

BOOKS FOR OUR TIME: IV

UNLIKE Karen Horney's *Neurotic Personality of Our Time*, last discussed in this series, the book we now propose to consider has no competition from similar volumes, so far as we know. *Richer By Asia*, Edmond Taylor's philosophic adventure of the mind, is unique in the type of cultural analysis attempted—less symptomatic of a specific "trend" than Horney's book, yet at the same time in tune with the contributions of Dixon, Fromm and Horney. There is a legitimate "trend," however, in the continued vivification of interest in Eastern philosophy and religion.

Often such interest manifests in a quite spontaneous fashion, as for instance in the surprising selection of *The Bhagavad-Gita* as a subject for study by the members of a university faculty discussion group (reported in MANAS for April 29 and May 13). We are reminded, too, of the publication of the journal, *Philosophy East and West*, starting in 1951, following an international conference of philosophers at the University of Hawaii. Some of the Westerners who attended the conference, and who later became interested in issuing such a magazine, found themselves turning to reading and reflection of a sort unusual in the science-dominated atmosphere of the West.

In some respects, at least, *Richer By Asia* serves as a focal point for orientation in further, related, reading. Justice Douglas' books, *Strange Lands and Friendly People* and *Beyond the High Himalayas*, belong naturally in the same sphere. So do Stringfellow Barr's *Let's Join the Human Race* and *Citizens of the World*. Similar emphases occur in a much older book, *The Soul of a People*, by H. Fielding Hall, written in 1898. Like Taylor, Hall was also an Army officer stationed in Asia—Burma, in his case. So impressed was he by the attitude of inward self-sufficiency of the Burmans—today he might have called it lack of neuroticism—that he studied carefully their Buddhist religion, concluding, finally, that Buddhism was not really "negation" at

all. While it taught acceptance of life's sorrows, it could imply joyous acceptance as well as Stoic calm. Buddha spoke, perhaps, in these terms: "To all those whose first thought is to escape from suffering, I say the complete conquest of desire alone will prevent suffering." But what of those in whom the desire to escape from suffering is not the guiding drive? Buddha, Hall thought, had something to say to such listeners, too. In time Hall came to feel that the Buddhist tradition contained profundities lacking in Christianity, and re-energized and clarified many Buddhist ideas. Similarly, Taylor's fresh discussions of the psychological dynamics of the doctrine of karma seem more provocative than the writings of such professional popularizers of Eastern ideas as Lin Yutang.

Taylor's deep preoccupation with the significance of the Asian point of view, as contrasted with the Western, is not that of an intellectual hobbyist, or even, it appears, of an inveterate introspectionist. Perhaps Taylor was simply a man who had seen something of the worst Western man can do—saw it as an officer in the war against Hitler's Germany—and had also seen the best it had been able to do, by 1947, in planning reconstruction for the post-war world. He then came to feel that this "best" was not good enough. When war-deposited in Asia, in any case, he was inwardly ready for a change of mental pace and outlook, and found his new environment remarkably conducive to revaluation.

Richer By Asia is a study of Western political, social and philosophical delusions, inspired by the author's residence in India as a functionary of the Office of Strategic Services. Employing the terminology of psychotherapy, Taylor relates the discovery, first within himself, then everywhere about him in his countrymen, of dogmatic provincialisms of thought. He suffered, himself, he saw, from "the Sahib-sickness"—illusion of superiority. This sickness he came to loathe, as a

preventive of clear insight. Thus Taylor's theses are inspired by more than the urge that has been responsible for so many volumes of armchair philosophical reflection; he became a "hot-gospeller," as Macneile Dixon once irreverently called Plato, because he felt that unless the cultural delusions of the West are speedily exposed and eradicated, hope for cooperative understanding between the new powers of the East and the established powers of the West will soon vanish beyond the point of no return. We select the following short paragraph as an excellent summary of Mr. Taylor's feeling, and also as a sample of the tone and approach found throughout *Richer By Asia*:

Whether we realize it or not we are all actors in the great drama of our day, the drama of the integration or the disintegration of man. This drama is being acted out not only upon the global stage but upon the private stages of our minds. The development of mass media of communication, the attendant intensification of propaganda, the preoccupation of the individual with public questions, his growing tendency to become involved in collective issues and to identify himself with collective causes—all these factors have revolutionized the emotional life of man. Individual psychology is no longer capable of providing a full explanation of man because the individual psyche is influenced by too many factors external to the individual.

Today the path of self-understanding which all the sages have taught was the way to inner peace, which the psychiatrists have discovered is the key to psychic health, does not end at the foot of the Boh tree nor at the analyst's couch. It winds through the battlefields, the propaganda services and the council-chambers of the world, it explores the group-antagonisms which poison our individual minds, which fill us with nightmares of personal insecurity, it leads into the prison camps of race and caste and cultural prejudice in which we segregate ourselves from our brothers.

As I found for myself in Asia, the study of the causes of man's disunity becomes an adventure of the mind and a discipline of self-knowledge when it is used to discover the roots of disunity in ourselves, to lay bare the resistances, the hesitations, and the contradictions hidden beneath our own verbalizations of the ideal of human unity.

We hope that readers will allow our claim that there are lines of inner connectedness between Dixon, Fromm, Horney and Taylor. These lines manifest, we think, as follows: Dixon sought to disenthral man from Authority-induced preoccupation with his own weakness; he portrayed self-induced philosophy as a stirring essay of the soul, and was opposed alike to moralistic religion and deadening materialism. Horney, in patient clarity, unveiled the cocoon-like layers of confused and immature aims which have come to surround human beings in the psychological structure of modern society—leaving few able to hatch forth into free flight, and leaving most of us condemned to a frustrating caterpillar existence from birth to death. Erich Fromm gave prolonged attention to those cardinal ideas of Christian culture which have made of man a far poorer creature than he need be, and exposed both the Authoritarian God and the God-Fearing men as responsible for a deal of moral disaster. But Fromm also saw, in the history of religious symbols and culture, a subtle undercurrent of aspiration toward a life higher than that recognized as possible by most men of the West. There is, chiefly in symbolism, he showed, a language of the soul—the unencumbered soul. The speaking of this language intimates man's delayed birthright of emotional and mental maturity.

No one set of religious formulations contains the secret, but aspects of it are revealed by all humanitarian, soul-energizing credos. Taylor demonstrates, first to himself and then to his readers, that the "language of the soul" is sometimes learned by reflection upon cultural contrasts, and by reflection upon the tremendously different philosophical culture of India in particular—again picking up a minor theme of Fromm's *Psychoanalysis and Religion* and *The Forgotten Language*. Now, what all these writers seem to be saying, and in uniquely instructive ways, is that the real life of man is the life of the mind—that here he is his own creator and destroyer, and, because in that realm, so in all others as well.

Returning to India and Mr. Taylor, there have been professional enthusiasts in plenty who attempt to trade in India's subtle wares. Taylor is of different

stamp; because he is so very different, so honestly critical, so free from any tendency to throw himself into a new idolatry, he accomplishes what seems a revelation of "the Asian mind." The Asian mind is indeed "backward"—but sometimes backward in a way similar to that of the absent-minded professor who cannot remember where the jack is when he wants to change a tire, but who *can* remember a potent thought that will inspire his classes. To paraphrase Taylor, the Asians can even manage to lose a locomotive—this actually happened during the war—but their leaders would probably never lose moral perspective to the point where the construction of an A-bomb seems justifiable.

A memorable passage in Taylor's book deals directly with this point—a passage which, together with its context, had much to do with gaining *Richer By Asia* a place on our brief list of "books for our time." It reads:

If India had been in a position to speak with authority at the time of the American atomic-warfare tests at Bikini atoll, we would have heard, not only through the Indian press but from the official diplomatic sounding-boards of the world, a message of great importance to us. We would have learned that without quite committing a social crime, we were following the pattern of crime, and were guilty of national blasphemy, not of a grave offense against Russia or even against peace, but against the dignity of man and the harmony of nature.

We did not feel—even those of us who strongly disapproved of the Bikini tests—that we were committing a really serious offense against peace, therefore the deep feeling of guilt we had seemed slightly superstitious to us, and we brushed it out of our minds, falling into an unnatural apathy. The Indians could have explained to us why our guilt was real and not superstitious, why Bikini, though it lacked the element of sadism, constituted the same basic blasphemy which is what really shocked us the most in the showerbaths, the gas-chambers and the crematoriums of Belsen, in Goering's grotesque experiments with frozen prisoners and naked gypsies, in the researches of Nazi medicine aimed at discovering the ideal poisons for injecting through the eardrums of children. The Indians would have told us that our blasphemy, like the Nazi ones, arose from an idolatrous worship of the techniques of science divorced from any ethical goals, that the man-made

cataclysm of Bikini was a black mass of physics as the German experiments were a black mass of medicine, that it was a mob-insurrection against the pantheistic sense of citizenship in nature, which we share with the Hindus in our hearts, but consider a childish foible.

Taylor also believes that the Indian perspective on the Soviet-Western power-bloc struggle holds one of the best chances for sanity in the future. "Both we and the Russians," he writes, "will learn to our great surprise that many of the policies and attitudes which seem so reasonable—or even generous—to us appear aggressive or deluded to Eastern eyes. At every level of the United Nations and in every international gathering we are going to see our hypocrisies denounced and our cultural insularity exposed and some of our questionable idealisms criticized. We are not going to be able to use backwardness as an excuse for oppression. It will not be enough for us to say, 'They have lost a locomotive,' when we want to send the Marines or the world-police into some disturbed Asiatic area. It will not even be enough to say, 'They can't keep order,' or 'They are oppressing minorities,' for the same argument could be used against us to demand an international mandate over Georgia."

Though Taylor's book is, in his own words, "a personal adventure of the mind," readers may easily feel that this volume is one of those rare contributions which, while written to satisfy the author's own need for expression, by some delicate balance happens also to coincide with the inchoate wonderings of many others. Not that Mr. Taylor failed to consider the possibility of an audience, yet his spontaneous flow of writing makes it seem apparent that the tastes of prospective readers were never seriously allowed to interfere with his own. So *Richer By Asia* is not a "personal" book, for all that. It is addressed to thinking man—the thinking man in Taylor and the thinking man in anyone who may happen to read it.

Richer By Asia is an answer, a really up-to-date, mid-century answer to the puzzled query, "What's all this about the intriguing depths of 'Eastern philosophy'?" Dogged by Western conventionality, many who have noted the preoccupation of certain

writers with Eastern psychology and philosophy imagine that whenever the "profundity" of the East is asserted, a simultaneous claim is being made that the East is "better" than the West; we think, so often, in terms of competition, and who is better than who seems a matter of great importance. Taylor helps to explain that this notion of "better" and "best" in relation to the realm of ideas is a great and characteristic weakness in most Western minds. The most philosophically inclined Easterners simply view events and human problems in terms of dimensions unfamiliar to us, and sometimes our own cultural delusions (the Easterner, clearly, is tempted by cultural delusions, too) are easily exposed by the study of philosophical contrasts. There may be schizoid tendencies in Asia, but there are paranoid tendencies in the West, and it is the paranoid who is most dangerous, both to himself and to others.

What is really worth while about Asian, and particularly Indian, civilization? This is indeed a question—a question which no one, we think, can even begin to answer in less space than the 430 pages of Taylor's volume. It is important, however, to wonder about the answer. As Taylor so convincingly argues, Asia has a vital role to play in world diplomacy. And then there is Gandhi, who did not really cease to live after his physical assassination. What accounts for a Gandhi, and for the millions of his followers who endured disciplines stricter than those imposed by any army in order to further the cause of their self-sacrificing leader? What is it about Asia which, according to a reported conversation, once led Sigmund Freud to call Gautama Buddha "the greatest psychologist of all time"?

The "East" has often been in vogue with those who seem to be the "wrong people"; there is a tremendous difference between the stance of philosophy and the stance of imitation, perhaps because philosophy can't be represented by any kind of stance. Among the Theosophists much pretentious nonsense has been advertised, and such have congratulated themselves upon becoming the anointed of the cosmos by virtue of having accepted the so-superior Eastern mysticism bequeathed to them—while if Eastern philosophy tells us anything

at all it is that no one can become anointed with anything save the effluvia of his own deeds. Then, there are the commercially minded, self-styled "yogis" who, we suspect, carry with them nothing genuinely Indian, in the classic sense, except the pigmentation of their skins.

What is present in some Westerners' inclinations toward Eastern philosophy besides bizarre leanings? Well, no one can strip India of its age. If anything is known by the Indians, and if this knowledge has found its way down through the centuries, it has had opportunity to become extraordinarily refined. The original Theosophists were apparently trying to get at a content of this sort, though their efforts were subsequently buried under a weird deluge of supernaturalism produced by cultists who claimed the same name. That such a tradition of self-reliant philosophy has existed and exists in India is attested by the fact that a Gandhi and a Buddha taught essentially identical messages—and both gained response from some deep capacity for appreciation in the otherwise ignorant majority.

Taylor helps to explain why, in a turbulent and harassed Asia, there are yet today forms of manliness which most of us Westerners know little about. For the dignity of man is not built upon political enthusiasms, nor upon conquests. Nor, going farther back and tapping again the resources of insight which Erich Fromm made available, is the dignity of man built upon the concept of an authoritarian God. The dignity of man is built upon the conviction of dignity itself—not the dignity of man alone, but the dignity and sanctity of life in general, whatever form it chooses to animate.

"The ancient pantheism," as the philosophers have called it, is the belief that "the universe is everywhere and in all its parts alive," and under the governance of natural moral laws formed from its own patterns of interaction. This view, sometimes clear, sometimes shadowed, is the view of those who have given to Asia its own special kind of greatness. Asians may have done almost everything else to subvert dignity—but one thing they did not do, and which we have done, is to cultivate "anxiety-neuroses" concerning the nature of the universe.

Letter from **MEXICO**

MEXICO CITY.—It is more than a trite expression that Mexico is the "mother of the foreigner and the stepmother of the Mexican."

The contours of the cornucopia, whose outlines form the boundaries of Mexico, strangely symbolize the traditional mistrust of the Mexican toward her northern neighbor.

This mutually shared misunderstanding is expressed by the *norteamericano's* typical if not offensive racial chauvinism in relation to his southern cousin. The Mexican notes the cornucopian outlines of his *país* [country], the outlet forming a common frontier with the United States—Ah! that is where all of her wealth flows.

It is patent, nevertheless, that the exploitation of the *peon* is fantastic. The foreign capitalist and the recently created bourgeoisie—a powerful reactionary element, according to some outstanding Mexican intellectuals—live in Quiviran wealth while the working class, from whose energy comforts are begotten, is paid a miserly five pesos daily for 8 to 10 hours of labor—equivalent to 60 cents, U.S. currency.

According to 1950 statistics, 40 per cent of the Mexican working population earns less than 100 pesos—twelve dollars—a month; living costs have risen 17 per cent in a recent brief period. The Federal Board of Conciliation and Arbitration established a minimum wage of 6.70 pesos daily for industrial workers in the Federal District (which embraces Mexico City) during 1952.

"In order to prevent the exploitation by undesirable foreigners of Mexican women who for economic reasons are forced to work in small factories which manufacture women's clothing and undergarments, Ernesto P. Uruchurtu, Chief of the Federal District, has ordered the director of the Department of Labor and Social Welfare to formulate a plan to protect the woman worker," says a news item in *El Nacional*, Jan. 19. According to the same report, numerous proprietors of small factories pay a top piecework wage of twenty centavos for sewing a shirt, one peso to one peso twenty centavos—15 cents, U.S. currency—for sewing a complete suit or dress, seventy centavos for weaving a shawl of go stitches, and fifty centavos—six cents, U.S. currency—for finishing first-grade underwear.

That the economic counter force of a clean fighting labor movement is a sorely felt need in Mexico is apparent in the random figures given above. Slavery, under whatever name, is still slavery, particularly so when legally proscribed.

The lack of economic equilibrium chiefly due to the absence of a vigorous unionism partly accounts for the steady exodus of *braceros* [laborers] across the Rio Grande River into Texas, Arizona and California where agricultural wages are consequently depressed, failing to meet minimum federal standards.

Moving in the darkness of night across the shallow Rio Bravo at Brownsville, McAllen, Laredo, El Paso, or at any number of points between, thousands of venturesome Wetbacks manage to evade the vigilant Border Patrol. Unable to speak English and without legal protection, the Wetback is unscrupulously exploited in field work—paid a substandard wage which is, even so and nonetheless, six times greater than that of his accustomed wage standard at home.

Because labor is a commodity, a source of lucre, farmers' organizations and Chambers of Commerce make no strenuous effort to curb, but rather encourage, this clandestine migration.

According to my enlightened informant, a taxi-driver who commutes between Matamorros and Brownsville, Mexican troops guarding the Rio Grande wink at the *bracero* traffic across the international frontier. And the bribe is a common method of silencing the over-scrupulous if underpaid soldier or official. Every week, according to the taxi driver, dead Wetbacks are seined out of the Rio Grande, in the vicinity of Matamorros. First robbed, then murdered, these dollar-laden Wetbacks never returned. In Brownsville, the well-informed cab driver observes, "the rackets are all on the other side."

CORRESPONDENT IN MEXICO

REVIEW

CHAPLIN IN LIMELIGHT

BEFORE one can write about Chaplin one must first make a momentous decision—whether to call him Charles or Charlie. The first might be more dignified but the affectionate diminutive rings truer to one who grew up in a time when the little comedian was a universal figure, his oversize shoes, baggy pants and jaunty cane as celebrated as Babe Ruth's bat, Bobby Jones' club, Tilden's tennis racket, Ben Turpin's crossed eyes, Mary Pickford's curls, Helen Wills' poker face and the senior Fairbanks' muscles. Most of these fabulous figures of the twenties have faded from the scene but Chaplin lingers on, metamorphosed by intellectual recognition from an image loved by all to a figure the target of misunderstanding and controversy. For old time's sake I'll call him Charlie.

Some months ago a Hollywood Boulevard theater announced the prospective showing of *Limelight*, whereupon the newspapers of Los Angeles became filled with denunciations against Charlie Chaplin. The objections came from two major sources, the American Legion and a craft union of the film industry which apparently numbered among its officers some vociferous members of the Legion.

The denunciations of Chaplin's morals and politics were intemperate and were coupled with threats of boycott and picket lines. For a brief moment it looked as if a *cause célèbre* were in the making. Then a prominent studio stockholder (Howard Hughes) joined the anti-Chaplin forces, the Immigration Department took a hand, and the motion picture exhibitors folded their tents and silently left the field of battle.

Although the furore took place months ago, and since then Samuel Goldwyn and other prominent film figures have had the courage to come to Chaplin's defense, the exhibitors seem to be still pressured into acquiescence. To the best of my knowledge, *Limelight* has yet to be

exhibited to the general public in the Hollywood area (as of May 26). It is strange that a community calling itself the film capital should be denied the privilege of examining a motion picture of such professional and technical interest. After following the newspaper controversy and reading the laudatory *Time* cover story on Clair Bloom, many Hollywoodites, including the writer, became even more eager to see *Limelight*. When other matters took me to San Francisco I made a special point of catching the picture. It was playing at an "art" movie house, *The Larkin*, which usually specializes in foreign films. In contrast to the threat of picket lines which had kept the picture off Hollywood screens, the only lines around the San Francisco theater were those of people waiting to get in.

What I saw was mostly a one-man show. Written, directed, produced, and acted by Chaplin, it carried the impress of his personality despite a large and excellent cast. I found it sad and funny: sad because Chaplin is a realist who sees life as a struggle full of ridiculous frustration and tragedy; funny because he still retains remnants of comic greatness. This came to light especially in the piano-violin duet scene with Buster Keaton, one of the most hilarious bits of foolery to grace the screen, although marred by craggy cutting.

The picture had a curious nostalgic quality, an air of remembered greatness. A sort of self-conscious imitation crept into some of the best scenes, as though Charlie remembered with longing his youthful self. Then he did what came naturally and it turned out to be art. In *Limelight* he seemed to be groping, experimenting, trying to recapture that fading spirit of youthful genius that pervaded his best films. If Chaplin had allowed others to participate more fully in its making, it might have been better, for nowadays great pictures are the result of the collaboration of many minds. But despite homespun philosophic lines, which verged on the platitudinous, and reluctant editing, which in many scenes left excess film footage after the point had been made, *Limelight*

was far and away superior to the average run of motion pictures.

In recent years there have been several outstanding films on the subject of the great comeback—films which portrayed powerfully and skillfully the various phases of human greed, human treachery, and the ruthlessness that does not hesitate to sacrifice anyone to the achievement of ambition. One of the amazing things about the Chaplin film, which also deals with an attempted comeback, is that it has no villain. Calvero, an aging music hall comedian fallen into obscurity through drink, meets a young dancer also discouraged and hopeless. He saves her from suicide and their devotion to each other effects the rehabilitation of both. No one conspires to betray, no one plots another's downfall for his own advantage. It is a picture with humor and pathos, but no meanness.

After all the hue and cry of the Legion and the Immigration Department about Charlie's morals, it is particularly interesting to note that he has produced in *Limelight* a film which reflects all the gentle virtues. It is completely devoid of violence, sadism and sex in its more blatant manifestations. There is nothing here that could offend the most stringent moralist.

Hollywood, California

RIDGLEY CUMMINGS

COMMENTARY

THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS

CRITICISM of "conventions" and "social institutions" is greatly complicated by the variety of motives which lie behind objections to conformity to custom. In a period like the present, when many of the conventions are losing their power to regulate behavior, the excuse of "freedom" is often used to avoid restraint in any form, and this attitude, being widespread, provides ample justification to those who fear any sort of change to argue that public morals are collapsing from lack of respect for convention. (See "Children . . . and Ourselves.")

Intelligent moral analysis is always difficult, but never more difficult than under conditions of this sort. The highest morality, it seems fairly clear, is that which arises directly from the perception of principles, and is pursued independent of any traditional sanction or restraint. Yet social morality or public morality, regarded in the light of this criterion, is never the highest morality, since it depends so extensively for its enforcement upon social pressure directing ostentatious observance of inherited standards of right and wrong.

In the marriage relation, for example, it is perfectly possible, under present conventions, for two people to unite in "holy matrimony" without either love or a feeling of mutual respect, and to go through life appearing to be exemplary members of society. On the other hand, a couple cherishing the essential ingredients of a genuine partnership are likely to be roundly condemned and even ostracized if they fail to observe the convention of marriage.

This is not to suggest that there is any necessary value in flouting convention, but simply to point out that, in the case of most conventions, "morality" is recognized much more in the form than in the substance of the relationship which the convention is supposed to govern.

Historically, conventions and customs have had their origin in the behavior patterns established by a ruling class or caste. Often these "rules" have embodied great wisdom. Individuals may live by moral principles, but *societies*, at least in the past, have seemed to require a moral *code*, if orderly human relationships are to be preserved, and the young inculcated with a sense of social responsibility. Growth into the free atmosphere of life on moral principle seems to proceed very slowly. It cannot be undertaken all at once, in every department of life, the great majority needing, instead, the help of specific conventions for guidance through areas of decision which, if unmarked by familiar authority, would create intolerable insecurities.

This, at any rate, seems to be the basis for an intelligent defense of convention, and while it presents certain problems, such as the question of who is to decide which are the best or "true" conventions, the alternative of a wholly conventionless society is practically impossible to imagine, unless the society were populated by people of extraordinary understanding and self-discipline.

It sometimes happens, however, that a convention becomes so corrupt that it eventually defeats the very purpose for which it was originally designed. This normally produces a generation of rebels whose hatred of hypocrisy and pretense leads its members to reject the convention entirely, without much appreciation of the values it was supposed to protect; and without, indeed, any broad grasp of the role conventions have played since time immemorial in the structure of society. There is plenty of historical evidence to show that when rebels are successful, and, as in the case of a general revolution, are themselves saddled with responsibility for social order, they commonly institute regulations which are even more rigorous than the old conventions, and which, because they are new, and not ingrained in habit, have to be

applied by police methods and sometimes a species of terrorism.

There is nevertheless another possibility—the possibility that human beings are growing into a deeper perception of moral responsibility and becoming more capable of ruling their own lives according to principle. If this be the case, then conventions themselves may be expected to alter in character, changing into the pattern of an example set by the moral leaders of society, as distinguished from the "Do's," "Don'ts" and rituals of a community dominated by authoritarian religion or authoritarian government.

One step toward this sort of society would be to learn to distinguish carefully between the truly moral elements in a convention and its non-moral or even oppressive aspects. The modern tendency of young couples to rewrite the marriage ceremony according to their own feelings about the obligations assumed is an encouraging illustration of the conscious reform of conventions and institutions by those who live under them. If ever marriage can lose its attraction as a high-road to "respectability," and become nothing more or less than what it ought to be—a serious undertaking of mutual responsibilities and obligations—its power for good in human relationships should be multiplied manyfold.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

AN Indian weekly, *Swatantra*, recently reprinted an essay from this page under the title, "Marriages and Psychological Casualties." We are thus encouraged once again to address ourselves to an often unpopular theme that conventional attitudes toward marriage are productive of a great deal of human misery and misunderstanding.

For almost a generation people have been watching the disintegration of the old social compulsions demanding the permanence of each marriage—an effect which may be regarded as the inevitable consequence of a far too conventional approach to dynamic areas of human interrelationship. Railing against the "loose morality" and the "lack of a sense of social responsibility" in modern divorces will not help matters at all, for in many instances the factors leading to the foundering of a marital relationship are due as much to the superficiality of conventional notions of marriage as to the ineptitude of the marital partners.

One of the most forthright discussions of this subject is supplied by Margaret Mead in her *Male and Female*. Dr. Mead contends that the social opprobrium still connected with divorce, regardless of the circumstances involved, subtly works *toward* divorce, for the reason that those who believe in the conventions usually recognize no alternative save that of continuing a tragically unhappy relationship—and then, when they finally break under the strain, become excessively violent in their demand for separation and in their expressions of alienated feeling. In many circles divorce is still subconsciously, if not consciously, regarded primarily as a disgrace. Dr. Mead writes:

As long as divorce is something disgraceful, for which however no one is punished, something to be hidden and yet something available to any one, we may expect an increasing number of irresponsible marriages. . . .But if young people can say instead, "Knowing every hazard, we will work to keep our

marriage," then the number of irresponsible marriages and irresponsible divorces may begin to fall.

It is crucial that in theory, and in practice, the fact that divorce may come to any marriage—except where the religion of both partners forbids it—must be faced. The stigma of failure and of sin must be removed, the indignities of divorce laws that demand either accusation or collusion must be done away with. Social practices must be developed so that the end of a marriage is announced, soberly, responsibly, just as the beginning of a marriage is published to the world. This means a sort of coming-to-terms with sorrow that Americans have been finding difficult to practice in regard to death as well as divorce.

If we recognize that we live in a society where marriage is terminable, and in some cases should be terminable, we can then give every newly married pair, and every old married pair, a chance to recognize the hazards they face, and to make genuine efforts to survive them.

Such ideas are bound to arouse a certain amount of emotional opposition unless it is realized that Dr. Mead is not arguing for divorce, but rather for the introduction of more enlightened attitudes which will make divorces less likely. You don't threaten a person into his best behavior, even by the generalized threat of social opprobrium, and, as several sociologists have pointed out, a broken home is not necessarily the worst thing that can happen to children. A far more fertile source for neurosis in the child is a situation where marital partners grow hostile, disliking each other intensely, becoming unable to devote any intelligent discussion to an examination of what can be done.

When parents try to conceal their true feelings toward one another in the marriage contracted, no one is fooled, least of all a child. Dr. Mead insists that, as a last resort, there may be a "good divorce," but that to be "good" it must be "chosen by both partners" in such a way as to allow room for mutual respect, and for a mutual sharing of a feeling of obligation to children involved. One of the worst tragedies of divorce, to our mind, is that often both partners are *expected* to carry antagonism toward their late

partner with them to their graves—for the divorce is regarded as a failure for which someone must be blamed. The effort is usually to shut each other entirely out of the remaining course of their lives, so that the abruptness and strain of antagonistic parting work incalculable damage to the young.

For all of these reasons, Dr. Mead affirms that the longest way around may be the shortest way home that, as Elbert Hubbard once maintained, it should be harder for people to get married and easier to be divorced:

A civil marriage that marries any pair who choose each other and can show no legal impediment, and then will not permit them to choose to end that choice, is a travesty of all the values of human dignity. There are at best something like 64,000,000 church members in the United States, and many of these are no longer guaranteed by their faith that they will be able to stay married for life. For the other 76,000,000 a pattern must be found that will make it possible for them to treat divorce when it does occur with dignity, and so make it possible for each married pair to work openly to keep and keep on keeping their marriages safe. There are signs that a vigorous younger generation is doing just that.

For any who find themselves reacting against Dr. Mead's words, we have a short quotation from one of David Riesman's recent articles in the *American Scholar*:

It seems plain to me that men cannot live without values, without preferences and choices, without the vocabulary of motives that we partly learn and partly teach ourselves. Those who bewail the loss of values seem disingenuously to bewail the loss—that is, the replacement—of their own values; and in many cases I believe this applies quite literally: for many of the men whom I find to be most hysterical about the loss of values appear to me to lack confidence in their own ongoing processes of valuation; they do not enjoy making choices, and their effort to escape from freedom is writ larger than life in their overly subjective appraisal of the society as a whole.

Conventional marriage is a curious mixture of genuine idealism and destructive reactionism, according to most psychological authorities of our

time. That a new understanding is beginning to develop, there can be no doubt, and it strikes us as particularly interesting that a publication issued in "conservative" India should find of especial interest our suggestion that "many men and women would be able to enjoy a happier life and provide a better home for their children if they were able to forget entirely the fact that they "married." As we said in MANAS for Dec. 17, 1952, "After all, their relationship is not to an institution called marriage, but to each other and their children. The real obligations are obligations to persons." We recall hearing a family guidance counsellor, a woman of distinguished reputation, enthusing over an experiment wherein a man and a woman had actually become divorced in order to see if they could not then better work out their destinies—safe from the intrusion of the stereotyped patterns of thought and action which usually surrounded such terms as "husband" and "wife." The counsellor remarked that innumerable couples in her own experience might easily have turned disaster to success had they had the percipience and the courage to attempt such a radical innovation, which is to say, simply, that those who deal with stress and strain in marital affairs know beyond any shadow of a doubt that the continuance of love or friendship—or the further constructive development of any relationship—is dependent upon attitudes and not upon social forms or norms. There are times, then, when confused people are unable to separate the two. For those who *are* able, however, we are sure, marriage can be a wonderful "institution."

FRONTIERS

African Impasse

IT would be difficult to find better brief statements of the problem of Africa, today, than those presented by Stuart Cloete and Alan Paton in *Life* for May 4. Inaccuracy, or misrepresentation, as some might suggest, may have crept into the other *Life* articles, but these two, written by recognized authorities, seem all that anyone could desire in the space allotted. Stuart Cloete, for those unfamiliar with his work, is a descendant of one of the original Dutch settlers who landed at Table Bay, South Africa, in 1652. He has farmed in the Transvaal and the Cape, and a few years ago won recognition from Book of the Month Club with his novel, *The Turning Wheels*, a tempestuous story of the great "trek" of the Boer farmers in 1836, northward, to escape the control of any sort of government. Alan Paton, author of *Cry, The Beloved Country*, a tale of modern tragedy in South Africa, is one of the leaders of the new Liberal Party—the first party in South African history to welcome to its membership people of all races.

It is no exaggeration to say that the Africa of today is seething with demands for racial equality, heard from Egypt to the Cape. While outbreaks of aggressive violence have been limited to the Kenya Colony of the British—where the Mau Mau terror has gained the attention of the world—the rest of Africa is sullen and resentful, and perhaps will be angry and defiant tomorrow. For the Africans are warriors who only in the past fifty years have laid down their spears against the white man. These Africans, black and brown, number some 175 million people, ruled over at present by about five million whites. Since the two world wars of this century, the Africans know that the white men quarrel among themselves, and can be defeated.

So far the conflict between whites and blacks has been an unequal one, with all the advantages save that of numbers on the side of the whites.

Parallels may be drawn between the conquest of Africa from the Africans and the conquest of North America—and South America—from the Indians, but there are major differences to be noted. In the first place, so far as the Indians of North America are concerned, the "natives" resisted by trying to preserve their ancestral tribal culture from the inroads of white civilization. They did not want to adapt and learn the white man's ways, for which they had very little respect. Very few American Indians even attempted to become like white men. They have preferred to die out, or to live in relative isolation on reservations, patiently enduring a fate which they saw and see no way to alter.

The outlook of the Africans is not the same. Cloete begins his article by reporting a conversation with an African:

"Master," the native said, "what would you do if they told you to take your trousers off?"

I said I would refuse. I did not ask who *they* were.

"Ja baas," he said. "Yes, boss, but that is what they want us to do now. Our fathers wore no trousers. They wore monkeys' tails and skins about their bellies, and plumes of ostrich in their hair. They had assagais (spears) in their hands and were free. The white man came and he was stronger than we and defeated us in battle. We admired the white man. He said, 'Wear trousers.' He said, 'Wear a shirt and a coat and a hat and be like us.' And we did. He said, 'Before you can walk you must stand, before you can run you must walk.' And we believed him. We believed that one day—not tomorrow, but one day—he would think of us as men. And now, master, he tells us to take our trousers off."

The African, in short, would *like* to learn the white man's ways but he is prevented by racial arrogance and fear on the part of the white minority. The white rulers are willing to allow *some* education to the Africans, because the white industrialists, in South Africa principally the mine-owners, need the Africans for labor. But they want that education to be limited to bare literacy. Yet as Cloete points out, "If a man can read the instructions for servicing a tractor, he can also

read the *Communist Manifesto*. If he can write he can communicate with his fellows and organize."

It is difficult and perhaps hazardous to draw comparisons between cultures. But it seems reasonable to suggest that while the American Indians may have been right in maintaining a consistent contempt for the white man's way of life, the Africans may have been just as right in admiring the white man's ways. While sociologists have taken a special interest in the tribal life of the Indians, finding much to make them say that the Indians knew secrets of social harmony which have been lost or withheld from their white conquerors, we know of no sociologists who have written so admiringly of African tribal existence. Cloete reminds us of the barbarism of Africa:

Only about a hundred years ago T'chaka caused 6,000 of his people to be killed when his beloved mother died, so that the Zulu nation should weep with him. He caused the gall bladders to be ripped from thousands of living calves so that the cattle should bellow in their agony. T'chaka was a good son; he loved his mother. Everyone must cry.

But white fear of the African has caused the latter to be instructed on only the ugliest aspects of white civilization. When the Bantu tribesmen return home from their stint of labor in the mines or in the towns, they have strange impressions to relate:

These men tell tales of injustice, some true, some false, but all believed, and a cold war between the white man and the black man is being fostered by this *agent provocatnr*. He tells the villagers that they have been forced into reserves which cannot supply them with food so that they must come out and go to work for the white man. He tells them that democracy is a lie. That Christianity is a lie. That the white man cannot get along without them. (He does not tell them that they cannot get along without the white man.) He tells them that Africa is for the Africans, that they must drive the white man into the sea from which he came. He shows them such means of sabotage as fires and the poisoning and maiming of stock.

It must be remembered that we are not dealing with American Negroes who think as white men do.

These Africans are the sons and grandsons of primitive warriors. They are pastoralists whose pastures have been taken from them, and their cattle are significant to them in a way few white men understand. Their herds are of psychic significance, and are sacrificed to appease the spirits of their ancestors. These are the things that lie behind such outbreaks as the Mau Mau in Kenya and the troubles in the industrial areas of the Union. Without religion, without hereditary leaders, without possessions or masters, they are developing into a black proletariat which can only be dominated by force. But for how long?

The key to it all lies in satisfying the hope expressed by the native with whom Cloete spoke—the hope that the white men would come to think of the Africans *as men*. Thus it is not a matter of money, although money might help. It is not a matter of anything except the deep determination found in all human beings to stand equal with all others in the ranks of a common humanity. This is what the white men, with some few exceptions, have denied the black men. And this is the one intolerable insult and psychological mutilation which can only end in the dehumanization of both black and white.

What is needed, then, is a change in basic attitude of man toward man. Alan Paton, however, concludes his discussion of the recent elections in South Africa, which brought new strength to Malan's Nationalist government, by saying:

. . . our only hope for an aversion of the tragedy that threatens us all is that sufficient numbers of Africaner Nationalists should come to their senses and see the ideal of white supremacy for the madness that it is.

Is there such a hope? I do not know—but at the moment it does not look as if there is or can be.