

ESCAPE INTO REALITY

ESCAPE from war, save when it really is escape from war, is an indulgence which we of the modern world should never allow ourselves. There are many ways of forgetting, at least for the time, the horrors and insanities of battle, and we are familiar with them all. The most prevalent and time-honored is simply the old "end justifies the means" faith. Like all blind beliefs, this is a form of wishful thinking and a proclamation of irresponsibility. But there are other ingenious techniques of escape which allow us to contemplate without discomfort military events taking place elsewhere, while we play a round of golf; we may not forget entirely that men are dying in agony while democracy is being "saved," but we have so conveniently contrived to adopt a remote perspective that our personal disturbance is relatively slight. Statisticians, politicians and military men are very good at this particular sort of abstraction from reality, which is one reason why we should have a healthy distrust for all three.

We may avoid consciousness of the full depth of tragedy in war by quoting statistics to ourselves; after all, the population of the earth is growing so rapidly that no presently conceivable war, A and H-bombs included, can be expected to reverse the trend; further, automobile accidents daily rival the debit side of the war ledger. Sometimes we may try working from the convenient hypothesis that life without wars would soon grow effete, and that living in a world of threatened death is part of the spice of living—therefore, let us eat and drink more frenetically, even, than usual. The personification of entire alien populations as if they make a single entity of the Enemy helps us, too, in all these attempts at mental escape. And small wonder, since the habit of making preposterous fetishes to represent the

Powers of Evil had much to do with the creation of wars in the first place.

Artists and the writers, however, find it more difficult to play the game of abstraction. They are compelled to isolate the individual human being, and consider him as such, whatever the background. His feelings, thoughts and tragedies are center stage; he is a man much like ourselves, whether he be at the front in our nation's army while we sit at home, whether he be German, Russian or Chinese.

Our social and political views have become so unreal that the poorest the imaginative writer can do is usually "real" in comparison. Thus it is often the writer of what we call "fiction" who brings us closest to reality in time of war, or in retrospect upon a past war. He speaks a language that is actually our own. He writes about *as in war*, and therefore, we think, it is not difficult to justify recurring discussion of current war novels, even if these include many undeserving of the first rank in literature.

The peoples of the world are being trained for war today on a larger scale than at any other time in the history of mankind. Nearly all the "war" literature being produced, "first rank" or not, shows an attempt to penetrate some of the psychological causes and effects of this vast Nemesis. A reading of war novels is especially timely, too, with the most recent chapter of large-scale hostilities not yet even temporarily ended in Korea. Many of these stories are by men who have had combat experience in World War II, and while the attitudes and conclusions expressed in respect to the essential ingredients of human nature vary greatly, these men seem less and less inclined to oversimplify.

A recent volume, *Attack*, now in Bantam Pocket Book circulation, is a terse account of one

segment of the last war in Germany which could well be on the recommended list for prospective conscripts. The author, Perry Wolff, concerns himself with the ideological issues no more than does fighting itself. The collective enemy and one's collective allies become impersonal—irrelevant to the individual soldier's struggle to keep his sanity. The following passage, it seems to us, supplies part of the *feeling* of war, which carries through so many moments of relative inactivity:

Tonight the enemy was quiet, but on other nights he could be heard shuffling, digging, talking his alien words. Daylight dilutes the sounds of war, but in the night the enemy was truculent and jangling. He rattled his mess gear, he fumbled with his equipment, his shovel clattered against a rock. Each night someone thought he saw him or was certain of his position, and a shot would be fired or a grenade would be thrown that harmed nobody. A flare would fly up, explode, hang like a tiny sun battling midnight, and reveal nothing, a humanless land. After the explosion of light would come quiet, worse than noise had been, because enemy turned all his thoughts to enemy.

There would be an instant like this, pinched between bayonets, and three hundred fingers would steal inside the trigger housing, feel the apostrophic metal, and wait for the next identifiable sound. Hush, expectancy, waiting; the deception of quiet; no one was able to understand that the enemy was equally frightened and had turned his finger to the trigger. Finally, a relaxed word, and the moment would collapse to reasonableness and continuity.

Until the enemy threw back a grenade.

Mr. Wolff was himself attached to a combat unit, and *Attack* can be assigned to what his publisher's agent calls "intense personal experience. Perry Wolff's infantry division fought its way through Europe, participating in all campaigns from Aachen and the Battle of the Bulge to VE Day. During this explosive period of the war, Mr. Wolff spent nine months in the front lines as a rifleman."

When a man who has passed through Wolff's experiences tells us that the prolonged experience of battle will produce the partial collapse of every

human personality, some attention needs to be paid to what he says. He says this, and he says it in the language of war, which is that of drama and of tragedy. Mr. Wolff is not a pacifist, but he refuses to make front-line action seem any better than it is. His line troops, almost to a man, reach a point of desperation from which no ideological propaganda can rescue them, and which may be expected to mark their personalities to the end of their days, if they happen to survive. A dialogue between a Staff Sergeant and a new replacement sets the tone:

"Well—after a while you do everything you can, and when it's like it was at Prummern, a shell on the lefta you, a shell on the righta you, dead all around you, you think you're the luckiest bastard in the world because you're still around. Understand?"

"That's me. I'm gonna be lucky."

"I usta think that way, too. But I think right now that if I could just get a nice clean wound right through here"—he grasped his thigh—"something that'd get you out, I'd settle for it, I sure would."

"What if it ain't your thigh?"

"Whaddya mean?" asked the sergeant.

Stoddard spoke up from the ditch. "He means, what would you settle for?"

"I ask you, too: what would you settle for?"

A pause. Then: "I'd give a foot."

"Is that all?"

"That's plenty."

Willis fumbled for a cigarette.

The sergeant spoke again. "If I could find a nice shoo mine when nobody was lookin'—especially when I ain't lookin'—"

Willis blew the smoke away. "You're plumb crazy. It ain't worth no foot. At least to me it ain't."

Another pause.

"I come from Chicago," said the sergeant. "And there's an old one-legged man in the neighborhood, name of Thomas. Anyhow, he lost his foot last war and they gave him a new one, and nobody can tell the difference. He's got a store on the corner of Halsted and Cornelia. Anyway, he's got a wife, a lot of

dough, and he's got a new car every year. I'd give a foot."

"Jesus Christ," said Willis, "you must be nuts. Nothin's worse than being wounded."

"Being dead," said Tighe.

"You're scared," answered Willis. "You musta seen too much of it."

"Yeah."

Willis continued. "Whyncha blow a foot off? That'd get you back."

Stoddard answered, "Some guys in C Company tried it. It was working all right, too. That's what I heard, and so the general sent down an order saying that the next man who tried it would get twenty years at hard labor."

"One soldier picked up his MI and blew his big toe off. He had the court-martial the same day. He got twenty years."

Tighe was silent for a moment. Then: "I'm twenty-one. Twenty years makes me forty-one. Mebbe I'll buy it."

Another novel with implications worth pondering is Louis Falstein's *Face of a Hero*. Falstein was an aerial gunner, owns a Purple Heart, four air medals and nine battle stars. His leading character apparently represents himself—a European-born Jew whose family suffered persecution. His revenge is sweet when the bomber hits German targets and when his own guns strike, yet even here, in the consummation of the sort of righteous hatred all G.I.'s were supposed to have, there is a touch of the ominous. And Falstein's final conclusions are even more so.

The defenders of democracy were supposed to believe that except for that *one* time of the defeat of the Nazis, the peaceful way is the right way. But it is not always easy, in the terms of the adage, to switch horses in midstream. No special finger of blame, certainly, can attach to Falstein for his feelings, and one may even feel able to share his temporary exultation, in battle, *yet his final philosophy on war can hardly be distinguished from Nazi doctrine:*

The dog-fight had lasted twenty minutes, Andy Kyle later told us. To me it had seemed like a second. But into this second a lifetime of grievances had been crowded. My guns had spoken for the pogroms I had lived through, for the pregnant mothers whose bellies I had seen torn open, for the cellar days of my childhood, for the yellow Star of David, for the anguished screams of people, my people, who were at this very moment burning in Hitler's extermination ovens, for Guernica, Coventry and Pearl Harbor. . . .

Here we had matched guns with professional soldiers. We had adopted their language, their tactics, their weapons.

In the one act of firing, I felt as if an end had come to all the years of temporizing. By pulling two triggers, just squeezing them gently, I had felt a completeness.

It was amazing, I thought, how again the simple proved to be the most direct. The most eloquent rebuttal to brutality was brutality in return. Such was the logic of our life, of our civilization, and of the moment. A man could express himself most fully only through killing. Any other way was compromising. The world was not for passive people. They perished. Only they who fought back would remain alive, even if only in the consciousness of those who came after them.

What of compassion and concern for others' welfare *is* able to survive in men who consistently face the prospect of searing death? Mr. Wolff tries to answer the question in *Attack*, and his conclusion is that even among the few who keep any aspiring part of themselves alive, fewer still emerge without moral mutilation. Even friendship quails before war, and the comradeship of two men who share battle together in *Attack is* nearly ruptured. Men *can* be, in other words, more than the creatures of circumstances, even in front-line warfare, yet Wolff finds the odds so heavily against the full resurrection, after battle, of their former selves that the psychological casualty list will be always far longer than we might expect:

The tempo of the artillery fire was crisper. Danger was coming closer, and fear was caught in his throat, yet he tried to think to his depth.

He could not. There was a thin film of stupidity between his mind's eye and a solution. He waited for truth to flash clearly, but it would not. At one

moment he believed it made no difference—his concern with Stoddard was without conditions, he helped the man for no recompense, he was doing something that had to be done and had not to be questioned. It was for no reason he wanted to release his friend. There was no need to balance the episodes and background of their friendship against the emotion he felt when he thought of his friend. It was categorical. It did not need understanding. The friendship existed, no matter the conditions, and there was no need to think why he troubled himself for his friend.

Except that he did think.... He had chosen his friend for his own need. This need had been generated by the abnormality of Army and war.

There had been a time—only the day before—when he had used Stoddard and called him friend because the use fitted his need. The moment in the truck was no longer unconditional and pure; Harris recognized now that he had seized Stoddard only to help himself. And there had been another time—when he had lain on the straw and pitied Stoddard, and called his pity friendship. But now he could confuse nothing else with his friendship.

Although he could not mark the lines or count the minutes, there were places and times in which each man had understood the other and felt as he felt. They breathed together. It was not that they called to each other, or that they called on each other for help. Harris could see Stoddard in himself, and himself in Stoddard. This was their friendship. Yet there were limits to friendship. It could be forgotten in danger and at distance. The Army could attack it, and the war could dissolve it. Nevertheless, it was not fragile. After life itself, it was the next necessity.

Stoddard and Harris made it, saving a spark of that so precious essence which makes man more than beast, but it was a close call and both knew it. And they were exceptional men, consciously fighting against the effects of the war upon themselves. What of the others, the thousands of Tighes and Willises, who were less well equipped?

Here, we think, is the final case against war. Most men simply cannot win against the forces which move to destroy whatever wholeness and balance they have known. This is not a political issue, nor an issue set in conventional pacifist

terms. The terms are set by the nature of man, and the price of warfare is always too high in the mentally and emotionally maimed. Can anything be worth this price when there are even unappetizing alternatives available? Perhaps we shall be able to see alternatives clearly only when we have all learned to stop viewing wars in abstract terms. Until then we can honor and sympathize with the men who are committed to entering this losing psychological struggle—committed, in part, through our own superficialities of thinking.

Letter from **FRANCE**

A COLLEGE TOWN.—Conditions have changed little since my last letter—the French still "look on" at the international scene, apparently powerless to alter it; the great majority have no interest in rearmament, or the right in Indochina, or the budding conflict in Tunisia—and see in all this principally more reason why the problem of living in France itself is not going to get better soon.

The more serious-minded who take time to read the newspapers ask what "those Americans" are going to do next and why they can't act in a more mature and understanding manner if they are going to take upon themselves the destiny of the world. The French are often frank, making plain what many Europeans think of American policy, which to them seems to be aimed toward war rather than peace. One wishes that more Americans could live in Europe, and see life from a slightly different angle. With war memories still relatively fresh, preparations for renewed destruction cannot be engaged in enthusiastically. Moreover, it is generally felt that rearmament is being imposed by the United States, not by the will of the French people. Maybe some Americans make a lot of money during rearmament, but here there are very few who profit; most people merely find their already low buying power further decreased. Only the wealthy French can afford the labor-saving devices which almost every American family has. And with the tremendous rise in prices since rearmament began, the average salary hardly buys everyday essentials.

Present French politics seem directed from Washington, not from Paris, and the ordinary man has a hard time digesting propaganda for "democracy" when the "democracies" now uphold the feudalistic French empire in Africa and Indochina. There is no reason to limit liberty, equality and fraternity to a chosen few. It is unfortunate but true that the defects of American

policy seem much more apparent than the advantages. So it is hardly surprising that the man who is told that communism is *the* big evil still wonders if its drawbacks are (for him) any worse than (or as bad as) "liberation" bombing, or economic and political domination by a non-communist power.

FRENCH CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW LOST KEYS

"THE people on the streets in New York all seemed to be wearing a set mask of facial muscles. Only the children had the open faces of natives." This was the reflection of Esther Warner, author of *New Song in a Strange Land* (Houghton Mifflin, 1948), upon returning to the United States after a stay of several months on a Firestone rubber plantation in Liberia where the work of her husband, a research biologist, had taken him. Mrs. Warner candidly reveals her susceptibility to the magic of the Never-Never Lands of far-off and ancient places. Herself an artist and craftsman, she sought out the human beings behind the masks—the overlays of artificial "adjustment" to the ways of white civilization—worn by the natives of Liberia, and found, like a few other lovers of the creative, the genuine, and the honest in human relationships, an almost untouched treasury of these qualities, with whose keepers she was able to make a fair exchange.

Now and then—we wish it were more frequently—we come across a book which leads its reader through some portal of rare perceptive experience. The reader may forget the genius of such books; too often we do forget them; but there is certainty that their writers can never forget the impact of what they have seen and understood—no more than the heightened awareness of what the ancients called "initiation" can be dulled or lost. Mrs. Warner was able to cross the outer threshold which bars most Westerners from the inner life of the Liberian natives because she spoke to them in the language of a fellow craftsman—or perhaps it was really the language of a fellow human being. She never assumed that being white and "civilized" made her a more important person than the blacks of Liberia.

Reading this book is likely to make you feel that in places like Liberia, beneath the brush and wild growth of the jungle, are hidden deep wells

of mystery—sources of regeneration and psychological inspiration for the Africans. The waters of those wells flow from the pulsating heart of the earth, not the "earth" of terra firma, but the *living* earth, conceived as a kind of "All-Father" of every being and creature. The sense of interdependence with nature is born in the grain of Liberian life, but it is also taught and imprinted upon the consciousness of the people by tribal custom and tradition. Indeed, it is hard to distinguish between the voice of tradition and the more intuitive wisdom of the heart, so closely united are the "culture" and the "nature" of these people.

The importance of tribal ceremonies to the Liberians is illustrated by what was said to Dr. Harley, a medical missionary, by a native boy who had reached the age of initiation into manhood. According to Liberian belief, "Until a boy goes to the Poro, he is without a soul, without even the name he will have later." The ordeal is painful, but Fau, the doctor's steward—a "boy" who was larger than any of the whites present at this scene insisted that he must go back to his people to be reborn as a man:

"Dottar," he repeated, "I am a small boy. I want to go to the Devil bush to become a man."

"But you are a civilized boy, Fau," Doctor said. "We have taken much care to teach you."

"Dottar," he said miserably, "look at my foot."

We all looked at the mound of flesh which composed this enormous extremity.

"All right," Fau went on, "suppose I take a cutlass and cut off the big toe? Can that toe walk alone?" This was a purely rhetorical question and he did not pause for an answer. "I am a *person* only as I am a member of my tribe. I can no longer walk alone than my toe can walk if I cut him off. If I do not get the Devil's toothmarks on my back, I do not belong to my people. I am as dead to them, less than a dead goat. For a goat that is dead is a dead goat. I would be dead to them without ever having been anything."

Fau, with or without permission, went to become a man according to the custom of his people.

Mrs. Warner writes thoughtfully of the relationships of missionaries to the Liberians:

Dr. Harley has never committed the crime of which many missionaries are guilty—asking the natives to burn their gods. He is too much of an anthropologist and too much of an artist. His big collection has come to him voluntarily by people who have no further use for their fetishes. It is not the purpose of this book to comment on mission work but I cannot help postscripting it with the remark that I wish all missionaries were anthropologists and medical doctors. Those who feel that Christianity and Western civilization are synonymous have wreaked unmeasured havoc. When all the old ideas are destroyed before new ones have had time to grow into a way of living, there is chaos and tragedy.

The superficial quality of the quick-change teachings of some groups was shown by a native boy who once came to my house on the plantation. I noticed that his arm had been tattooed with a strange head, quite unlike any native drawings or the usual geometric tattoo.

"It's Jesus," the boy told me.

"But why?" I asked.

"Well, Ma," he said. "I go to one mission school. I sit down there. The missionary tell me I got to get Jesus under my skin. Then I can't do bad thing again. So I get photo of Jesus from one English book and I have him put under my skin."

"And does that stay your bad ways?" I asked.

"No, Ma," he said. "It don't. And it hurt like hell!"

New Song in a Strange Land is really a work of psychological sculpturing, in which the dignity of the Africans is gradually revealed by deft strokes of Mrs. Warner's art. First she peels away the coarse bark of external subservience to the coastal whites. She finds that "civilized ways," to the native, means "stealing." The Africans respect the whites for their peculiar attainments, but are quick to recognize personal weakness and inadequacy in representatives of the invading culture. Except for technology, it seems, we are all "natives" of a sort, and the Liberians are in many ways a better sort of natives than the whites.

A beautiful Liberian woman asked Mrs. Warner, "You hear the wind?"

"Yes, Sahda, I hear."

"It is my radio!"

The beauty of Mrs. Warner's book—beauty of prose, beauty of understanding—is communicated by the rest of this passage:

Sahda felt a cadence of the elements running through her being, with tones of depth and height which were beyond the range of my sensibility. I could not hear all that Sahda heard nor feel all that she felt because I had not earned that right by living closely with the weather. Since she was a child tied on her mother's back, the wind had been her song, the night had been her inner silence and loneliness, the storms wresting the jungle her unleashed strivings. For this, Sahda, I would gladly barter my radio. You say I come from a land of "boxes that talk," but I am humble before you whose soul is not choked with static. . . .

We end our report on this book reluctantly. Some nostalgia of soul holds its pages open, some yearning to understand which is more than curiosity, more than wonderment at the strange yet inwardly familiar simplicity of these people. They seem to have held sacred some of the keys to life that we have lost. We want those keys, yet cannot have them by imitation. A barrier of sophistication and world-weariness stands between us and such islands of natural life. But at least, we can feel a Promethean frustration in the constraints of our bifocal vision, through which we see so much, making us realize, tragically, that we feel and know too little.

COMMENTARY

THE PERFECT GOVERNMENT

IT seems likely that the quest for the best possible system of government has at least one thing in common with the search for happiness—neither goal can be reached without abandoning all familiar modes of approach. The men who are complete, in other words, are never the men who strive after happiness; they are after something else, and the happiness comes as an unexpected overtone which graces their lives because of how they are spent.

Good government, by a parity of reasoning, is government which attaches very little importance to itself—which is the functional result of men doing together what they cannot do singly or in small groups. This, we think, would be a system which would return the power of moral decision to individuals, where it belongs.

After all, we claim that "democracy" is the best form of government because, in theory, at least, democracy is by definition the respecter of individual choice. Quite conceivably, a tired and inefficient monarchy with very little centralized power would afford its people more actual liberty than a bustling "democracy" with a very high tax rate and a propensity for getting into international wars.

It is true that the problems of the modern world seem to make this sort of government—a government without much power—a completely "unrealistic" ideal. We live in a period of international crisis, apparently *continuing* crisis, but since it is a crisis between nations, instead of between individuals—between one great mass of depersonalized individuals and another great mass—the artificial sense of participation which individuals gain through propaganda may not last as long as the crisis itself. And when their sense of participation dies, their protestations that they *are* a "free people" may also die away, to be replaced by insistent demands for the reclamation of individual decision.

We need to realize that such a demand can never be satisfied by a new design for government. This realization was surely an essential part of the genius of the Founding Fathers of the United States, who knew that governments never create freedom: *men* create freedom, and protect their freedom by limiting the power of government. The political dilemma of the present lies in the fact that we now think that we must increase the power of government to preserve our freedom. The men who are able to find a way out of this dilemma will probably be the Founding Fathers of tomorrow's revolution. Ordinarily, we think of "revolutions" as being against some tyrant or oppressing class, but the *next* revolution, to be worth anything, will have to be psychological rather than political. What is needed is a new vision of the ends of human life, to which, in time, political relationships will adjust themselves.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

THE termination of Robert Hutchins' career in educational administration was an unhappy occasion for many who found themselves perennially stimulated by this unorthodox gentleman's embarrassing questions concerning the orthodox University viewpoint. Though now serving as an Associate Director of the Ford Foundation, Dr. Hutchins nevertheless finds occasions for continuing his Socratic probing in the educational field, and since these may now be expected to be fewer and farther between, a recent Hutchins article in the *Progressive* seems especially worthy of note.

Dr. Hutchins has never written about higher education as if it were an end or aim in itself, whatever his "ideological opponents" may claim. His obvious intent, similar to our own, has been to demonstrate that certain fundamental issues are now crucial in our social, political, educational, and family lives, and that the most rewarding investigation of these issues necessitates a consideration of the vital relationships of trends in all four fields. Serving as a champion of academic freedom, Dr. Hutchins is no less concerned with the ominous attack on free thought in political life, in the community, and in the family. Yet, he says, the standardization-of-thought trend is often a direct result of our educational procedures:

We must admit that our education has been very little of that philosophical, historical kind which would enable us to understand what is going on in the world and to exercise an informed, critical judgment upon it. In the absence of education and experience our first reaction in the face of a totally new situation is fear, fear of the unknown and uncomprehended.

In addition to the vain and irrelevant effort to build up overwhelming military power, we have begun an unprecedented attempt to ensure the conformity of our citizens. That is, of course, wholly inappropriate to the struggle in which we are engaged, for the liberty inscribed on our hearts has traditionally included freedom of thought, speech, and association, and now, if ever, is the time to show

the world the power and reality of our devotion to these principles.

Instead of encouraging independent thought and criticism as the best demonstration of the vitality of the truths inscribed on our hearts, we are busily engaged in suppressing them. If it is impossible for a man to be a professor unless he holds views that the majority will approve, then the American universities will become little more than detention homes for the young, with technical schools attached.

Back in 1946, at the University of Chicago, Dr. Hutchins delivered one of his most radical addresses—"The Administrator." The temptation to conformity, which Hutchins holds the University administrator must resist, is the same temptation which confuses so many public figures at times of national crisis. "The Administrator" was not designed to win friends and influence people in university circles, but at least Hutchins was following his own prescription—he has never believed that educational or political progress can be achieved without a large amount of daring and a certain amount of obstreperousness:

The academic administrators of America remind one of the French revolutionist who said, "The mob is in the street. I must find out where they are going, for I am their leader."

Almost every American university is managed in terms of the social pressures prevailing at a given time. An administrator who administers is bound to cause trouble.

He must try to induce those to whose care the curriculum has been committed to face the problems it raises as persistently, as seriously, and as impartially as possible. In this connection, too, the administrator must be a troublemaker; for every change in education is a change in the habits of some members of the faculty. Nevertheless, the administrator must insist on the participation of the faculty in the constant reconsideration of the means which it is using to attain the end of the university; for his duty is not merely to decide upon the classes of cases committed to his care, but also to see to it that the other members of the community do not become office-holders in relation to the categories committed to theirs.

An air of martyrdom is unbecoming to the administrator. If he fails, he should resign. He

should not become an office-holder. The administrator who is afraid of anybody or anything is lost.

A concluding thought of "The Administrator" focusses attention upon processes of common moral deterioration, as applicable to both politics and education. And it may be that the same process of comfortable decline in originality can often be observed in American family life:

The end of an institution gets lost as it matures. The enterprise goes on because it started and runs for the sake of running. If any other consideration than that of self-perpetuation is allowed to enter, it is usually that of prestige. Let us be famous for the sake of fame. We see a similar phenomenon in the case of states which have lost any conception of the end of political organization. They say, let us be powerful for the sake of power. The fact that the purpose of universities is rapidly lost has led to the suggestion that they should be burned down every twenty-five years, or that the original faculty should consist of men forty years old, that no additions should be made, and that they should all retire at the age of sixty-five. These proposals seem drastic, but they are little more so than the facts demand. It is imperative to force the periodic reconsideration of the purpose of an institution.

We doubt if Dr. Hutchins has ever actually been an arsonist. Unlike the fictional hero of *The Fountainhead*, moreover, he has never been known to blow up a University, and even less would he be inclined to put the torch to a good proportion of American homes. But he clearly considers many forms of habitual and traditional thinking in need of purification by flame. It is certainly possible for the home and family to become "ends in themselves" and to lose a sense of direction, even as they *appear* to mature.

We wonder if each parent cannot find some provocative suggestions in Hutchins' comments upon the obligations of good administration? The parent, actually, is an administrator, but all too often is the sort of administrator who never admits to the possibility of being "in trouble" himself, while he will often wax indignant over the troubles of native non-conformity into which his children are precipitated. But Hutchins tells us that the

administrator must *himself* be in perpetual difficulty, and that he is much more useful to the body of individuals he seeks to instruct if he constitutes himself a radical rather than a reactionary force.

Whether one is a University president, a political office-holder or a parent, in any case, the same opportunities and the same temptations are present. We are sure that we need more parents who are constantly "in trouble" about something important, with their schools, their communities, or their families. All pioneering thought brings about difficulties, reproaches, condemnations, or, at the very least, recalcitrance. Out of overcoming difficulties, history teaches us, grows progress.

FRONTIERS

The Trap of "Progress"

THE idea that Western civilization, bag and baggage, has climbed aboard a wayward bus, headed for both known and unknown disaster, has been gaining currency for the past generation or so, but only recently have these ominous looks at the future found a place in authentic scientific literature. Just why thinkers who commonly avoid the slightest breath of extravagance should now feel free to exude gloom from every pore, we cannot say, unless it be that the outlook is gloomy, or that they have become infected by the collective anxieties of ordinary folk.

The fact of scientific gloominess is undeniable. In the *Scientific Monthly* for last December, a reviewer of the dark predictions of Roderick Seidenberg's *Posthistoric Man* (Chapel Hill, 1950) is held almost spellbound "by the remorseless logic of clear and pregnant statement, by the epic development of his [Seidenberg's] conception to its stark conclusion." The reviewer, Bentley Glass, objects to this version of the "decline of the West" on several grounds, but is unable to restrain his enthusiasm for Seidenberg's brilliant argument that modern man is moving toward a static period in the life-cycle of the human race a time when an eventless monotone will overtake mankind, similar, as the title intimates, to the supposed entropy of pre-historic human life.

Seidenberg contends that the very process of civilization will eventually choke off all individual distinction, all originality. "Social" measures will assert the rule of statistical welfare over the eccentric deviations of individuals. The private individual may expect to be "organized" into nonentity. In primitive times, social controls were unconsciously embodied in "accepted rituals and dogmas." Today the functions of these controls are not abandoned, but are consciously incorporated "into the rationalized and purposive institutions of civilized society." The future of the

human race, according to Seidenberg, is foreseen as a day

when the organization of society will have proceeded to its final crystallization, when, "in a period devoid of change, we may truly say that man will enter upon a posthistoric age in which, perhaps, he will remain encased in an endless routine and sequence of events, not unlike that of the ants, the bees, the termites. . . . Man may likewise find himself entombed in a perpetual round of perfectly adjusted responses. . . . Man will hasten along his predestined way under the illusion of attaining his freedom on even higher levels of existence, while actually sealing his fate by all the devices his dominant intelligence can command. . . . In this mechanization of the individual we cannot fail to see the eclipse of the spiritual structure of man."

One may easily recognize these tendencies in modern society, but has not the author, like Tolstoy during his period of helpless self-disgust, identified his own—our own—*malaise* with the intrinsic nature of things? Is this doleful doom written in *all* the stars, or only in those particular stars we have chosen to navigate by?

The institutions of the West, including its religious institutions, have evolved to their present power and influence without much genuine consideration to the "spiritual structure of man." What, then, is so remarkable about the fact that, as Seidenberg notes—

If society once drew strength and sustenance from the inner sources of being through the revelations of saint and mystic, it seems destined to abandon this well of inspiration in focusing wholly upon the external manipulation of its affairs and the purely mundane solution of its problems.

The acceptance of this state of affairs seems to imply a prior acceptance of the Comtian analysis of human history, under which the final stage of human development is to be marked by a complete rejection of all metaphysical doctrines or theories of superphysical causation. First we outgrow theology; then we eschew metaphysics; and now in the golden age of scientific certainty, we abandon all but the positivist outlook, manfully suppressing as vagrant fantasies all past, present, and even future visions of non-material reality.

And if, in the grip of the Garrison State, we come to despise ourselves and our mean motives, and by reaction to despise and fear other men, until we create the monstrous armament of the present-day war machines to suck away our vitality, our freedom, and even our hope of freedom—why, all this, we are forced to admit, is part of the "natural order of things." Our life-cycle is spent, and too much learning hath made us mad!

Inasmuch as Prof. Seidenberg reached his "stark conclusion" from biological forms of analysis, it should be permissible to draw on other analogies in examining his thesis. For example, in the development of modern agriculture, a wide variety of poisonous insecticides have come into use, and may be regarded as a part of the "organization" of our food-producing resources. These "modern" methods have doubtless been regarded as typical of the march of progress, yet now we learn from a House Committee hearing that residues of these poisons have to be eliminated from such universally used products as baby foods and peanut butter. L. G. Cox, a technical representative of the Beech-Nut Packing Company told the Committee: "Fragmentary data indicate that a newborn baby may already have a slight amount of DDT stored in his tissues, . . . and may be receiving additional amounts in his mother's milk." A *New York Times* report (Feb. 1) gives the testimony of Mr. Cox on the spoiling of produce by DDT and other poisons:

In 1948, he said, the company had to reject squash from Florida, peaches from Pennsylvania and celery from Florida; in 1950 it incurred a financial loss of \$15,000 by having to reject contracted vegetables exposed to BHC, and to buy others in the open market at much higher prices; and in 1951 it was "forced to reject contracted apples in New York because of BHC contamination."

A parallel instance of the kick-back of "progress" emerged in a conference on antibiotics sponsored by the New York Academy of Sciences. Physicians reported that the use of antibiotics such as penicillin, streptomycin, chloromycetin, aureomycin, and terramycin for the

control of infections "may seriously interfere with the normal bodily process of immunity development." The antibiotics do not destroy, but only check the activity and spread of infectious germs. The antibiotics also "check" the normal development of antibodies to overcome the disease, so that the patient may suffer a relapse when the administration of antibiotics is stopped.

Because of these unforeseen effects of progress, it seems that we now must organize further measures of control. Thus a proposed amendment to the Food and Drug Law would require food processors to gain permission from the Food and Drug Administration to include new "chemicals" in their products. Cancer researchers, meanwhile, are asking for a similar provision to apply to both food and cosmetics. Dr. W. C. Hueper of the National Institutes of Health told the House Committee that certain dyes seem to be cancer-producing—even dyes now certified by the Food and Drug Administration. Tobacco smoking, he said, is among "recognized and suspect sources" of cancer of the lip, tongue, oral cavity, larynx and lung. He also reported "that 250 cases of bladder cancer in dye workers had been definitely traced to a dye called beta naphtholamine and that more than a thousand cases were on record in all countries." (*New York Times*, Jan. 30.) Even the carbon black in eyebrow pencil, when heavily used, may be dangerous.

There is something more than a little frightening about all this—for these may be only a few of the things wrong with the organization of modern progress, and who knows what horrors are still concealed? One hesitates to draw the next breath. We could, of course, take up organic gardening to eliminate the hazards of insecticides. This would wipe out one large segment of "organization" and its special ills. Eating food grown on naturally restored soil might make us healthy enough to get along without antibiotics, perhaps with fewer doctors, with the possible result of weakening even the organization of the

A.M.A.! Cosmetics and tobacco and food chemicals might be harder to get along without, and think of the vice presidents in charge of sales who would join the unemployed, the advertising talents that would waste on the vine, and the vast factories that would have to start making something useful! These organizational reforms might go far to reverse the trend prophesied by Prof. Seidenberg; then, if we wanted to complete the job, we could abolish war, that greatest of all organizational structures. Peace, of course, would be a shattering blow to modern industry, and perhaps we are not really ready for so far-reaching a disaster. Only a few pacifists are ready for that, and they, poor visionaries, do not understand the logic of modern progress. They are foolish enough to want to resist the compulsions which underwrite Prof. Seidenberg's science of human decline.

However, just to show that there are wheels within wheels—that, so far as technology is concerned, some radically new approach to practical problems may be just around the corner—we may cite from the *Organic Farmer* for January the report of an "electronic" bug-chaser which is now being used by Arizona cotton growers.

This device, which seems straight out of the Arabian Nights, is able to send out "vibrations" which drive away insect pests. An aerial photograph is taken of the land to be de-bugged; the exact area marked off on the print, cut out, and placed in the machine, along with a eucalyptus leaf which cotton bugs uniformly despise. When the machine is turned on, the bugs "see" eucalyptus instead of cotton, and take off for greener pastures. The theory is that each species of plant has its own magnetic rays by which the foraging bugs locate their nourishment. The machine, it is claimed, changes or camouflages these rays. Arizona farmers at first laughed at the gadget, but watched a 20-minute demonstration with growing amazement. A large operator in Marana, Arizona, said: "We investigated the

machine and came to the conclusion that it works with 100 per cent success."

Sympathy for the poor but honest cotton bug prompts a wondering about the next generation of cotton plants: could they, conceivably, mutate into eucalyptus hybrids as a result of these intruding and deceptive rays?