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THE LONG ADOLESCENCE

IT is easy to be critical and disdainfully "superior" in attitude toward what we call, somewhat sententiously, "Western civilization," and at the same time difficult to avoid being tremendously impressed by its accomplishments. The Americans, for example, are so very good at so many things. Pick up any mass-circulation magazine published in the United States—*Life*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, or the *Reader's Digest*—and you have cause for wondering amazement on several counts. First, there is the great variety of undertakings in which the West exhibits extraordinary know-how and general, all-around competence. In a recent *Post* (the issue with pictureless cover, in which Mr. Whittaker Chambers tells you about the operation on his conscience), an article devoted to glaciers, to the anomalous behavior of one glacier in particular, discourses at length on the fabulous resourcefulness of a small group of "glaciologists." They are determined to find out why this Alaskan icefield keeps getting bigger and bigger, while all the others in the geological neighborhood are getting smaller and smaller. You have the feeling that they *will* find out—what with Navy planes, generous subsidies from a geographical society, and a do-or-die spirit which laughs at danger—and that the cold facts of glacial ebb and flow will be properly recorded in all the best encyclopedias.

Glaciers, of course, are but one of many things which the West is getting to know more about than any previous civilization. Progress in technology has enabled us to put together practically any gadget that can be imagined, and while we can't put *people* together, yet, we are experts at taking them apart in very large numbers. We are the yogis of the micrometer and the slide rule, the Merlins of manufacturing and processing. Every day, some new triumph of engineering genius appears on the market. We are always adding to our wealth of practical solutions to mechanical and chemical problems—in fact, we have an additive civilization, and we count that year wasted when a host of "new models" does not render the products of yesterday's inventiveness badly dated if not actually obsolete.

Naturally enough, if our civilization is additive, the individuals who make it up tend to be acquisitive. The business of life is to "acquire"—if not wealth, then information. The idea of growth or "progress" is a concept without natural limit. It has no cyclic modification, no internal rhythm or dramatic unity. Even the concept of "wisdom," as popularly held, refers to little more than a large collection of anecdotes illustrating the sagacity of unusual people. That monument of modern magazine publishing, the *Reader's Digest*, each month mines the endless versatility of Western ingenuity; its contents are always fresh, always sprightly, and nearly always interesting to most of us. Read and be edified, entertained, and often delighted, the *Digest* editors say to us, in effect. You'd never know, turning the pages, which exhale an air of supreme competence and confidence, that Western civilization has any real problems at all. It hasn't, of course, at the level of the *Reader's Digest*, for the *Digest* is about the things we are good at, which is probably the reason why this magazine has some ten million subscribers.

One wonders, sometimes, if the West, and Americans in particular, will ever grow up beyond the age of fascination-with-mechanics and happy-playtime-with-things-that-have-wheels. On these subjects, we have a vast and absorbing practicality, and great subtlety in even the psychological areas connected with practical affairs, but let anyone step over the line—into, say, the field of serious thinking about the nature of things—and almost inevitably he waxes pompous, sentimental, or downright foolish. The practical man, in other words, seems to have about all the genius which this age can afford. The intelligent, practical man knows his limitations. In the field of publishing, this is illustrated by the late Harold Ross, founder and for many years the editor of that masterpiece of American journalism—of journalism anywhere—the *New Yorker*. A writer

who was long associated with Ross recently expressed the opinion that he "made a great success in American journalism because he set definite limits to his scope and exhibited both integrity and ingenuity within those limits." Another note on Ross's policy is interesting: "One of the limitations he set for himself and his enterprise was that it would never even pretend to have the whole answer for any problem." Readers of the *New Yorker* can easily recognize this in retrospect. Simply because *New Yorker* writers have never tried to bite off more than they could chew, never resort to ponderous phrases, but limit themselves to insight into human foibles and follies, honest illumination is often the result. Ross was determined not to let the magazine get "serious," which meant, in practice, that this publishing venture has frequently been more genuinely informing than the heavy intellectuality of writers who assume larger obligations.

The United States is literally full of people with Ross's kind of common sense, if not his humour—people who know their jobs with almost sage-like perfection and who understand the nuances of human relationships within the scope of their practical undertakings. All they ask is some intelligible set of blueprints, or comparable set of instructions—just provide these, and they are ready to go to work. Such people are instinctively suspicious of the "professor" type, of moralists and reformers, and of politicians. They are suspicious of anyone who attempts to deal with the "wild" incommensurables. The *New Yorker,* for instance, deals with tame incommensurables, for humor simply brings home to us in unfamiliar guises the things we really know but hadn't thought of in the connection which the humorist calls to our attention. The "wild" incommensurables have to do with wider questions—the kind of questions that technology shuns because of their unsettling possibilities.

Unlike Monsieur Jourdain, in Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme,* who suddenly discovers that he has been talking prose for twenty years without knowing it, the man who investigates the wild incommensurables may discover that he has been talking mostly trivia and nonsense for twenty years, while thinking he was saying things of great importance—which would be a painful rather than a whimsical realization. Suppose, for example, that our world and culture were to discard the additive theory of progress and to adopt another view. Suppose we were to develop from the myths and hero legends of the past a kind of master-pattern or great design for individual existence. It might run something like this: That the life of man ought to be aimed at some great fulfillment. Siegfried must slay the dragon and find the treasure, Ulysses must find his way home. Perseus has need to capture the Gorgon's head, Rama must regain his bride, and Arjuna win back his kingdom. Jason and his Argonauts must seek the Golden Fleece, Hiawatha must vanquish Mondamin.

Or—to change the figure—does anyone think that Oedipus and Orestes alone were guilty of unnatural crimes? That only in ancient tragedy are heroes haunted by the Furies? We live in a world where the Furies lurk on every battlefield and in every council hall, where men kill the things they love, if not deliberately, out of "necessity," then unknowingly, by starving them to death. Worse only than an unnatural sense of innocence is an unnatural sense of guilt, and modern man seems to suffer from both afflictions. *What are our crimes?* They are not, it seems certain, what we think they are, for the catharsis of self-understanding and self-reconciliation has never been so remote from human psychological experience.

We lack both the mien and the mask of true maturity. Men walk on the street as though entered in some unending competition. They seek no peace with themselves, no sense of completion in the work that lies before them. Like creatures obsessed by some insatiable cosmic current of compulsion, they pursue the world as it turns. The third act comes, the curtain rises, and the climactic moment of their lives passes behind the backdrop like a ghost, never appearing on the stage. The players have had no instructions, there is no *play,* but only the drive from birth to senility—

> Getting and spending, we lay waste our Powers:
> Little we see in Nature that is ours;
> We have given our hearts away,
> A sordid boon! . . .

For this, for everything,
We are out of tune. . . .

Isn't it possible for a human being to pierce the meaning of his life with the blade of his mind? This welter of spurious satisfactions we hear preached about us, what have they to do with the feeling that one's life is good—a feeling that depends upon no one but himself? There are scales which can fall from the eyes, a vigor of intelligence and sensitive, even tender, awareness that can give the tissues of the face an ageless dignity and beauty. But these transformations come from the spirit, they are alchemical, and grow from a special sort of self-consciousness in human life.

The alchemists, perhaps, knew more than we imagine. At least, they were concerned with a Great Work, and if some of them pursued the mirage of transmutation, how much more unfortunate, we, for whom it is no longer a mirage! What a sad, unsatisfactory thing it is to have the gold—to have practically anything we want, to be a rich man's son, and to find that a diet of unearned increment produces little more than nervous indigestion. A man should never get gold until he has learned how little is its value. While he is looking for it, his sanity is preserved by the activity of the search, but when he gets it, he must either become a philosopher or accept the doom of Midas.

In this life, we are given some time, some raw material, some energies, and the intelligence which we are. What is this stuff we are to work with, and in what shape should it be wrought? No man can conquer the universe around him, it is too big, and it is not there for him to conquer. Why should we not say that there is a destiny for each one of us—a course, a journey, or a pilgrimage—and that most of the way is traversed simply by recognizing how the unchanging elements of the life of man appear in his particular drama? He can avoid Scylla and Charybdis, it is true, but only by refusing to set sail. There are all sorts of ways by which men can conceal their destiny from themselves, but the price they pay is the price invariably exacted for cowardice and self-deception. The savor of life turns into the insipid taste of vegetation, and to this is added a sickness of the soul. Languor and violence, aggression and servility, frustration and abandonment, and all the psychiatrist's bill of particulars are in the indictment of our acquisitive civilization.

Unfortunately, the idea of "destiny" is commonly thought to mean some script written and rehearsed in heaven, to be played out on earth by men acting like some kind of mechanical toys. There is a script, we think, but one with author unknown, and stage directions which must be decoded from the scene of the play itself. The plot revolves around the eternal dialogue of man talking to himself, and only as he questions and answers himself does the play move. It is the quest for freedom, for expression, for peace, for worthy action, for new horizons—for all the things a man strives after when he is truly man. Every progression in this spiralling drama involves both disillusionment and new inspiration—a rock which crumbles underfoot, and a mist which hardens into a new road ahead. There is pain more cruel than the surgeon's knife, and contentment which soothes like an Indian summer's reprieve before the winter's storms. What we need to know is that all these are but scenes, "stages," in the play of life. There is no last, unbearable agony, no absolute, unsullied bliss. There is only the endless sequence of events and the usufruct we gather as actor and spectator.

"Life" is not stately. Only man is stately; or only man imparts a stateliness to life. If we want a life where greatness presides, we shall have to discover where in our destiny are the portals leading to great deeds. So far, we have played out only the prologue of the drama. Fascinated by the wonders of a long adolescence, we delay and put off with excuses the entrance on the stage. If we wait too long, we may one day find the footlights out, the curtain down, the show gone on the road with other players in our parts.

Letter from **INDIA**

SURAT.—India has passed through perhaps the greatest election of the world. Over 176,600,000 people had the right to vote for the first time in history. The enthusiasm with which people responded to this call was wholly unexpected. Over 45 per cent voted. In some parts polling was over go per cent of eligible voters, and in some most interior villages it was 100 per cent. This is really amazing when we consider that India has only 15 per cent literacy. But this election gives definite proof that illiteracy does not mean either lack of intelligence or total ignorance of current affairs. Even today we find villagers who cannot read and write but who can easily discuss the most complicated problems of religion, philosophy, economics and politics.

The peaceful manner in which the whole election was carried out is also astonishing. There was not a single major incident of violence in the whole country and even small-scale election clashes were very rare. One can give only two reasons for this. The first and more important reason is Gandhi's training through the numerous nonviolent struggles against the British government. Every part of India has gone through that training either directly or indirectly. The second reason is the excellent planning and efficiency of the election commissioner and his staff.

Some of the results indicate the general tendencies of the vast masses of India. The most outstanding fact is that communalism (sectarian religious politics) is proved to have no place in India. All the communal organisations combined could capture only 6 seats in the House of People, out of 390 results announced so far. This is nothing when compared to the 277 seats captured by the anti-communal organisation: Congress. Gandhi sealed the fate of communalism in India by his martyrdom. Nehru lashed communalism in every one of his election speeches. India is religious but not communal.

Nehru's victory over his immediate rival was both a personal triumph as well as a triumph of science over superstition. Nehru's rival tried to exploit the religious faith of the masses of Allahabad, who are well known for their orthodoxy, by inducing them not to vote for Nehru, who is in favour of the Hindu Code Bill, which gives more rights to women than they have today. On the other hand, a majority of Nehru's canvassers were women.

The results do suggest that there is a slight tendency towards leftist ideals. The Congress is likely to lose its hold if it does not look to the hardships of the poor, and the leftists are likely to be stronger in the future, but only if they engage themselves in concrete constructive work.

REVIEW
PRISONERS ARE PEOPLE

LAST week's lead discussion noted significant changes of attitude towards racial problems, including the fact that popular novels dealing with racial themes now express a progressive, never a reactionary, outlook. This, we take it, has to do with further maturation of the mind and the social conscience of our times.

The same generalization may be applied to the recent literature of penology and prison life. Revaluation of the psychology of punishment, deprecation of the death penalty, and recognition of the tenuous moral distinctions between most of the men behind bars and most of the men in front of them are common observations. Warden Clinton Duffy's *My Home is San Quentin* and psychologist Donald Wilson's *My Six Convicts* are cases in point, to which now may be added Kenyon Scudder's *Prisoners are People* (Doubleday, $3.00).

Warden Scudder of the "minimum security" penal institution at Chino, California, is one of an admirable group of prison reformists who are able to see that the causes of war, the causes of violent racial frictions and the causes of crime are nearly identical. No racial segregation policy, sub rosa or otherwise, has ever been in effect at Chino. Scudder's examination of the personalities of individual inmates of Chino is interwoven with appraisal of successful methods of rehabilitation. He thus supplies the ingredients of a new educational program, and, more important, the ingredients of a new and improved view of human nature. Scudder, by the way, is the sort of "psychologist" no one can argue with, for he deals with facts and situations, and his conclusions are derived from incontestable experience. His philosophy is easy for anyone to express, but few can implement it with rigorous application such as he supplies.

The introductory sentence of *Prisoners are People* gives the keynote of his outlook:

> This is a true account of a prison without walls, without guns, without guards, where the dignity of the individual is recognized and each is treated as a person.

The claim *could* be pretentious, yet it is wholly justified by the subsequent account of the Chino administration. Scudder did more than the "best he could" with the reactionary proposals urged upon him by the prison board and by political pressure—he refused compromise at the risk of his career.

The story of Chino "policy" is especially intriguing, for while Chino had been created by the Legislature as a "minimum security" institution, construction of elaborate guard towers and the usual high fence was well along when Scudder arrived on the scene. Fortunately, this building program had been temporarily halted for lack of WPA funds, and at the first meeting of the Prison Board, as a matter of routine, immediate completion was proposed. Scudder opposed this move, and in the process introduced an extremely revolutionary idea. In a private meeting with potentially receptive members of the Board he outlined his reasons why Chino would fail in its objective if it were provided with *any closed walls at all!* The Warden's remarks on that occasion involve far-reaching psychological and moral issues:

> We have money to build an inner fence and gun towers around the buildings at Chino. I think we should not do it. We will have some escapes, of course. We will even if we build the wall. Suppose we lose ten per cent of the men. We will still have the other ninety. This will take courage on your part, because with escapes we will face severe criticism from law-enforcement groups who are more interested in secure and escape-proof incarceration than in the adjustment of the men. Without a wall, and without the use of guns and brutality, every man coming to Chino will have to make his own decision whether to escape or not to escape. If security facilities are severe, and if guards are so omnipresent that escape is not possible, then the important responsibility of deciding whether or not to escape will be eliminated. No man will have to make this decision, and therefore his moral responsibility will not be strengthened. If he is constantly faced with the

possibility of escape and continually rejects this opportunity, then he has taken an important moral step, and has accepted a responsibility. In so doing he admits to himself his desire to become a social individual.

Scudder's faith later came to be embodied in a paragraph of policy penned by the late George A. Briggs, member of the Prison Board:

> The policy of the prison board is based on the concept that there can be no regeneration except in freedom. Rehabilitation must come from within the individual and not through coercion. With this principle in mind, the rehabilitative program of the prison system of California contemplates not only important education and vocational factors, but also, by and through classification and segregation, a gradual release from custodial restraint and a corresponding increase in personal responsibility and freedom of choice.

In the full development of this point we have, perhaps, the greatest single contribution of *Prisoners are People.* In the author's summation:

> The training and treatment men receive in prison will determine to a large degree their success or failure on parole. Individuals change slowly; therefore the process of adjustment must be gradual. It's easy to be good with a gun in your back when you are told what to do and when to do it. It's quite another thing to have to accept responsibility while in prison, the same kind of responsibility you are expected to assume in a free world outside the walls.
>
> Since society derives no benefit from punishing a man for punishment's sake, many men should not be sent to prison until every other available resource has been exhausted. Our courts could safely double the number now serving a sentence in the community under supervision and thus capitalize on the normal reaction of contrition which follows almost every conviction. In this way many more promising first offenders would be able to make restitution for the wrong they have done, at the same time support their families and avoid the lasting stigma of a prison term. A prison experience is too apt to bring out the worst in a man and leave its permanent scar upon his personality.

Mr. Scudder is on proved ground, here. According to a report by Austin MacCormick (published in the *Proceedings of the American Prison Congress,* 1947):

> The hard fact is, so small a percentage of the total number of offenders are caught and convicted in America today, that legal punishment cannot be considered a major factor in the control of crime.

The Scudder policy has worked. The fame of Chino has spread far and wide, and will do much to hasten alterations in penal procedures throughout the world. The story of the Chino men during the war years is quite dramatic, reaching a climax in conscientious and inspired service during the period of national emergency in fighting forest fires, servicing supply trains, etc. The prisoners were commended by various commanding officers for their work, and received fine letters of praise from the State Forestry Division of Fire Suppression for deeds of heroism and self-sacrifice. On one occasion, after some of the Chino men had effected a plane rescue in the San Gabriel mountains, at the cost of serious exhaustion and privation, they were put to work guarding the plane, a military aircraft, by an army officer who issued them guns! They grinned and surrendered the guns when someone pointed out that such procedure was highly irregular.

The discipline problem at Chino has been minimized by an Advisory Council of prisoners. In its meetings this Council group decided to never talk about any member of the supervisory staff, nor any men of the institution, but to limit themselves to formulating the most intelligent policies they could devise. Here, it seems to us, is convincing indication that Warden Scudder's approach is so much appreciated as to have been absorbed into the working patterns of the lives of the inmates.

Scudder provides a final note on the now somewhat time-worn but always amusing theme of comparing prisoners' virtues with the morals of the outside world:

> It has often been said that only a fraction of the people who should be in jail are actually there. When we said good-by to the last of our eight thousand visitors on opening day we found that the general public had walked off with forty of our plain glass tumblers as souvenirs from a state prison.

It wasn't the last time we suffered from the predatory instincts of the public. One night during the war, in a black-out, someone crawled over our back fence and stole thirty of our rabbits. The men said, "We know now why we have gun towers and the big fence. It's to keep the unprincipled public on the outside."

The gun towers, though, are still unoccupied, and the fence of normal size and construction. Drive past Chino someday and see for yourself.

COMMENTARY
HE WHO GETS CAUGHT

THE reading—even the review—of a book like *Prisoners Are People* provokes reflection on the large and as-yet-unsolved problem of crime in our civilization. The pat theories, the "complete" theories, are obviously worthless. And sentimental theories are as bad as self-righteous and brutish theories.

Our acquaintance with criminals is not extensive, but we have had the privilege of association with several individuals who have spent years in prison because of their principled deviation from conventional standards of conduct. These persons, almost to a man, report that a large proportion of the men in prison have surrounded themselves with a shell of egocentric illusions and behave according to stereotypes of "toughness" which leave little opening to the so-called process of "rehabilitation," even assuming that rehabilitation is possible in the adverse environment of penal institutions.

The thing, however, which our society so easily forgets—"our society" meaning ourselves, our neighbors, all the citizens who don't happen to be in jail—is that the prisoner is *still a human being,* and is entitled to be treated *as* a human being, despite the restraints which society has imposed. This, we think, is what men like Clinton Duffy and Kenyon Scudder are contending for, against the apathy of the public and the unresponsiveness of legislatures to the voteless prison population.

A man in prison might be regarded as a man who is very like ourselves, except that he has been unable to control impulses which the rest of us either restrain—perhaps through fear or hypocrisy, perhaps through sensibility or a feeling of social responsibility—or express more astutely, so that the rather coarse net of the criminal code cannot touch us. Then there is this further comment, made by Charles B. Thompson, for many years connected with the Court of General Sessions in New York City:

> We might as well keep in mind that society has its own crimes which, however, are not recognized as such because they are committed on so large a scale. Society has its mass-homicides called wars, its mass-robberies called invasions, its wholesale larcenies called empire building. As long as the individual's behavior fits in with the mass-reaction it is considered "good" behavior. As long as he does not question by word or deed the validity of the mass-behavior he may be called a "good citizen."

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

MUCH of what has been written in "Children—and Ourselves" has affirmed the child's *innate* possession of some of the highest and noblest qualities attributable to the human being. This seems a crucial proposition for education, since either we are striving to "draw out" from the child his own latent capacities, or we must recognize that our task is only that of indoctrination and conditioning. Even if "latent capacities" are granted, but conceived to be nothing more than the ability to learn manipulative skills, we still cannot set ourselves up as more than "indoctrinators." Only if the child, *when* born, and just because he *is* born, be conceived to have an *individuality*, educationally—just as we theoretically regard him as having "inalienable rights," politically—do we have a sound basis for believing that there is something more to education than the cultural "manufacture" of personality.

It may be said that to claim that the child is, at the outset, an "individuality," is an assertion with little definite meaning, "individuality" being a word of as much ambiguity as the term "soul." But people, we might rejoin, are themselves very ambiguous, and even little people. There are extraordinary differences of character among children of a single family who have all been brought up in the same sort of environment—important differences, although we may not be able to explain why they exist. For, unless the "inalienable rights" we speak of so feelingly when making proud reference to the American Declaration of Independence are a part of the human being *from* birth—or even before—we must accept the alternative that individual rights have their only origin in the social complex. If this be so, in turn, we are obliged to conclude that all "educators" are simply "conditioners" and "indoctrinators."

It seems likely that the real meaning of "individuality" will never be reached by mere verbal definition. Perhaps the only legitimate definition is supplied by human beings themselves, in their unmistakably creative thinking and behavior. Dialectical argument settles nothing, certainly, concerning such subtle issues, yet always, we suspect, there will be an appreciable number of men who see a preponderance of evidence for the real existence of distinctive individuality. What is "evidence" for some, of course, will not necessarily be evidence for another, but among those who regard the unique wonder of the human being as deriving *from* individuality, any form of evidence will be held important.

A short time ago a rather remarkable document came into our hands. It is not altogether unique—we remember once reading another markedly similar expression—but it does raise some interesting questions. The "document" is in the form of a written pledge to live "the higher life," composed entirely on his own initiative by a thirteen-year-old boy. Though his parents had a religious background, the boy had quite definitely indicated his disinclination to have anything to do with the church to which his parents belonged. Whatever his psychological environment, the distillation of essential ethics was apparently the youngster's own. We reproduce it practically in full:

> This is the property of _____, Age 13, born July, 1929.
>
> 1) I will not give my opinion unless it is asked for.
> 2) In orchestra I will help to the greatest extent I may.
> 3) A mistake seen in another is but a reflection of yourself.
> 4) I will never stop and divert myself as long as there is work to do.
> 5) My purpose will be in expanding my mind, not in gaining material.
> 6) I will hurt no one mentally or physically.
> 7) My thoughts shall be clean so will my actions.
> 8) Although I will be humble I shall throw happy radiation and be silent and observing.

9) All things I would preach on mistakes of others I will but make them a lesson to myself (see 3).
10) If you are going to say something bad about a person don't say anything.
11) I shall go to bed at anytime and get up no later than 5:30 A.M. My food will be plain and regular. A bath will be taken as often as possible, teeth will be washed two times a day, hands washed before meals
12) I will always consider the other fellow's opinion as well as mine.
13) All my spare moments will be devoted to the better understanding of Music, Colors, and Numbers.
14) All I say will be based on truth, fact and logic.
15) I shall say or do nothing to be ashamed of, therefore always telling the truth.

This particular youngster grew up on a small acreage in the country and his chief companions, it appears, were a dog and some livestock for which he was responsible. An interest in music led to his determined practice on the violin, whereas, at school, he demonstrated that he was not "queer" by enjoying an active participation in athletics.

The disciplines he adopted in the æsthetic field and particularly his decision to devote all his "spare moments to the better understanding of Music, Colors and Numbers," take us back to some of the traditions of the Pythagorean and Platonic Schools. Few serious students of ancient Greek education any longer believe that the emphasis of Pythagoras on "music and numbers" was either naïve or incidental. Behind concern for these disciplines, rather, we may think, lay a determination to familiarize the young with the orderliness, the lawfulness and the harmony of the entire universe. This view of the Great Harmony, by the way, is said to have been responsible for Copernicus' first dream of the heliocentric system. Copernicus had been studying Greek philosophy, and thereby acquiring something of that breadth of imaginative perspective so often productive of important discoveries.

A modern educational historian gives this brief characterization of Plato's *organic* concept of education, and Plato obviously represented a continuance of the Pythagorean tradition:

> All virtues must be molded into an organic whole. For this purpose a forming power within the human personality is necessary, strong enough to harmonize the body with the mind, aesthetic with moral demands, and the more instinctive drives with intellectual maturity. Here lies, for Plato, the deepest sense of gymnastics and music. Gymnastics is much more than mere physical exercise, and music is much more than what we understand by musical training. They both aim at a cultivation of the body and the emotions, as the foundation upon which to build later a sound intellectual life. They have to prepare the total person for achieving "good speech, then, good accord, and good grace, and good rhythm."

The most puzzling and intriguing aspect of this *spontaneous* and self-devised pledge to Discipline, taken to himself by a thirteen-year-old, lies in the question of its source of inspiration. Is it not possible that the essentials of what we call "morals" and "ethics" are contained in inherent or spontaneous aspirations of the human soul, for the young as well as for the mature? Thus, at least, it is easier to explain the "idealism of youth" and to explain, also, why oldsters who speak of later "learning better" than their original idealism nevertheless feel a profound nostalgia for the outlook they have persuaded themselves to deride.

We have mentioned familiarity with a similar instance of youthful idealism—one in which the boy was only ten years of age a case also without any formal religious indoctrination. Here, again, the writing and signing of a sort of special promise to himself was done with the utmost seriousness, and any slightest infraction of the "dedicated life" was to be recorded and examined as to causes and effects by a separate essay on the subject of the transgression. All of this was long kept secret, and we can imagine that while the burden was great for one so young, and imposed a severe psychological strain, whatever of self-discipline was thus learned must have been of great benefit in later life.

In both instances, the strong and coherent drive responsible for the "pledges" seemed to dissipate itself later in adolescence, at the very time when other people were trying to tell these

youngsters what was "good," and "right," and "moral." Such circumstances, plus the fact that neither youth had had any theological conditioning, could be listed as evidence for the child's possession of a deeply ingrained moral sense, independent of environmental and cultural influence and, perhaps, superior to them.

Where do such speculations lead? It is difficult to say, beyond noting that whatever hidden meaning the word "soul" conceals is made even more deep and mysterious thereby. Certain it is that human beings have as yet hardly begun to know how to study themselves in psychological and ethical terms, but probably, whatever of this study is attempted will be especially valuable when predicated upon sympathetic understanding of the minds of the very young.

Most of us are *two* "selves" rather than one; the expedient views we acquire with what we euphemistically call "maturity" are often *not* genuinely individual, although they may and do form Freud's "superego," a strong though artificial entity. But is there not something, underneath the conditionings to which we have been subjected, which is truly "individual"? If it is possible to build a faith that such is the case, we may also hope to establish rapport with the most inspiring aspects of the world's great religions, in which the doctrine of the brotherhood of man is founded upon just such a mystical, metaphysical base.

FRONTIERS

Are Vows Immoral?

WE use the word "vow" in the usual sense of a promise which precludes the right to re-examine one's position and to change one's course if deliberate re-examination should convince one that is best. A person taking a vow promises, with respect to the matter involved, to limit free intellectual or spiritual growth. Though his vow may seem unwise in the light of further experience and insight, the "sacred" promise would hold him to his course.

Authoritarian relationships frequently make use of vows. Those who receive or encourage vows evidence a willingness to hold the minds and spirits of men in servitude to some mental or emotional attitude which, though sincerely taken, nevertheless may represent but a transitory stage in the growth of the spirit.

"To thine own self be true." No more exacting standard ever was presented. That standard cannot be satisfied by any once-for-all submission to external discipline or influence, or to any formal code. It demands each day new examination of one's self and of one's purpose, and new resolve. Often the tired, baffled spirit is tempted to give up, and by taking formal vows to hand over the direction of his life to the keeping of another, or of an institution, or to find peace by putting an end to intellectual or spiritual search.

Yet one way leads to spiritual servitude, the other to life, to freedom, and to unwarped growth. No vow or promise made by my past self is binding if it keeps me from being true to my best present self. Renounce every arbitrary, mistaken or ill advised promise, be true to your best self,

> And it shall follow as the night the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man.

Fiction and drama must have plots, and the plot as a rule represents a dilemma. Scarcely any type of dilemma is more common in literature than that which results from an ill-considered vow. A son makes a pledge to a dying parent, a husband to a wife; a man promises not to divulge the secret of his friend. Conditions change, and to keep the vow means injustice, misunderstanding, tragedy. This theme is common in literature partly because it is so easy to manipulate, partly because it is a true reflection of life. Avoid unconditional pledges and promises and we shall eliminate one of the commoner unnecessary sources of tragedy.

Virtues in their slow, troubled evolution develop many excesses. Self-restraint becomes asceticism, thrift turns into miserliness, and desire for freedom becomes anarchy. The sense of responsibility is one of man's noblest traits. To mislead or to exploit it, to make it the basis of authoritarian coercion; to capture youthful zeal and aspiration and to bind it irrevocably to a fixed outlook by religious or other vows, is infamous. No longer may an American sell his own body into slavery. Society protects him from his own indiscretion. For him to commit his mind through vows or pledges is no less servitude.

The mind of man has a right to freedom. (By "right" we mean, not a supernatural or mystical endowment, but recognition and support of a status which accords with good overall policy.) No emotionally induced or ill-considered pledge I may make to church or state or friends can properly require me to discontinue inquiry into the truth or, within reasonable or necessary limits set by law or society, to refrain from changing my conduct as I change my mind. My sense of responsibility calls for me to assume heavier burdens than any vows. Only as it governs my life can I hope for freedom from external bondage or self-imposed servitude.

No contract is properly inexorable. The validity of each one rests upon the reasonableness of its terms. A contract to give dollars in return for cents would not be sustained in law because the unequal condition implies some lack of sanity or freedom in its making. If I freely sell for a hundred dollars a mine which later proves to be worth a million the contract is good because when all factors, including uncertainty, are taken into account, the exchange is reasonable. In Western law the concept has largely disappeared that a vow or pledge necessarily carries obligation or responsibility. Contracts are good when they define relations within reasonable limits of uncertainty. It will be well when promises to one's self or to others have similar authority in morals,

when they are used to establish and to define inherently reasonable relationships, and when they have no potency to sustain those which may now or in the future prove to be inherently unreasonable. In both law and morals, understanding of the legitimate functions of contracts brings a greater tendency to enforce the fulfilment of those which are inherently reasonable.

Marriage vows are no exception to the rule that vows are immoral. When people marry they assume one of the chief relationships by which the long struggle for the refinement and mastery of life is carried on. Each party has in large degree the power to make or break the life of the other. If the home fails, then, so far as those persons are concerned, that struggle ends in defeat. The finest human traits are elusive and require exceptional environment, such as the home, in which mutual regard, forebearance, affection, and unselfishness have their best chance. Such relationships seldom spring full grown, but usually develop slowly, often by indomitable determination not to fail. In marriage each gives himself, not by contract or sale, but freely. Recognition of these values and responsibilities constitutes the strongest of ties. Arbitrary bonds, such as marriage vows, may seem to be effective among unthinking people until time can make a more perfect tie, but may they not more probably prevent recognition of the true basis of union? Would not the real reasons for patience and loyalty be more potent than these arbitrary forms? Where separation becomes morally necessary, should it be accompanied by a sense of guilt from broken vows?

Our government is justified in accepting into citizenship only those newcomers from abroad who believe that they will make loyal citizens. The oath or vow of loyalty is intended to help insure such selection. Is it not unwise in that it seems to preclude the right to change one's opinion with changing experience or insight? Instead of an oath of allegiance, would not some such statement as the following be preferable: "I have considered the nature of the American government and society, and sincerely believe, without mental reservation, that I can give it my overall genuine loyalty. It is my full and unreserved intention to do so. If at any time I find that I am not a loyal American citizen, it is my intention to make that fact known to this court, so that my citizenship may be withdrawn."

Laws, manners, taste, morals and customs may establish useful channels for action. Our animal impulses or imperfect early training may incline us to actions which are out of harmony with standards or ideals of action to which in our best moments we have committed ourselves. Floods of passion or social pressure may powerfully impel us to acts which our calm and deliberate judgment disapproves. Boys or girls of good ethical intent may temporarily find themselves in a period of emotional stress during which a course of action seems good which is in conflict with deliberately formed judgments and standards. Some people undertake to justify vows on the ground that they may hold a person true to his deliberately formed convictions in such periods of emotional stress.

Vows and pledges are not the only way, nor do I believe that they are the right way or the best way, for maintaining standards in time of emotional stress. Moral or ethical counsel and example may teach the general truth that periods of emotional stress do betray deliberately-arrived-at standards and ideals, and such teaching may encourage the habit and the confirmed principle of action that one will not succumb to emotional stress or "temptation," when it is out of harmony with accepted principles and ideals. Where such self-restraint has been developed by teaching and example, it has the increased effectiveness which results when emotional persistence of purpose is in accord with intellectual recognition of the reasonableness of the position taken. A vow or pledge may have only the emotional set to sustain it.

Judged by these criteria, are not vows immoral? You must not ask that your will or your influence of today shall control my mind and my acts of the future, under conditions which neither of us can foresee. The outlook of a moment or of a period must not dominate the conduct of a life.

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