

THE GRAND OUTLINE

THE loneliness of modern man, his feeling of homelessness, his "alienation" from a natural life, is often explained by moralists as the punishment for his defiance of natural law. There is some truth, doubtless, in the charge. Man has been guilty of almost countless crimes against nature. From Cain's murder of Abel to the atom bomb, human history records excess piled upon excess. We might say, without adopting the dogma of Original Sin and without agreeing with the evolutionists who see in these things no more than evidences of man's jungle heritage, that the predisposition of human beings to make a mess of their Lives and of the world around them has been a constant factor in all the history we know.

And yet, admitting this, and also the justice of the moralists' reproaches, we think that there is something more involved in the plight of modern man. He is not "just" being punished. It is conceivable that he is being introduced to a new kind of *freedom*, and since every sort of freedom invokes a corresponding desperation and feeling of being "lost," so our present confusion and aimlessness may represent the travail of a birth as well as retribution for the past.

Among the dozen or so possible explanations of what is wrong with modern man, one suggests itself as including both the retribution theory and the idea of a break-through into a better future. It is that modern man, unlike the men of other ages, is born into a world which has no grand outline of the scheme of things. No promise of Valhalla beckons to arouse his heroic qualities. No vaulted cathedral raises its spire to the stars, declaring a supernatural link between Heaven and earth. The symmetry of a great world-belief is lacking on our horizon; instead, we see only little shadows of men, uncertain, insecure, who, as we watch them, come to the edge of life and seem to fall away into

nothingness. And these men, we say, are ourselves.

The sad emotion of feeling motherless afflicts us. For to be without any sense of living within the matrix of destiny is, as natural man, to be motherless indeed. The ocean of life becomes an alien sea, its rocks and reefs unmarked upon a chart of larger relationships, its shores an existentialist horror of more extended meaninglessness. From time to time we see our fellows—even distinguished fellows—return to the bosom of the church, clutching their Bibles and leaving their amputated reason behind them in the desert of unbelief. For the man who watches this, and looks again at the ways of the modern world, the choice sometimes seems like one between two prisons. Who, he wonders, will answer the roll call next?

In times like these, one is drawn to ponder the great religious systems of the past. A visit to the pages of the *Laws of Manu*, compiled in English a century and a half ago by Sir William Jones, brings new wonderment at the glorious security of the Brahmanical scheme. There are no wild irrationals in this system, no unbidden meteors to burst into and disturb the stately progressions of its men and gods. You have the feeling of being conducted on a tour through a best-of-all-possible-worlds such as Dr. Pangloss would have appreciated far more than eighteenth-century Europe. Here, with almost as much living diversity as Nature itself, is pictured the great hierarchy of life, the Great Chain of Being.

Then, turn to the *Mahabharata*, and despite the endless paradoxes, the splendid contradictions and puzzling anomalies—as enigmatic as our own existence—there remains an underlying pattern, an earthly and celestial harmony to which all human beings belong. Men dwelt in these mansions of

the soul for thousands upon thousands of years, and felt themselves at home.

The recurring and unsettling question is this: Even if it were all true, could I live in those mansions? What if some such awesome museum of the imagination were to come alive through the unexpected magic of a time-machine—would I be willing to walk out of the window of the present into this well-regulated security—to take my heart's desire by the hand and step from the unknown into the known?

I know—I *think*—we answer, I would not. The tamed and tempered universe is not for me. Not for all the Nirvanas gained and ungained could I desert the shapeless present for this delicately sculptured finality. This present, these doubts, my tragic uncertainty, are at least my own. And if the renunciation seems a painful one, without warrant from the hungers so widely advertised as belonging to man, there is the consolation that every plateau of attainment eventually becomes, for truly human beings, a jumping-off place into some new unknown.

Is it then possible, with all our burden of misdeeds, our sickly bodies and our overcast souls, that the lack of a great outline for our lives is only the seeming void which shrouds the beginning of a new destiny? Is it perhaps a cyclic renewal of the eternal Promethean mission?

If we could think so, we might make some peace with our bewilderments, accepting them as the normal companions of all pioneers. But what a sorry crowd of pioneers! We have all the accoutrements of the Promethean fate—the agonies of mankind in the twentieth century are surely as great!—yet we have not the sense of Promethean purpose. The sufferings of the Titan as he hung on the rock, a vulture tearing at his liver, gained at least the recompense of understanding. Prometheus knew why he suffered. As Byron put it:

Thy godlike crime *was* to be kind,
To render with thy precepts less
the sum of human wretchedness,

And strengthen man with his own mind.
But, baffled as thou wert from high,
Still, in thy patient energy,
In the endurance and repulse
Of thine impenetrable spirit
Which earth and heaven could not convulse,
A mighty lesson we inherit.

Prometheus challenged the tyranny of Zeus, he broke with the rigid hierarchy of Olympus, then suffered punishment for bringing to men the illumination of the fire of mind; just as, when Adam ate of the apple which gave him knowledge of good and evil, he was evicted from the paradise of Eden.

There is, apparently, a dynamic iconoclasm, a revolutionary principle, at the heart of every great religion. There is the security-giving scheme, the formal pattern of relationships with their apex of rule or authority, and there is the almost anarchist rejection of all this: "When thy heart shall have worked through the snares of delusion, then thou wilt attain to high indifference as to those doctrines which are already taught or which are yet to be taught." (*Bhagavad-Gita*, II.)

Can we say, perhaps, that the evil religions, the faiths which devalue the human spirit, are those which hide or suppress this secret doctrine of freedom, this promise of emancipation from all theologies?

In any event, it seems certain that a successful Prometheus has to know what he is about. There are two ways to oppose the static cosmology of the theologians. Aristophanes described one of them by saying, "Whirl is King, having driven out Zeus." Whirl is of course the favorite enemy of Zeus, for Zeus can always recover his throne from this usurper. Prometheus, unlike Whirl, did not rudely unseat the ruler of Olympus, but gave human beings the power to put him in his place, through the power of mind. Lucifer did the same thing when he betrayed the tribal deity, Jehovah, by bringing Adam the knowledge of good and evil. This is the only way to succeed against the systems and institutions of religion. They cannot be driven out by violence; they cannot be forcibly

suppressed or made "illegal." For always the time comes when the reign of Whirl grows so chaotic that men creep back into the fold, pleading for their lost security, begging that the void be filled, that the scheme of magical salvation be once again painted on the backdrop of their existence. It was this weakness in human nature that the Grand Inquisitor of Dostoevski's *Brothers Karamazov* relied upon for the support of the Church. It is the secret of all totalitarian power, whether religious or political.

The uninstructed Prometheans always overlook this weakness. Thus the great reformers of the Enlightenment, the "earnest atheists" of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while Promethean in intent, really helped Whirl to a cycle of supremacy. Diderot, like Prometheus, had his secret, but it was a very different secret. The secret of Prometheus had to do with the final defeat of Zeus through the ultimate enlightenment of mankind. Diderot's secret was his suspicion that the inert materialism of his doctrines would suffocate the moral sense in man. So Diderot, as the historians now tell us, himself suppressed the darkest implications of his theories. But the people found them out and put them into practice, and this is the great discovery of so many modern moralists, who now attack the men of the Enlightenment, who condemn the rebellious, independent spirit of the Renaissance and of the French Revolution. Away with these Godless men, they say—these proud egotists and optimists of merely human possibility. See how they have misled us into lawless cults of pleasure and sensation! What they do not say is that, during the past two hundred years, the greatest reformers, altruists, and humanitarians have been almost all skeptics or unbelievers, and by ignoring this all-important fact they overlook the very genius of the Promethean spirit.

What we must now discover is that the modern Prometheans see through a glass darkly, do not understand the real secret of how to dethrone Zeus, which must be accomplished

through a deeper knowledge than is possible for the makers and rulers of systems. A mere revolt is not enough. The revolt continues—it must continue—but the Promethean vision has yet to appear before our tired eyes.

It is possible, surely, for a more profound sense of human destiny to fill the hearts of the men who, with stoic determination, are slugging out the battle for freedom of mind in the forums and market places of the modern world. The unsatisfied longing for a sense of destiny is the chief source of discouragement for many of those who try to live above the grubbing for profit and personal acquisition which is regarded as "normal" in our time. Some promise that the Promethean urge is not illusory—some feeling that the grand outlines of the past, the noble myths, the heroic molds, are something more than perfervid romanticism—is what we want.

Even the history of Western thought since the awakening of the fifteenth century shows how irrepressible is the search for a sense of destiny, for a relationship with some larger law of life. The dynamism of Evolution was enough to launch the last half of the nineteenth century on a great splurge of optimism and predictions of endless "progress" for mankind. The Marxist doctrine was a still more definitive joining of man with historic processes—and if the doctrine was delusive, the chords it struck in the human heart were not. Even if these gospels have proved inadequate or false, the motives behind them are our only hope.

Plainly, the longing for a destiny urges us on to seek liberation from unmeaning, but it also makes us exceedingly vulnerable to the traps of closed systems. It anon saves, anon damns, like every creative power possessed by man. Here, in the eternal paradox of human morality—that the capacity for creation makes us potent for destruction, that our susceptibility to enslavement, turned about, is the determination to be free—we may find intimated the meaning of the Nietzschean

phrase, "Beyond Good and Evil." For are we not, as creative beings, just that?

We rise from an abandonment to weakness, gaining new strength in the sight of a far-off star. The "immoralities" which inspire self-hate—their evil is not in themselves, but in the clotted darkness they create. Surely goodness—surely goodness is no end in itself, and as much of a by-path as evil, when conceived as a goal above freedom, above the Promethean secret of the free destiny of the human soul.

The alienation that we feel, the uncertainties that haunt, and the doubts that dry up our courage: why should we not say that these are no more than the conditions of life at this juncture of history, and stop fleeing from them as though they were graveyard ghosts and we but children hurrying home in the dark? What if there is no home for man, save in the Promethean heart? What if the great European humanists were right in saying that man has no other destiny but to be forever re-creating his life to embody further visions, larger dreams?

Letter from **CENTRAL EUROPE**

INNSBRUCK.—Touring Europe, the United States Secretary of State stopped at London, Berlin, and Vienna. It can be supposed that Mr. Acheson enjoyed most of all his visit to the capital of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, for here, at least, he was free from political bargaining and endless discussions. The City welcomed him with flags and garlands, perhaps enabling him to forget for a moment that the pitiless Iron Curtain reaches, with its last tassel, into the center of Vienna—a city which once knew nothing but prosperity, royal festivities, and swinging waltzes!

Mr. Acheson came to Vienna to return the recent visits to the U.S.A. of the Austrian Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and he may have felt that a stay at the capital of Austria would symbolize the interest which the United States takes in this small country. No one aware of the international situation could hope that he would bring any news! He did, however, bring assurances that the U.S. would do its best to secure a State Treaty for the little Danubian country, and that any attack on Austria (still partly occupied by American troops) would be regarded as an attack on American territory.

But what he learned from the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs was surely not uninteresting to him. Mr. Gruber had just returned from a visit to Tito—the first visit of a "Western" minister since Tito made himself independent ruler of Yugoslavia. About four years ago, Mr. Gruber was involved in serious differences with the Yugoslavs, who then exhibited territorial designs upon Austria. Now, however, he was able to tell about a reception in Belgrade which was unexpectedly warm and cordial, and about talks with the Communist dictator which seemed to end in what might be called a "psychological peace treaty" between the two countries. The pleasure isolated Yugoslavia

found in the "good-will tour" of a Western minister was so great that Mr. Gruber had opportunity to urge the Yugoslavs to seek a solution of the problem of the Freestate harbour of Trieste, which still overshadows seriously the relations between Yugoslavia and Italy. In view of the improved relations between Athens and Belgrade, and between Ankara and Belgrade, the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs had ample reason to suggest to Mr. Acheson that—if Tito can be trusted at all—there are signs which promise stabilization for the Western Balkans.

Some of the Austrians have approved the visit of Mr. Gruber to the island of Brioni, where Tito resides. Others disagree, arguing that Russia is much nearer to Austria than America, and that Russian troops are still in the country. They refer to the fact that Tito is the arch-foe of Moscow and predict that the Russians will retaliate for the visit of Gruber to Yugoslavia as soon as they find a suitable opportunity.

The problem of the average Austrian, however—one that is with him day after day, and month after month—is of a general character. How long will this precarious situation continue? He cannot get an answer anywhere. He feels that his country is dragging along, that no economic recovery develops in spite of all the efforts of the population, and he knows that the Austrian birth-rate has fallen to the lowest in Europe. The Germans, it is said, having received \$36 per capita of American aid, can now stand on their own feet and need no further support. Austria has received \$200 per capita, yet remains unable to care for her population. Will the U.S.A. pay unto eternity? What will happen to this country, if the United States Government should stop this assistance?

CENTRAL EUROPEAN CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW

THE SOUL AND MR. SHEEAN

VINCENT SHEEAN has received for a good deal of criticism since his famous visit with Gandhi at the precise time of the great Indian Leader's assassination. A hard-boiled international news correspondent who suddenly goes "mystic" provided an easy target for derision. *Lead, Kindly Light*, Sheean's book on Gandhi, was hardly welcomed in intellectual circles, save for those heavily populated by pacifists and mystical religionists. But those who waved away Sheean's intense personal preoccupation with Gandhi's greatness as a sort of professional gimmick designed to add to an author's stock-in-trade, overlooked the fact that Sheean obviously meant what he said about Indian thought in general and about the thought of Mohandas Gandhi in particular.

Lead, Kindly Light is a sincere account of a modern journalist's receptivity to mysticism, and if the range and tempo of the book seem entirely too personal to afford rapport with those who have known mysticism longer than the author, or, conversely, if its contents give the impression of being vague mumbo-jumbo to those who were disappointed to find Mr. Sheean no longer a "down-to-earth" writer, the fault may be laid as much to a narrow canon of criticism as to the book itself. The introduction of any fairly typical western mind, by sudden, emotional means, to "supra-physical reality," can hardly be expected to produce a precision fitting. Odds and ends of past attitudes and expressions will at times emerge, and while such incongruities may be noted, they by no means justify wholly negative criticism. New psychological discoveries may be either gropingly expressed or inadequately grasped yet still merit serious and appreciative attention.

All this, we think, should be borne in mind when one encounters Sheean's recent novel, *Rage of the Soul*. The title indicates that Sheean has not suddenly forgotten the strange motivations and interests which found focus in *Lead, Kindly Light*, while the tale's development suggests that Sheean may be floundering somewhere in between two

worlds, the Eastern and the Western—the religious and the hedonistic.

Those who found Somerset Maugham's sophisticated dalliances over double martinis out of key with the accompanying discussion of Indian mysteries of the Self will at times react similarly to Sheean. We suspect, moreover, that *The Razor's Edge* is by far the better book, from all literary standards. Neither novel, though, can serve as satisfactory introduction to the attitude and spirit represented by the ideal of India's Holy Men, simply because of the constantly mixed associations, and India's Holy Men, we understand, are held to be both calm in temper and single-minded in concentration.

We are, however, skirting an obligation imposed by the correspondent who has asked us to evaluate *Rage of the Soul*. What we have just been saying is no more than a warning as to some of this book's probable psychological limitations; evaluation is another matter, in this case very difficult. Perhaps all a reviewer can do with a book about which he cannot make up his mind is to offer, first, the most that may be said in favor of it, and then to enumerate possible objections—which is, we suppose, about what we have been doing thus far.

The plot of *Rage of the Soul* revolves around the determination of a cultured American woman to seek enlightenment in India. The cause for her quest is entirely personal: after years of happily married life she suddenly finds herself emotionally involved with a man for whom she has no real liking or respect. She is shaken to her psychological roots by the discovery that she has so little knowledge concerning the sources of some of her actions, and so little self-control. What she finally learns from the "guru" of an Indian friend is that part of her difficulty springs from a tendency to be too concerned with her own virtue in some inexplicable way, the deeps of her emotional nature have struck back at her veiled assumption of superiority over "lesser" beings. She learns, also, although this conclusion is put tentatively, that even an unworthy action may lead to enlightenment, if one is genuinely concerned with attaining a deeper wisdom:

"Can light come from an unworthy source?" she asked. "Perhaps unworthy is not the word. Can it come from evil? Can it come from weakness? Could it ever come from a source condemned by—by one's own judgment or conscience?"

The *guru* waited a little to reply. . . .

"The *first knowledge*, or *first acquaintance*, with light, that is with the interior light, might come from some such source," he said slowly. "It is possible. The Hindus of ancient times thought so. They had a way of deriving good from evil, you know. I do believe, myself, that light so derived can endure. That which illumines the being and lifts it to a higher level of consciousness comes from above—from afar. But *first knowledge* might come otherwise, perhaps even from weakness—I do not express myself clearly today."

The crux of Mr. Sheean's philosophy revolves around this passage. He is putting forth the suggestion, obviously related to his own speculations on Eastern thought, that too much concern with "good" and "evil" can easily block one's travels toward more complete self-realization. Even sensual intensity, he implies, can reveal a reflection of the profound impersonal truths which are still, for most of us, the impenetrable mysteries of our existence. Now such a formulation can either be taken as an excuse for eliminating "the moral problem" or as a basis for universal, thoughtful compassion, which excludes no type of man nor type of experience from our understanding and sympathy. We think it is true that preoccupation with either one's personal virtues or one's vices—areas of special attention in most conventional religions—is a sign of immaturity, both emotional and moral. But it may also be argued that too high an indifference to personal behavior will tend—unless very much of a Wise Man oneself—to eliminate the *qualitative* factor in experience, and that we all badly need to intensify those self-disciplines which make increasingly selective standards possible.

Is Mr. Sheean here guilty of an essentially misleading oversimplification, a too casual blending of Western hedonism and Eastern soul-seeking; or is he looking rather closely at an uncracked kernel of an eternal truth; or is he preparing his readers for the

conviction that men really need institutional religion to soothe their fevered brows?

We cannot say, and are obliged to discuss *Rage of the Soul* in its own terms. Since Mr. Sheean himself does not press his arguments, nor even, in fact, state them as arguments, we are left to reflect upon the implications of his "problem." We are left, however, with one clear contention of the author's, which we think is constructive. Mr. Sheean does not feel that pilgrimages to India, nor consorting with travelling "yogis," will provide Westerners with the answers to their psychological problems. The secrets of Indian profundity, apparently, are too subtle to allow of systematization. *Rage of the Soul* put it:

The whole context of thought was so different that often what was most familiar to an Indian had no meaning or suggestion for her . . . this is what gave her such disconcerting (and discouraging) moments of wondering whether full communication would ever be possible. She was afraid, for instance, of the *guru*—not of his age, learning or sanctity, none of which in itself dismayed her, but of the strong probability that she would miss the true meaning or at least the implications of whatever he might say. She had now been in India long enough to realize that an immense amount was said there by indirection, with one subject often enough completely discussed by means of another, or with a whole series of indications supplied in a sort of interlinear reference system not to be deciphered by the first comer. Too much had to be explained, she felt, to make up for all those innumerable small bits of furniture that were, from birth, existent to Europeans but not Indians, or Indians but not Europeans. And then, beyond that, there was also the unexplainable, to the threshold of which it was impossible to come unless much of this initial incomprehension was decisively cleared away. It was like a carved portal to secret delights of the mind to be guessed in daydream but never penetrated unless the rubbish-heap, the whole detritus of centuries, could first be removed from its approaches.

COMMENTARY A LOST INSPIRATION

MODERN artists and writers, when confronted by such objections to their despairing "realism" as those voiced by Joseph Wood Krutch (see *Frontiers*), habitually reply that their honesty compels them to hold a mirror up to life as they see it. If, they argue, the world is a despair-generating place, then they have no choice but to report the fact. Mr. Krutch's rejoinder to this seems worth repeating:

Even the most convinced moderns seldom affirm that Shakespeare was a bad artist. And though they do often maintain that his times were fundamentally different, that he profited by the spirit of his age just as they are victims of theirs, two facts nevertheless remain: (1) the Elizabethan world was not, objectively considered, either a wholly just or a very pretty one; (2) Shakespeare himself, contributed a good deal to making it seem, nevertheless, very glorious. . . .

Here, by implication, is the criticism which Tolstoy made of himself and his contemporaries in his *Confession*. The world seems an evil and unprofitable place, he said, because my life is aimless and unprofitable to both myself and others. This discovery was at the root of Tolstoy's strenuous personal reform. It is a discovery, moreover, which declares the superiority of the individual to his environment.

Continuing the discussion, Mr. Krutch looks for clues as to what has happened among some lost or forgotten "philosophies":

Consider a few random examples of words and phrases used by older and sometimes by merely old-fashioned critics or estheticians. What did Poe mean when he talked so frequently about "ideality" and was apparently convinced that readers would know what he was talking about? What did Thoreau mean when he wrote into his notebook the opinion that the business of art is not so much to imitate nature as to recover that original of which nature herself is an imitation? What does Santayana mean when he says that art is concerned less with repeating nature than with fulfilling her?

The Platonic overtones of these ways of looking at art and life are unmistakable. And, let us note, the Renaissance, from which modern liberalism obtained its philosophic inspiration, was born of a Platonic revival. Finally, Thoreau's rejection of the *status quo* was as complete as that of any of the modern pessimists, yet his belief in the reality of a world of ideals to be realized on earth gave him the courage to stand against odds, instead of succumbing to despair.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

LAST week's presentation of a subscriber's arguments for increased regulation by-law of adolescent behavior calls for parallel review of proposals for greater freedom of choice among the young. We can hardly hope, however, to find a balance or compromise between theories of restraint and those of unrestraint, for the whole matter is a psychological rather than a legislative subject. It is increasingly evident that a parent's attitude of mind and his reasons for establishing restrictions in the home will be the determining influences upon the child's personality, the specific restraints having much less importance. If, in other words, the parents have developed what some educators call a "team spirit" in the home, and if they are no more suspicious of their children than they are of themselves, being as ready to receive rebukes from their children as to give them, then "regulations" which would otherwise be authoritarian can be part of a program of intelligent planning for the welfare of the entire family unit.

The most intelligent supporters of more legal restraints upon adolescent freedom recognize this, but also point out that the immaturity of the average American adult is so appalling that restrictive legislation is needed as an expedient measure. For unless there is a constructive "team spirit" in a home, the child will usually develop its less desirable equivalent elsewhere, perhaps with a gang involved in destructive forms of adventuring. But curfew laws do not eliminate gangs. However reasonable the argument for curfews, no adult or parent should blind himself to the fact that any restrictions, whether legislative or otherwise, which are conceived primarily as "protection against evil" are inimical to the highest educative aims. Purely restrictive legislation is really defensive legislation, and defensive legislation, like mobilization for national defense, can easily produce factional attitudes. Righteousness and scorn of law are the opposite yet twin progeny of attempts to secure compliance by threats.

No home or community can be psychologically healthy so long as there is a persisting focus for devious conflicts between the generations. That there is, and always has been such conflict, except in the

most perfect homes and communities, is evidence that many of the restraints imposed upon youth are less than philosophical in origin. For restraint *imposed* upon either adult or youth, simply for the sake of social convenience, cannot fail to generate rebellion against authority—any authority.

The full application of the American political ideal would require at least the psychological "consent of the governed" in home, school, and community. If a parent or teacher has a child's respect, if adult and child are engaged in mutually beneficial enterprises, or can share enthusiasms without mistrust, a *natural* authority of broader experience can easily be recognized, and recommendations and advice accepted by a child or adolescent without resistance. Apart from these considerations, though, we must recognize the need of the child, particularly the child possessed of a creative imagination, for developing independence, and not seek to defend ourselves against all of the turbulence of that independence. This does not necessarily mean we should offer drivers' licenses freely to young teen-agers, but it does suggest that restriction upon entertainment and rules about bedtimes, however logical, should not have a focus in political authority. Driving a car and going to bed are entirely different things, the one directly involving property of others, the second involving freedom of choice in the home.

A recent article in *Mental Hygiene* (January, 1952), by Dr. Katharine Banham of Duke University, indicates the many layers of complexity which surround irregularities of youthful behavior:

The little two-year-old who develops a marked tendency to obstinate behavior may be one who is socially sensitive, attached to the people who care for him and suggestible to their desires and wishes. Such a child is often a model of "good behavior" for a while. He does what he is asked to do, learns quickly or persists conscientiously in trying to do the things that are required of him. This desire to conform or comply with the requests and wishes of others may reach the strength of a compulsion, and sooner or later the child may find himself pressed into doing things to please others that cause extreme discomfort and possible humiliation to himself. It is then that he becomes stubborn. His behavior may take a negative turn and he does the opposite of what he is asked to do. It may take the form of open rebellion and outbursts of temper, or it may become generalized

inactivity. A tense, inhibited child is in a state of conflict, wants to go both ways at once, and so stays still, doing neither the thing that pleases him nor what his parents want. Some contrary behavior in children may be attributed to the fact that they are hyper-suggestible. Their negativistic behavior is a defensive reaction against exploitation by those persons, usually adults, with whom the children are particularly suggestible, pliable, and amenable. The child's behavior is an attempt at adaptation of his own needs as a growing individual and the demands of the people with whom he lives and to whom he is attached.

If this is true, then obstinacy in children may be taken as evidence of growth, of adaptive behavior. The child has distinguished more than one set of demands in his little world. He is trying to respond to them, but he has not yet found an adequate solution that will satisfy all the demands. Following his own interests brings disapprobation, which is not a pleasant incentive. Complying always with the wishes of others does not necessarily satisfy his own interests. Submissive compliance becomes increasingly disagreeable as his thwarted desires grow stronger, and its incentive power diminishes. A thwarted child is in a state of suspended animation. He lacks a pleasant incentive to act. Either he does nothing or his self-interests find expression in the form of negation of social pressures and parental demands.

What has been said of the two-year-old applies equally well to the adolescent who objects to parental regulation or has moody spells of depression or irritability. He is at a special growing point in his life span. He is approaching adulthood, with all its possible freedom of choice and action.

There is, however, an area of beneficial compromise between the extremists on both sides of the "restraint" question. Our correspondent who recommended more community restraints was careful to suggest that these be accomplished as an accompaniment of altered and improved environmental opportunities—or, rather, by making more constructive or responsible opportunities available and removing other opportunities less constructive.

Aside from the difficulty which springs to mind when we realize that some children at fourteen are much more responsible and mature than others at thirty—showing that all blanket rules are far from ideal—it is probable that many communities could

benefit by more stringent age restrictions of drivers' licenses, rights to visit night clubs, etc. Yet the method would not be applicable with equal justification to other problems. And it is often the communities with the greatest number of delinquents which show themselves psychologically unprepared for introducing restraints in any but an authoritarian manner. The authoritarian manner of indifferent parents or teachers naturally encourages blind rebelliousness among adolescents in the first place.

The very parents who allow their children freedom to run the streets at night and who are too preoccupied with their own concerns to give much attention to how the children's energies are being utilized, may be those most suspicious and authoritarian, whenever their belated attention is focussed upon a child's conduct. Perhaps it is the unhealthy admixture of arbitrary application of tyrannical means wherever the parents' interests are "crossed," with the excessive leisure of an over-rich society which contributes the most to youthful disorientation.

For those not familiar with educational experiments in *complete* lack of authoritarian control we recommend two books issued by the Hermitage Press of New York in: 1949, both reviewed in this column some years ago. The first, *The Problem Family*, is by A. S. Neill of the Summerhill School of England; the second, *Talks to Parents and Teachers*, is a collection of essays by Homer Lane. These educators would insist that the only cure for emotional malaise in adolescents is begun by a period of *total* freedom, as an immediate "expedient" in order to allow self-discipline to begin. Our present society, in Lane's and Neill's terms, never really does allow psychological freedom, however lax its strictures in respect to adolescent responsibilities may be, because parents and teachers are typically too distraught to really face the task of education.

FRONTIERS

The Role of Liberal Ideals

DURING the past ten years or so, an increasing number of Western thinkers have been drawn to what, for lack of a better term, may be called the "spiritual point of view." This influence has emerged in various ways. Its major cause is probably the infiltrating effect of the Theosophical Movement of the nineteenth century, which supplied a vocabulary of spiritual conceptions that are independent of traditional Western theology. More broadly, there has been a gradual growing together of the cultures of Occident and Orient, with the result that Eastern metaphysics is no longer unknown to educated Westerners. Actually, the philosophical ideas of Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and Confucianism are leavening the Western mind in much the same way that Platonic philosophy permeated and awakened the mind of Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Interest in Eastern metaphysics is also reaching us through the theories of men like Carl G. Jung, Erich Fromm, and Joseph Campbell, and the admiration felt by liberal Christians for Gandhi has brought effective recognition of the depth of Eastern religious devotion. Such influences as these, taken together, have helped to make possible publication of a book like Alan Watts' *The Supreme Identity*, which is devoted to the Upanishadic idea of the One Self, in which all beings participate. Mr. Watts' volume is not an inspiring one, being rather heavily theological in its exposition, yet the fact that such a book appears in a land where God and Man have for centuries been regarded as separate and distinct essences is itself of considerable importance.

In any event, it seems probable that the trend toward "spiritual" thinking and writing is now in its merest beginnings, and that twenty years from now such books will be the rule rather than the exception. Which brings us to our point.

The West has its own philosophical tradition—not a spiritual tradition—but a tradition which may be said to have spiritual implications. It is the *liberal* tradition, born of the Renaissance, and transformed by the French, American, and Industrial Revolutions. The themes of the liberal tradition began as affirmations about the nature of man, but in the course of Western history they became affirmations about the nature of the Good Society. Eventually, the original ideas about the nature of man tended to be subordinated and laid aside, liberals giving their attention to defining and producing the Good Society.—For those who accepted this trend, Society became in effect the creator of the Good Man, instead of good men being the creators of the Good Society. It was only a short step from this deification of Society to the deification of the State, and the granting of supreme authority to the State as the source of all Good.

The liberals who resisted this trend are today in the difficult situation of being without a dynamic credo, and for this reason, perhaps, some of them are turning to religious or "spiritual" ideas in the hope of finding a new inspiration. (While other causes, doubtless, have contributed to these transitions, the foregoing, we think, notes factors of major importance.)

Question: Can the infusion of "spiritual" concepts from the East, and from revived and "purified" Christian mysticism, give new life to Western society? Can it invigorate our weakened liberal philosophy with more profound concepts of value, and help it to change from being the credo of a mere "resistance" movement into an affirmative and fighting faith in behalf of the dignity of man?

So far, there is little evidence that anything like this may be hoped for. On the contrary, most of the tired liberals who go "mystic" seem to forget all about their old social ideals, as though they represented no more than a deviation from the true path of spiritual enlightenment. The transition, instead of being a reinforcement of

liberalism, reveals an almost monkish tendency. There are exceptions, of course, in those Christian groups which devote themselves to race relations, civil liberties, and various phases of pacifist activity, but these forms of social action seem to stem from liberal Christianity itself rather than from some form of mystical inspiration.

The fact is that Western liberalism offers ideas about the good of man which are simply not present, except in germ, in any of the traditional religions. Western liberalism, since its primary expression during the Florentine Renaissance, has increasingly given itself to defining the good life in terms of socio-political relations. Its philosophic ethic concerns the nature of man, but its working ethic concerns the Good Society. It describes the principles of self-government and attempts to establish a balance between political authority and personal freedom.

The traditional religions, even the Oriental ones, hardly touch upon these problems. Buddhism is non-political; Christianity asserts that the "Powers that be" were ordained by God and should be obeyed; Hinduism, historically, is a vast and complicated theocracy. Plato attempted to bring together the spiritual and the political, but his synthesis of these realms in the *Republic* was, we think, preponderantly symbolic in intent.

One searches these ancient religions in vain for a discussion of what we today term "social problems;" In defense of ancient spirituality, it might be argued that these teachers by-passed the political area as relatively unimportant. After all, they were concerned with *soul*-development—with a cycle of existence which reaches beyond the death of the physical body. In the case of the reincarnationist religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Platonism, and others—the social situations, as represented by caste, class, and the distribution of wealth, had always to be considered in connection with the ruling principle of *Karma*, or *Ananke*, and this was bound to alter the value judgments of philosophers convinced of the truth of these doctrines.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that the humanitarian impulse of the West produced concepts of deep moral significance. There is a genuine problem in this quest for synthesis between spiritual and social idealism. If the social idealist neglects the spiritual core of liberal philosophy, he is vulnerable to the strident appeals of the totalitarians. And if the man with spiritual inclinations allows himself to become indifferent to the issues which claim the liberal's attention, he may be accused, perhaps justly, of some kind of spiritual selfishness.

The need for this synthesis is intimated by Joseph Wood Krutch in an unusual article in the *New York Herald Tribune* for July 13. Mr. Krutch writes about the folly of seeing "communist tendencies" hidden in some of the forms of modern art and literature, going on to show that while modern expression often deserts the principles of the good life, the practice of red-baiting contemporary artists and writers has the effect of obscuring the really important issues in criticism. As he puts it:

If there is any conscious organized plot to use the arts for propaganda purposes, it is probably not a very dangerous one and certainly has had little effect. The fact does nevertheless remain that a great deal in modern art and modern literature actually is, without being specifically intended to perform that function, subtly destructive of the convictions on which the whole post-Renaissance civilization of the Western World has been based. . . .

When the hero of a novel has been deprived of free will, made the victim of an unjust society, and described as simply the product of the social or psychological forces which mold him, he has certainly been deprived of a good part of his dignity. When his life has been represented as almost wholly painful either by apocalyptic and pessimistic Existentialists or by Utopian prophets of a better world to come, then the possibility of leading a valuable life in this world has been denied almost as completely as it was denied by the pre-Renaissance doctrine of the essentially evil character of all life in time. When dreams, obsessions, perversions, and fixations are represented as the most significant features of mental experience the implication is certainly not that the realm of rationality is that in

which we can most fruitfully live. And when the plastic arts adopt either geometrical design or any form of non-objectivity as their method they are obviously rejecting the conviction that the forms of the natural world furnish the proper starting point for the work of the artistic imagination. [A Renaissance assumption, according to Mr. Krutch.] Though, in other words, one cannot take very seriously the Communist plot to use the arts, it may possibly be that Communism itself is simply one aspect of that revolt against the Renaissance to which a great deal of modern art does testify.

Modern European civilization has been, almost by necessity, skeptical and agnostic in its assumptions. We say "by necessity" for the reason that this cycle of history had the task of weaning the West of its dependence upon an irrational, oppressive, intolerant, and angrily dogmatic religion. Because of this burden borne by the West, the Renaissance ideals became *absolutely crucial* as the only possible means of keeping alive spiritual ideas during a period of almost complete unbelief—unbelief, theologically and metaphysically speaking. The Renaissance affirmations of the Dignity of Man, of the worth of earthly life, of the importance of Reason, and of reverence for Nature were, and are, we may say, functional or operational versions of spiritual concepts which the ancient religions—the philosophical religions—expressed in other terms.

It follows, then, that if the liberal movement is to recover its original spirit, it will have to return to its original inspiration. This does not mean a shot-gun marriage between liberalism and modern mysticism, nor even an imitation of the Renaissance "greats," but, means, rather, a rediscovery of the spiritual origins of the Humanist credo. The impotence of the modern liberal lies in his lack of first principles; at any rate, the principles he has today do not tell him very clearly what to do.