the examples in story and song, and the possibility they offer of comparisons with ourselves. For, as Deor said in the midst of grief over being neglected in old age, "Yet these strove on and overcame; I can endure as well." The resultant dignity of both physical and spiritual bearing is perhaps the most precious thing we can ever acquire.

In considering the place of letters in studies, the Commission on Liberal Education of the Association of American Colleges stated in December 1947: "Literature has always been a powerful force for illuminating our true nature and for influencing men in their separate and their social lives. Its study was never more necessary to education than now." "In showing forth the various kinds of life, evil as well as heroic, literature reveals the moral problems and meanings of experience. It therefore acquaints the student with moral choice and the consequence of action. Proper teaching of literature should create in the student resistance, on the one hand, to corrosive cynicism, and on the other, to narrow and unenlightened fanaticism. It should make him aware of the variety as well as the constancy of moral responses to experience. The full understanding of a piece of literature entails the commitment of one's affections and sometimes even one's beliefs, and thus the effect of the intensive study of literature should be growth in the extent and clarity of one's allegiances. So literary study, both secular and religious, provides moral enlightenment by making more elaborate and more firm the understanding of what it is to be human.

We may note, also, that in another paragraph which follows, Chalmers is still speaking of "all" varieties of fiction and drama. Selectivity is of great importance, but less important than holding the feelings and the mind open to those vicarious experiences of literature which are, at the same time, not altogether vicarious:

In fiction of all kinds there is a double demonstration that the inner law for men exists and that men sense it by conscience: the fact that without

the existence of the law and our apprehension of it there would be no plot; and the fact that without the common possession of the inward law by all men the audience could never see the foundation, let alone apprehend the purport of the story. Rarely does anyone of average mental abilities enter into a series of the great stories well told without concluding for himself consciously or unconsciously that both the characters and the action of the stories must be reckoned with in his own life. That is what makes the true fascination of fiction. It is the same when a discerning person sees at first hand and vividly the account of historical events in which life, death, and the light or darkness of whole cities of men are at stake.

David Riesman's addendum to *The Lonely Crowd*, by way of an article in the winter *Antioch Review*, expresses a similar feeling. Liking to be specific, Riesman undertakes defense of motion pictures and "pocket books" on less theoretical grounds. "Now," he writes "it is my opinion that Hollywood movies not only are often shoddy but are often profoundly liberating and creative products of the human imagination." He continues:

If English leisure is sterile and mean-spirited, I doubt if such movies have made it so. Rather, I think English, and American life also, would be enriched if people learned to understand and appreciate the movies, and could enjoy them in the spirit, at once critical and friendly, with which people at different times and places have enjoyed literature. The thought occurred to me some years ago that our schools and colleges, and particularly our altogether too pious adult education ventures, might begin experimenting with courses on movie appreciation, and popular culture appreciation generally—a movement which would require us to develop something we have not yet got in this country: a corps of gifted movie and radio and TV critics.

In regard to pocket literature, Riesman insists that the disapproval occasioned by lurid jackets and emphasis of violence and sex is too hasty. Public taste in an era of increasing free time may be gradually becoming better all the while. He speaks of the need for the social scientist to achieve perspective and detachment from previous cultural theories, in view of the fact that our country is changing so rapidly in terms of "cultural opportunities" and also because it is so "hard even for the wisest among us to grasp what is

going on." To illustrate, Riesman provides a single instance of recent reading trends:

Recently a friend of mine who works for one of the pocket book companies visited an Ohio Valley city of about 75,000. There is no bookstore in the town, but a few books are kept, along with stationery and oddments, in the main department store. My friend asked at the department store why they didn't put in a real bookstore, and was told, "Well, this is a steel town. People here don't read; they just look at television or go to the taverns." Yet over three-quarters of a million pocket books were sold in this same town in 1951 at restaurants, at newsstands and in drugstores, many of them in the Mentor line of modern classics. This is well over a book a month for those old enough to read. I wish we had some knowledge and understanding of what these citizens made out of all they read: the Faulkner novels, the Conant *On Understanding Science*, the Ruth Benedict *Patterns of Culture*, along with the Mickey Spillane and other mixtures of sadism with sex. But studies of this kind in the field of leisure have not yet been made, as far as I know. . . .

We feel there is a tremendous need for extension of both high school and university opportunities for evaluation of current writing. Most departments of English are involved either in the classics or in the techniques of writing, adding up to a sort of arch-conservatism which fails to provide the thing most needed—an opportunity for free discussion on current volumes. The aim of such discussion should not, we think, be to decide as a group which books are the "best" in an absolute sense, either artistically or morally, but rather to provoke thinking about *why* it is that one dislikes or likes any current thesis or fictional attempt. Such classes or "courses," we are sure, would attract a large and enthusiastic enrollment. Perhaps such classes exist, but so far as we know most teachers are afraid to enter this field since no settled criteria have been developed for evaluation. Yet the absence of fixed yardsticks of measurement is precisely why open discussion of current literature needs to be encouraged and why it can be so interesting to students. This is also an area in education where the teacher has nearly as much opportunity to learn from his students as they have to learn from him.

## *FRONTIERS*

### The Peaceful Heretics

WHILE the Albigenses present one aspect of this great long subject, I have come upon another aspect right in my own neighborhood. I live in a farming district in Ontario and in the course of some folklore research I became very much interested in a community of Mennonites. There are many "splinter groups" in Ontario but the one in my community is, I believe, one of the last surviving groups to maintain in considerable purity the Christian tradition that goes back to the days of Paul. This group has farmed here for a hundred and fifty years, many families still on the land they cleared. They have a small church, so austere, so simple, so lovingly cared for by the members, that it impressed me deeply as a real place of worship. They have never had a paid minister, they tend the church, cut the wood used in its furnace, carry out faithfully most ancient Christian customs, including the kiss of peace and the washing of feet.

They are simple living, good farmers, good neighbors, continue the ancient tradition of great hospitality, and have among themselves a gaiety, zest for living, and sense of humor that intrigued my curiosity, in these times of strain and fear. So I tried to find out their origins. I shall try very briefly to outline the situation as I see it now.

In the days when Christianity in its earliest form reached what is now Italy, Rome straddled the peninsula and faced East. Conquest meant the acquisition of wealth from the nations of south and east. Northward stretched a land of forests, all the way to the foothills of the Alps. These lands were inhabited by the land-loving Celts who had been defeated by the Lombards and had retreated into areas that were scorned by the more ambitious kingdoms and duchies. When the persecutions became cruel, many Christians fled into the forests and moved northward into the wilderness, taking refuge with, and Christianizing, the Celts in what we know as Piedmont and

Lombardy. As that country was drawn into Western civilization by the Roman occupation of Europe, there were waves of recurrent persecution which drove the heretics farther and farther into the Alps country.

As the centuries passed these heretics retreated slowly through the Alps and fanned out onto the Rhine and the Rhone valleys. Because of what they believed and the fact that they lived what they believed, they were trustworthy, skilled farmers, herdsmen, keepers of vineyards and so on. They were welcomed as settlers by owners of great estates, who allowed them to settle on waste lands and turn them into good agricultural lands. In this way they had permeated into Bohemia a century and a half before Huss. They were in France long before the Beghards, the Huguenots, the Lollards. They were the fertilizing force that produced the Waldensians. The Albigenses and some other sects may have grafted onto the apostolic Christian teachings, traditions of the Gnostics, or it may be that remnants of ancient Gnostic groups which once flourished in southern France, grafted the Christian teachings onto their more ancient ones.

Certain of these Celtic Christian groups, forced northward into what later became Switzerland, were later still driven from Switzerland by the Reformed Church of Switzerland and some settled in the Rhine country, others in Holland, and some went to Russia. My neighbors were mostly German-Swiss speaking from Zurich (German was the compulsory language of the Holy Roman Empire), who came by way of the Palatinate, Holland, Pennsylvania, to Upper Canada in 1804. The chief family was that of the Reesors. Bishop Christian Reesor, with all his sons and their wives, and his daughters and their husbands, settled in the Rouge Valley, became farmers and millers, and were skilled artisans. They opened a school which was also a church. Long before there was public or compulsory education of children, these Swiss Brethren educated their children to read the

bible. Christian Reesor brought with him a Fräschaur bible published in Zurich about 1530, and it is still in the possession of one of his descendants, now 85 years of age, and also a Mennonite minister. I believe that the Swiss Brethren became Mennonites in Holland on their way out of Europe.

There are some interesting old English books on these folk-wanderings of the heretics. Cromwell was the Protector of the Celtic communities in Switzerland and once threatened to "sail a fleet over the Alps if necessary" to prevent their extermination. Milton was his secretary and wrote his dispatches to the rulers of various persecuting countries. Thomas Taylor, the Platonist, and friend of Blake, became so interested in the fate of the forgotten Christians from the fourth to the twelfth centuries that he made a research into the available material of his time and wrote a most interesting volume on their history.

There are two streams of Christian tradition quite easily recognizable when one investigates. There was the long succession of small, independent sects known by many names, all of which implied humility, defencelessness, selfdiscipline. Long before there were *Waldenses*, these apostolic Christians were called *Valenses*, the Men of the Valleys. Their beliefs were all curiously uniform. They never believed in child baptism, in the use of images, mass, confession, professional priesthood, the reservation of the wine in communion, and so on. They never *rejected* these things because they had never adopted them. They did not believe in any office higher than Bishop. In many of these things Charlemagne was their protector.

Then as time passed the Church became so obviously and generally degenerate that there was a restlessness even within the hierarchy. Here there begins the second stream of tradition: churchmen who rebelled and led church-Christians into heresy. The difference between church-Christians and Bible-Christians, as the ancient

heretics were called, became so pronounced that the Reformation was conceived. The *reform* groups bear the names of the leaders of revolt against the grossness of the professional priesthood. There were Hussites, Lutherans, Zwinglians, and others. But it is important to recognize that this reformation movement, which drew people out of the church, was quite secondary. The steady pressure of example, through a thousand years of the slow degeneration of the church kept the seed of the original Christian movement alive so that in due time it led to revolt. There is a tremendous job to be done in tracing the influence of these sects upon the men who created first the Renaissance and then the Reformation. St. Francis, Dante, Abelard, Savonarola, all give indications of their disturbing influence.

To me it is astonishing to try to re-create imaginatively the potency of the Christian ideology in those first centuries, the impact it made upon the people who were not even regarded as human. The age of primitive Christianity is something very few people can know, because all organized Christian institutions have blurred the outlines of that first impact of Christology upon the mass human mind. That the human being has a value in himself, that he has the right to think, to worship without the intervention of priests, that rituals, ceremonies, images, and priestly pardons or condemnations, have no authority over man himself, that marriage, the home and the family are good human institutions and should be inviolate—these are some of the ideas that kept hundreds of thousands of obscure men and women faithful to their traditions in spite of the most cruel persecutions for a thousand years between the time of the election of the first pope of Rome and the Reformation.

I never before realized the number, the diffusion, the force of the heretics throughout the history of Europe. In spite of fifteen hundred years of persecution by the greatest institution on earth, the Church of Rome, and then three

hundred years of persecution by Lutherans, Calvinists, and other Protestant groups, they survived, fertilizing the minds of their persecutors as the centuries passed.

Strangest of all, I think, is that this group in my own community should have held intact the basic apostolic teachings. They have, of course, forgotten their own history, the reasons for their many ancient traditions, their refusal to take oaths, to bear arms, or to pay a pastor for his work (they still choose their ministers by lot), but they have survived and brought intact into this Valley of the Little Rouge River the kind of Christianity they were taught in the forests in the foothills of the Alps nineteen hundred years ago.

No other ideology, political, social, economic, has had such power to change men and to keep them loyal to their faith from generation to generation, as has had the ancient, misinterpreted principles which sent the "displaced persons" of the Roman Empire fleeing into the secret valleys of the Alps. It has been a tiny trickle of tradition. But, after all, the Rosetta stone was our first clue to the history and culture of Egypt.

The early cults preserved their knowledge of the Christian teaching by learning whole books of the Bible by heart and repeating them to others. They carried on the tradition of "epistles" from one group to another right down into Upper Canada and within the past fifteen years there was a publication of these letters in English, translated from the original German-Swiss, by means of which the scattered communities kept in touch with one another a century ago.

The heretic was "he who chooses," and if there is one thing we need more than any other today it is the ability to choose what one thinks, the values upon which one acts, and the goal toward which one directs the way into the future.

One of our most profound thinkers in this country has become very much interested in this theory and points out that if it can be substantiated

it would write a new chapter in church history. "If that is so," I asked him, "why hasn't some one else written it before now?" "The truth of the matter is," he replied, "neither the Roman Catholic nor the Protestant churches want to know it."

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