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EUROPEAN INSPIRATION

AT rare intervals, books are written which seem to justify the use of the word "perfect," for every "perfection" is a relative thing—relative to a set of conditions under which the perfection is achieved. For example, a kind of perfection, we think, attaches to Ortega y Gasset's work, *The Revolt of the Masses*, first published in English by Norton in 1932. "Perfection," here, is not an extravagant word, for Ortega seems to embody in this book a comprehensive penetration of the issues and problems of the authoritarian and regimented society of today. Ortega accomplished a work of prophecy and completion with the materials at hand, and if this is not perfection, it will serve until some more blinding example comes along. But this is precisely the point: a "blinding" perfection is of no use to anyone. It vanquishes the mind instead of enlarging it.

Today, after hundreds of years of indoctrination in ideologies and programs, we are, or ought to be, tired of conquests of the mind. We want a kindly light, and a kindly light we can make our own—not a sudden, hypnotic illumination. Another work embodying this relative sort of perfection is, we think, W. Macneile Dixon's *The Human Situation*, issued by Longmans in 1938. Here, again, one finds a complete absence of the proselytizer's zeal. Mr. Dixon, like Ortega, trusts to the truth he has discovered to persuade the reader. "Conversion," to both, is an alien process, a betrayal of the mind. Ortega concerns himself with history; Dixon with metaphysics and the immortality of the soul; yet the conclusions of both, while not the same, bespeak a harmony on essential questions. Both are devoted to man's understanding of himself, and both respect the same moral qualities in the human being.

We have a theory about such men and their "perfections." It is that they represent the final flowering of European civilization. With a maturity not to be discovered in anything published on the American side of the Atlantic, they seem to sum the distinctive genius of the European—of the Man of the Renaissance. The values precious to Europe—for which men lived and died as martyrs—animate these books, not as slogans but as verities organic to the entirety of their content. Such works, we think, are the really lasting monuments to European culture.

We have now to add another volume expressive of the genius of Europe *The Need for Roots*, by Simone Weil. In this book, the author seems to provide a synthesis of all the important values of both the religious and the revolutionary thought of Europe. Hers is an acute European—and acutely French—intelligence, combined with an austere devotion to the oppressed classes that leaves the reader in awe of her moral stature.

Who is—was—Simone Weil? Alfred Kazin, in the *New Yorker* for July 5, puts it simply:

> . . . Simone Weil . . . was a frail, awkward, and bookish young lycée teacher with a peculiar need to share the most arduous and painful experiences of her generation; she... injured her health working in the Renault factory and as an agricultural laborer and by fighting with the Spanish Republican Army during the Civil War. She was also Jewish and looked it, which would instantly have condemned her if she had been caught by the Germans.

Working with the Free French in London in 1942, she was asked to write a memorandum on the regeneration of France. The result was *The Need for Roots.* She died soon after completing it, at the age of thirty-three. Although then in England, she would eat no more than the official ration allowed to the French under the German occupation, and this resolve, together with exhaustion and tuberculosis, took her life. Apparently, Simone Weil was the sort of person

who required something more than physical nourishment and material support to stay alive.

Her book is the vivid work of a moralist who has tried to practice what she preaches. When she speaks of the needs of the working classes and of the peasants of France, the fact that she has labored beside them in factory and field lights up her sentences. Critics may call her "difficult, violent, and complex," but we do not find her so. Instead, she seems to resolve the contradictions of European culture by seeking out the original inspiration of every custom and tradition, in order to restore it to view.

The idea of being "Christian" acquires a notable dignity at the hands of Miss Weil, whose religion is philosophical and intuitive. Inasmuch as both Catholic and Anglican spokesmen have given evidence of claiming Simone Weil as a Christian apologist, a passage of her views of Christian history may be quoted:

> On the plane of events, the notion of conformity to the will of God is identical with the notion of reality.
>
> On the plane of good and evil, there may or may not be conformity to the will of God, depending upon the relationship to good and evil. Faith in Providence consists in being certain that the universe in its totality is in conformity to the will of God not only in the first sense, but also in the second; that is to say, that in this universe good outweighs evil. Here it can only be a question of the universe in its totality, for in its individual aspects there is, unfortunately, no room for doubting that evil is present. Thus the object of this certitude is an eternal and universal dispensation constituting the foundation of an invariable order in the world. Divine Providence is never represented in any other form, unless I am mistaken, either in the sacred texts of the Chinese, the Indians, and the Greeks, or in the gospels.
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> But when the Christian religion was officially adopted by the Roman Empire, the impersonal aspect of God was thrust into the background. God was turned into a counterpart of the Emperor. The operation was rendered easy by the Judaic element in Christianity, of which the latter, owing to its historical origin, had been unable to purge itself. In the texts dating from before the exile, Jehovah's juridical relationship to the Hebrews is that of a master to his slaves. They had been Pharaoh's slaves; Jehovah, having taken them out of the Pharaoh's hands, has succeeded to Pharaoh's rights. They are his property, and he rules them just as any ordinary man rules his slaves, except that he disposes of a wider range of rewards and punishments. He orders them indifferently to do good or evil, but far more often evil, and in either case they have to obey. It matters little that they should be made to obey from the basest motives, provided the orders are duly executed.
>
> Such a conception as this was exactly on a par with the feelings and intelligence of the Romans. With them slavery had undermined and degraded all human relations. . . .

Simone Weil's disapproval of the Romans appears throughout the book. Her judgments are perhaps harsh, but they arise from criticism of acts and attitudes which she finds characteristic of the Romans—not from any hate of "Romanness." Her book, in short, has an impersonal ground, and if the reader happens to disagree with her historical judgments, he has the privilege and obligation of regarding instead the principle she seeks to illustrate from history.

The book has three sections: "The Needs of the Soul"; "Uprootedness"; and "The Growing of Roots." Throughout these sections, one can find continuity of theme for nearly every social theory, reform and revolutionary doctrine in world history, but no ideological ardor. It is the actual moral content of historical ideas and relationships which engrosses Simone Weil. The insights of Marx, and even of Hitler, along with the concept of authority and legitimacy in medieval Spain, are found to be useful. Here is a book, moreover, which abandons all defeatism. It is as though two centuries of failure in applying revolutionary reforms are not to be regarded as proof that reforms cannot be accomplished. It may be argued by some that Simone Weil exhibits too great a faith in the State as the instrument of reform. It *is* true that she invites the State to assume high moral responsibility; but she demands no more than Plato, whom she greatly admires,

demanded of his guardians and philosopher-kings. Here, perhaps, *is* a weakness of her thinking; but the book is so much more than a "program"—it is a thrilling incitement to virtue that this weakness may be regarded as easily overcome, provided that the society she proposes could be populated by the sort of individuals she envisions.

What emerges, finally, from *The Need for Roots is* a sense of archaic nobility and devotion to moral values which, save for the genius of the author, would seem anachronisms in this age of easy compromise. One by one, the false pieties of the day are challenged. Discussing the need of the soul for honor, she says:

> All oppression creates a famine in regard to the need for honor, for the noble traditions possessed by those suffering oppression go unrecognized, through lack of social prestige.
>
> Conquest always has that effect. Vercingetorix was no hero to the Romans. Had France been conquered by the English in the fifteenth century, Joan of Arc would be well and truly forgotten, even to a great extent by us. We now talk about her to the Annamites and Arabs; but they know very well that here in France we don't allow their heroes and saints to be talked about; therefore the state in which we keep them is an affront to their honor.

Such things, to Simone Weil, are *crimes*, most intolerable of all when committed by peoples who pretend to be civilized.

Like Plato, Simone Weil would prosecute corrupters of the truth. The intellectual or writer who is irresponsible with either facts or ideas would have to answer for *his* behavior before a special tribunal charged with protecting the populace against literary misrepresentation:

> For example, a lover of ancient Greece, reading in one of Maritain's books, "The greatest thinkers of antiquity had not thought of condemning slavery," would indict Maritain before one of these tribunals. He would take along with him the only important reference to slavery that has come down to us—the one from Aristotle. He would invite the judges to read the sentence, "Some people assert that slavery is absolutely contrary to nature and reason." He would observe that there is nothing to make us suppose these particular "people" were not among the greatest thinkers of antiquity. The court would censure Maritain for having published—when it was so easy for him to avoid falling into such a mistake—a false assertion, and one constituting, however unintentionally, an outrageous calumny against an entire civilization. All the daily papers, weeklies, and others; all the reviews and the radio would be obliged to bring the court's censure to the notice of the public, and, if need be, Maritain's answer. In this particular case, it seems most unlikely there could be one.

For those who will make the obvious comment, Simone Weil has this answer:

> But, it will be objected, how can we guarantee the impartiality of the judges? The only guarantee, apart from that of their complete independence, is that they should be drawn from very different social circles; be naturally gifted with a wide, clear, and exact intelligence and be trained in a school where they receive not just a legal education, but above all a spiritual one, and only secondarily an intellectual one. They must become accustomed to love truth.
>
> There is no possible chance of satisfying a people's need of truth, unless men can be found for this purpose who love truth.

When a writer has no fear of making such declarations, why should we concern ourselves with the "practicality" of the political devices which are used to convey his ideas?

In her design for an improved European society, Simone Weil's objective is to restore the moral content of the working man's relation to his work. Her first step would be to abolish all large factories, and, probably, to dissolve all stock companies. Production would be decentralized, divided among small proprietorships and central assembly shops. The plan is not worked out in detail, but is obviously conceived in response to the needs of human beings. One end to be accomplished would be to relieve the workman of having to think about "money." That men should have to work for money, instead of to produce useful articles, is to Simone Weil a degrading evil. Concluding, she says:

> At all events, such a form of social existence would be neither capitalist nor socialist. It would put an end to the proletarian condition, whereas what is

called Socialism tends, in fact, to force everybody without distinction into that condition.

Its goal would be, not, according to the expression now inclined to become popular, the interest of the consumer—such an interest can only be a grossly material one—but Man's dignity in his work, which is a value of a spiritual order.

The difficulty about such a conception is that there is no possible chance of its emerging from the domain of theory unless a certain number of men can be found who are fired by a burning and unquenchable resolve to make it a reality. It is not at all certain that such men can be found or called into being.

Yet, otherwise, it really seems the only choice left is one between different, and almost equally abominable, forms of wretchedness.

It would be possible to go on for pages, quoting, at random, passages of this sort. How Simone Weil could accumulate such a profound understanding of her native Europe by the time she was thirty-three is, for us, a major historical mystery. It is as though, unlike most of her contemporaries, she could at any time repeat with perfect honesty the formula from the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, "I have never turned a deaf ear to just and true words"; and, having this quality of mind, she learned far more rapidly from life than the rest of us have done. Her own comment on the Egyptian principle is this:

> . . . in international affairs, every one regards it as a sacred duty to turn a deaf ear to just and true words, if they go contrary to the interests of France. Or else, do we admit that words contrary to the interests of France can never be just and true ones? That would come to exactly the same thing. .... Regard for others, recognition of one's own faults, modesty, the voluntary limitation of one's desires—all are now turned into so many crimes, so many sacrileges.

A word, perhaps, should be said of Mr. T. S. Eliot, who writes the Preface. It is to the poet's credit that he invites the book's readers to expose themselves "to the personality of a woman of genius." The artist in Eliot, doubtless, recognizes her genius. But it must be his hope of religious security in the Church of England which makes him warn the reader against Simone Weil's "extravagances" or inaccuracies concerning matters which, so far as we can see, she deals with at her best. He finds it odd that she admires the Druids, whom the Romans put to the sword, and he wonders if the Albigensians, slaughtered at the order of Innocent III, had not reached the end of their cultural "productivity." He suspects also her attraction to the "wisdom of the East"—could she, after all, "read Sanskrit in the original"? We do not know, and care less. For here is a human spirit which alights with patience only where freedom has sent down roots. A love of man and an intolerance of wrong, wherever found—these are the hallmarks of the only *catholic* religion that exists, and these are the qualities which shaped the religion of Simone Weil.

Letter from **INDIA**

SURAT.—"This frail man alone is achieving, today, with non-violence, what the military might of the Government was unable to achieve with force." Thus said Nehru, Prime Minister of India, in a speech delivered earlier this year before the Indian Parliament. He was paying a tribute to Vinoba Bhave, who was trying to bring peace to the "communist-affected," panic-stricken Hyderabad by a nonviolent method, walking unarmed, unguarded, from village to village spinning, praying and preaching non-violence.

I write with some hesitation this sketch of a personality for MANAS, which in its every issue proclaims its "wishes to present ideas and viewpoints, not personalities." I venture to do so because this personality represents today an idea, the idea of non-violence and love. He is trying to breach by his deeds the gulf between the poor and the rich in India—between the teeming millions of Indian tillers and the princely landlords—by a method which has never been tried before in history, not even by his great master—Gandhi. He is appealing to the conscience of all those who have land to donate some piece of land for those who are landless. "With folded hands," he says, "I entreat you to fulfil my mission. I do not ask land for myself. Those on whose behalf I come to demand are mute and cannot express their minds. I wish my words to touch your hearts straight as the Ramaban (the arrow of Rama). My object is to transform the whole society. The world has already seen two great wars and a third threatens to be in the making. India does not want to follow the world. She wants to show the path courageously. Let us therefore with heart within and God overhead fulfil our mission."

And lo! He is almost working miracles. From a people well known for its attachment to land, thousands of acres of land are pouring in for distribution amongst the poorest of the poor.

The distribution of land in India today is one of her toughest problems. Eighty per cent of India lives on agriculture. An overwhelming majority of these people are landless labourers. Some state governments have tried to solve this problem by legislation, but with very little success. There is a constant endeavour from certain elements to create dissatisfaction among the labourers. But this does not help, because they have nothing constructive to suggest to them. Vinoba is trying another way out. He wants the landlords to part with their land voluntarily and he is successful wherever he goes. In Hyderabad he got 15,000 acres and is daily receiving telegrams begging him to honour the landlord by receiving some land-gifts. In the North tour, Vinoba received many thousands of acres. The movement is steadily gaining momentum. Vinoba has thought of collecting fifty million acres, amounting to one sixth of all the culturable land of India. The goal is still very distant, but he is creating an atmosphere which is unique. It may soon come to about a thousand acres a day! And an acre means decent living for one person in India.

Vinoba, like Gandhi, has a firm faith in the goodness of man. He believes that no man is completely evil. The good virtues in him can be awakened by an appeal to his conscience. The daily land gifts from those who were unwilling to part with an inch of their land is a definite proof of this belief. It cannot be said that Vinoba is successful because of his popularity. Nobody but a few friends knew him some years back. He was working quietly in a village for more than a score of years, trying to live more simply than the poorest villager. From this life amongst the poorest he found his faith, the faith that India had not lost her soul. She obtained her independence by non-violence, she could as well gain her peace and prosperity by non-violence. It is this firm belief in non-violence that is working miracles for him.

INDIAN CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
LO, THE POOR WHITE MAN

Two fairly settled stereotypes of opinion about the American Indian are by this time familiar to most of us. The first of these, now fortunately receding from importance, cast the "treacherous savage" as villain in frontier melodramas and, even today, a certain number of Class D motion pictures revolve around "red varmints," serving to remind us how nearly universal an interpretation this sort of portrayal used to be. Another and opposite stereotype has been created by some busy pacifists who, as self-appointed scourges of the American conscience, have insistently reminded anyone who would listen, "Look what this country did to the Indians!" This reproach has become so familiar a super-plea for tolerance in regard to the brutality of other nations that, as with most clichés, it is now usually disregarded.

Behind this second stereotype comparing the noble Indian with the scheming, selfish white man, however, are concealed some important psychological truths which increasingly come to light through the efforts of sociological historians. One of the most fascinating articles we have encountered for a long time—and the word "fascinating" is used deliberately—appears in the *American Scholar* (Spring, 1952) under the heading, "Americanizing the White Man." The author, Felix S. Cohen, has been both a scholarly and practical student of Indian history. As an attorney, he was responsible for winning the right of the Indians to vote in all those Western states where the franchise had previously been denied them. Now a visiting professor in the Department of Philosophy at New York's City College, and also serving the Yale law school, Cohen's studies of Indian laws and treaties are listed as "standard reference works."

Mr. Cohen's article in the *American Scholar* has an even more constructive orientation than that of seeking proof that Americans have characteristically acted like blackguards in their treatment of Indians. He is less concerned with our wrongdoing than with our ignorance—a still monumental ignorance of the many superiorities of Indian culture to our own:

> Only a few scholars know that the changes wrought in white life by Indian teachers are far more impressive—even if we measure them by the white man's dollar yardstick—than any changes white teachers have yet brought to Indian life. How many white farmers know that four-sevenths of our national farm produce is of plants domesticated or created by Indian botanists of pre-Columbian times? Take from the agriculture of the New World the great Indian gifts of corn, tobacco, white and sweet potatoes, beans, peanuts, tomatoes, pumpkins, chocolate, American cotton, and rubber, and American life would lose more than half its color and joy as well as more than half its agricultural income. Without these gifts to American agriculture, we might still be back at the level of permanent semi-starvation that kept Europeans for thousands of years ever-ready to sell their freedom for crusts of bread and royal circuses. And if we lost not only the Indian's material gifts, but the gifts of the Indian's spirit as well, perhaps we should be just as willing as Europeans have been to accept crusts of bread and royal circuses for the surrender of our freedom. For it is out of a rich Indian democratic tradition that the distinctive political ideals of American life emerged. Universal suffrage for women as well as for men, the pattern of states within a state that we call federalism, the habit of treating chiefs as servants of the people instead of as their masters, the insistence that the community must respect the diversity of men and the diversity of their dreams—all these things were part of the American way of life before Columbus landed.

The American tradition avows equal respect to diversified religions and philosophies. Mr. Cohen wants Americans to live up to this ideal. Many refinements of the Indian way of thinking and living, he shows, have thus far been almost totally ignored, and even when imitated, are borrowed without appreciation of their source. Cohen produces a wealth of provocative material from historical sources to illustrate the extent to which Indians have been unrecognized instructors and benefactors of the white men for hundreds of years. The following quotation from the writings

of Thomas Jefferson indicates how easy it was for a man of open mind to adopt a learner's role:

> Crimes are very rare among them (the Indians of Virginia); so much that were it made a question, whether no law, as among the savage Americans, or too much law, as among the civilized Europeans, submits man to the greatest evil, one who has seen both conditions of existence would pronounce it to be the last; and that the sheep are happier of themselves, than under the care of the wolves. It will be said, that great societies cannot exist without government. The savages, therefore, break them into small ones.

Those who are devoted to the principle of decentralization will here begin to sense the type of revaluation of American history which Mr. Cohen's article can inspire. Nor was the Indian tradition of decentralization simply blind custom. The value in confederation was fully appreciated by some of the first great Chieftains encountered by the whites. One instance of this is recorded in the form of a speech made to the American Colonies Council of Lancaster in 1744, by the great Iroquois, Canasatego. Canasatego advised the Colonial Governors:

> Our Wise Forefathers established Union and Amity between the Five Nations. This has made us formidable; this has given us great Weight and Authority with our neighboring Nations. We are a powerful Confederacy; and *by your observing the same Methods our Wise Forefathers have taken, you will acquire such Strength and Power. Therefore whatever befalls you, never fall out with one another.*

The advice of Canasatego was obviously approved, for Benjamin Franklin chided the Albany Congress of 1754 by saying that "if Six Nations of ignorant savages should be capable of forming a scheme for such an union and be able to execute it in such a manner that it has subsisted ages and appears indissoluble, and yet that a like union should be impracticable for ten or a dozen English Colonies" some question might logically arise as to just who are the most ignorant—Indians or English.

Certain it is that the Indians, of whatever tribe, displayed a universal distrust for authoritarian measures. The tribal Council was a working democracy, the Chief being regarded as a servant of the people, weighted with grave responsibilities. Again and again, in imitation of the authoritarian methods of Europe, Americans have complained about the refusal of the Chiefs of most Indian tribes to make decisions for their people, but their honorable custom of referring decisions to their people has nonetheless persisted in a manner not dissimilar to that of the Quaker meeting, wherein unanimous agreement is sought. "This characteristic of Indian leadership," writes Cohen, has not only been "a sustaining strength in Indian democracy," but must also have inspired that deference to the public will which may be considered "the greatest achievement of American political leadership." Cohen thus contends that "American democracy, freedom and tolerance are more American than European and have deep aboriginal roots in our land."

If we turn from the political achievements of the Indians to their economic contributions, we are due for more edification. The historian, Prescott, said of the Incas:

> Their manifold provisions against poverty . . . were so perfect that in their wide extent of territory—much of it smitten with the curse of barrenness—no man, however humble, suffered for the want of food and clothing.

It was in fact out of America that the vision of modern Utopia came—a Utopia resting upon the "consent of the governed" and upon the principle that no man could be dispossessed of the land he used for his sustenance.

One of the most convincing arguments against the hackneyed charge that Indians are innately "cruel" grows out of Cohen's evaluation of sports. Pre-Columbian Europe was chiefly concerned with sports involving killing—hunting, falconry, and duels-to-the-death in armored jousts. Even the sport of archery was directly concerned with practice for killing. But the Indians developed many games which simply utilized a rubber ball—as was first noted by Columbus and recorded by a contemporary historian.

Concerning the spirit in which sport may be ideally conducted, Cohen sums up by saying that "the spirit of group sport and team play cultivated in pre-Columbian America still offers a peaceful outlet for combative instincts that in other lands find bloodier forms of expression."

Mr. Cohen's article is so packed with interesting material that the chief function of a brief review should be to encourage its careful reading, and to note that much of what Mr. Cohen says is amplified by the observations of other students. Will Levington Comfort, for one, in his history of Mangus Colorado, Chief of the Apaches, points out that however cruel the Apaches were in war, a sense of honor almost invariably burned in these fierce tribesmen—and burned in them much more brightly than among the representatives of "civilized" government. Treaties with the Apaches were broken again and again, and ancient customs of the tribe interfered with, contrary to promises. Mangus Colorado once spoke of this in wonderment, failing to comprehend why the white man (known to the Apaches by the word of the new language most frequently employed—"Los Go-dammies") could not respect other men's visions and customs:

> You came to our country. You were well received. Your lives, your property, your animals were safe. You passed by ones, by twos, by threes through our country. You went and came in peace. Your strayed animals were always brought home to you again. Our women and children came here and visited your houses. We were friends—we were brothers!

In *The Flame of Time*, Baynard Kendrick, author of *Lights Out*, describes the customs of the Seminole Indians of Florida. What he says, particularly in respect to psychological self-discipline, belongs with other recommendations for the "Americanization of the white man":

> Apparently, the Seminoles never asked questions or indulged in gossip of any kind. So long as you behaved yourself, you were judged by your actions, and your actions consisted of what you wanted to do.

There were many other facts of Seminole life that Artillery was unconsciously soaking in. Violence and temper were lacking among the Indians. Since his arrival, he had never seen a baby slapped, a boy or girl whipped, or even spoken to harshly. Nor were animals mistreated, for horses and cattle were carefully tended, and the yapping pack of mongrel dogs which slept and scratched all over the square were always fed and never beaten.

Cheti Haiola's village was free of fear as it was free of overwork and drudgery. It was easy to get food in the surrounding woods and lakes, and all food went into the common pot, and there was plenty for everyone. In McKetch's camp, there was an overtone of fear, sentries posted and the cannon ever ready against the Spanish dragoons. The families were constantly talking of close escapes from imprisonment and jail.

Artillery discussed it with Hasse Micco, who showed surprise.

"Here we have no jail because there is nothing to steal. Should one take from another that which can be caught in the net, grown in the field, or shot on the trail?"

"I suppose not," Artillery agreed, "but I never hear any of the warriors quarreling about women either."

"Those who quarrel say their own tongue lies, and that they do not trust themselves," said Hasse Micco. "Our storehouse is full. It is used to feed the members of other tribes who may visit us, or for the feeding of our warriors, should the women decide we must go to war."

"'You mean your women decide when you go to war?"

"Do not yours?" Again Hasse Micco's dark eyes expressed surprise. "A man can meet but death in battle, and like my father, he is gone, and when he is gone the woman's toil is doubled forever, and the mourning is hers, and the sorrow. The temper of a warrior is great, and in many things, which talk might cure, he can see a fighting wrong. So the women must decide and weigh. They know better of the life and hardships that must be faced when the warriors are gone."

COMMENTARY
THE DREAM OF SYNTHESIS

A BOOK like Simone Weil's *The Need for Roots* could easily become the basis for a new theory of history, or serve, at least, as provocation for new comparisons of the present with the past. In our time, it seems almost a law that books which embody affirmative moral intelligence should be at odds with the customs and institutions of the day. Moral intelligence, in other words, is of necessity revolutionary intelligence.

Since, in other epochs, this has not always been the case, there is the question: Why, in some ages, are the creative spirits the builders of human society, while in other ages they are rebels against the established order? A particularly interesting thing about Simone Weil's book is the way in which the writer acknowledges, directly or indirectly, the moral values in past institutions. In one place, for example, she proposes that punishment for offences against society should be imposed according to the moral responsibility of the offender. This is a very ancient idea, reaching back thousands of years to the practice of the ancient Hindu administrators who applied the ordinances of Manu. The high-caste Brahman who violated the law was subject to much more severe penalties than the Sudra, who was not supposed to enjoy the Brahman's fine perception of the difference between right and wrong action.

Simone Weil's appreciation of the genius of ancient institutions makes one wonder if those past forms of government can ever be restored—or if anyone should attempt to restore them. Conceivably, we need to recover the vision which formulated the legal codes of the distant past, and to do this, not in preparation for another cycle of tightly organized, hierarchical society, but in order to root in our minds a feeling of the great need for a more organic society, although one born from inner disciplines instead of outward, legal restraints and sanctions.

The intensity of Simone Weil's moral perceptions made her at once a free individualist and a visionary of social organization. This combination has often seemed a contradiction in terms, and, even while reading her book, the practical synthesis of these two extremes in a social order seems difficult to imagine. Yet inspiration for a synthesis of this kind is strongly present in *The Need for Roots,* and from such inspiration may arise the invention that is needed to make dreams come true.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

DAVID DE JONG'S peculiar book, *The Desperate Children* (Doubleday, 1949), suggests a train of thought worth pursuing. Reviewing such a book, however, need not imply entire agreement with the author's perspective, nor urge it on all parents and teachers. While we have doubts about the book's over-all worth, and further doubts about the termination of its plot, Mr. de Jong at least reminds us that the lives of children are often preoccupied with symbol and fancy. Of this, we are sure, we all often need to be reminded. The analytical approach to "child-psychology" has been of inestimable benefit to teachers and parents, yet the individual child will always escape classification.

Whatever of depth and sensitivity a mature person enjoys is derived largely from the quality of imaginative power allowed and encouraged to develop in him before adolescence. Mr. de Jong's heroine is an "old maid" school teacher who captures the love of her pupils because she shares her imaginings with them, and participates in theirs. Miss Tumolcy is dishevelled, consumptive, and sixty-odd, but she possesses that priceless capacity often spoken of in these columns—she never forgets how to be a child herself.

The title, *The Desperate Children*, is excellent, for it indicates the predicament of the many children who live "in the agonizingly cruel no-man's land that lies between childhood and the complexity of the adult world." Such children need allies to help them bridge the gap, by showing that it is possible to be tolerant of the rigidities of the adult world without losing one's own secret, inner life. An English philosopher used to insist that some of the subtlest truths known to man are best expressed by "metaphor and figurative expression." Unfortunately, both religiously and scientifically oriented education tend to destroy one's capacity for appreciation of symbols and metaphor. Authoritarian religion accomplishes this result by imposing puritanical moral judgments, while "scientific child psychology" does it by oversimplified classifications of "behavior disorders." Since the child is neither a behavior disorder nor a moral category, but rather an unpredictable individual whose values remain largely esoteric even to his parents, the gap between the generations may be widened through either influence. We are still told what to do *with* children rather than how to understand them, even though it is verbally recognized that the latter accomplishment would be much more desirable.

Miss Tumolcy is "wonderfully crazy," often turning upside down the conventional methods of approach to grave issues. Take for instance the subject of Death, one of the many solemn subjects which she approaches from a new direction whenever she has the time and can escape surveillance. Death is a solemn and somber thing, best kept from the attention of children, we think? But can we be sure? The child's imaginings may not need to be restricted to the "pretty" subjects, and why should there not be an innate capacity to view Death as but another aspect of life? Miss Tumolcy proceeds in this fashion:

> "We are now started on the lesson on Death I promised you. For we took care of angels yesterday." She winked at the farm boy, who looked away.
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> Then she had said things like: "Death is all around us, near us, in us, stationed everywhere along your arteries and veins, or galloping like a flock of minute rabbits through all the confluences of your kidneys. The ventricle and auricle are as nothing to it, no more than a pumping station is to an atom bomb. On the whole, however, he is a gentleman, Death is. And we are so close to him all the time that we may as well play ring-around-the-rosy with him. Children, rise and hold hands, girls with boys, if the latter's hands are washed. We are now playing with Death in the most nonchalant fashion in the rule book. Imagine yourself in erstwhile Europe with bombs bursting. That'll do it. One must have the time in one's veins and be objective withal. . . ." But because his own mind and imagination had far outraced her, she pounced on him again, this time

demanding: "Spell and define that salient word, objective, Sebastian"

It is possible that the foregoing passage will seem mere froth to many readers, but surely retrospection will reveal to most of us that "eccentrics" have often been the best friends of our children at critical stages of their early life. When Miss Tumolcy spoke thus, she was moved by both instinct and a kind of transcendental purpose:

> Orrin sat listening to Miss Tumolcy completely; to Miss Tumolcy talking about June and its splendid sun, and then accidentally about parting again. Accidentally and not incidentally, even though she wanted them all to realize that parting, perhaps him and Orrin especially. She seemed bemused with it, her eyes on her half-raised hands, which were gesturing as if to pull on tight-fitting gloves. "Some of you," she said, "at least two of you, this past year have learned about personal injustice, about unreasonable adult spite—which, even so, must be forgiven in the best and most secret rooms of your being, and then relegated and reduced to its proper dimensions. . . " She was talking intentionally away above their heads, so that they'd go and reach, perhaps among Orrin's impossible angels.
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> "The need to replenish oneself, again and again, once you've tasted a little of the joy of so doing," Miss Tumolcy was saying urgently, "the need to see that life is palpably great, yet so unsolved, yet so beautiful, that you can't afford to forgo and forget any of it. Some of you will have felt an inkling, because it is only an inkling you can assimilate at one time, on tall occasions, or rare occasions, on unsuspected, unprepared-for rare days. . . ."

The contrast to the wonderful Miss Tumolcy is the starched and straight-laced Principal who can't get along without the aging teacher, yet personally abhors everything about her "undisciplined" manner. How easy it is, though, for "conscientious" parents, teachers, and Principals to delude themselves into thinking that they are serving the interests of children so long as they deal scrupulously with categories of behavior. There are various ways of talking over children's heads and only the sort native to Miss Tumolcy is permissible—permissible because embodying affirmation. Miss Stroock, the Principal, did a great deal of thinking about such important words as "love" and "responsibility," but her thinking is always routine, making her a stranger in the midst of her children. The following, we think, is a not unsympathetic description of one who has lost touch with the young:

> In the precise reception room of her being something seemed to be standing or hanging awry; some drawer was not quite closed, some picture was tilted, somewhere dust seemed to be eddying. Occasionally a haze seemed to drift across it, fumes from something nether, not by any means to be hallowed, though perhaps not quite to be battled. Somewhere she might have become slack in obedience to herself and her own carefully nurtured mores. Whatever it was, it seemed to remain undefinable and elusive. Duty, love, justice, responsibility . . . The labels caromed through her head; she flipped a mental index finger over them. But all she managed to do in the process was to feel hard, troubled, and harried, with a confusion of anger and justification. Where then, and how.
>
> She placed a firm smile on her face to make her mind behave.

FRONTIERS

Maturity In Religion

ORDINARILY, we don't like people who make light of the things we believe in. A sneering or bitter disposition of matters on which we set great store is usually painful to us—unless, of course, we have the maturity to be immune to such attacks; and, when this is the case, our beliefs or convictions are likely to be philosophically based and invulnerable to sneers.

There is the possibility, however, that the humiliation we feel, when we can be made to feel it, is a far more important reality than the beliefs we hold. Conceivably, this emotional reaction to criticism is the best possible evidence that there is something wrong with our beliefs—on the hypothesis that beliefs ought to make us feel strong, instead of weak or "defenseless"; so that we might even be grateful to the man who is able to produce this reaction in us. Anyone who can embarrass us, make us cringe, or feel "inadequate" is a friend, whether intentionally or not, who helps us to see where we have some further work to do upon ourselves.

The foregoing reflections were prompted by a Danish reporter's contribution to a department in the *United Nations World* for August. Journalists of various countries were asked: "What is the significance of the trend in European politics from religious to labor parties?" Among the several replies, that of Peter Freuchen, of *Politiken* (Copenhagen), is so distinguished by what might be termed a "cynical" view of religion—of organized religion in particular—that one is led to speculate about the reactions of those to whom the church means a great deal. After disposing of the question with respect to Denmark, Freuchen observes:

> In other countries, it is obvious that religion has cashed in in many cases, when the minds were softened down by war or poverty. This will always be the smart Christian church's good opportunity to harvest a crop. But when times grow more "normal" (whatever that may be!) people are less and less frightened and they will turn away from the church. I know of no *religious* party in Europe that is not harbored by the *churches.* And as the tendency in every land will be toward labor because socialistic ideas progress with the desire for a fuller life in heavily populated countries, the "trend" to labor from religion cannot be said to be the result of propaganda.
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> During the war it was expected that a wave of conservatism and religion would grow; and it did. I always heard from all sides in the war that "God was on their side." "God send them a blessed victory!" so the churches were filled with people to thank Him. Later, "God send peace," so the churches got crowded to thank Him again.
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> When people see no result from worship, they will try to go back to work and do something for themselves. That makes—in my opinion—the trend, you asked me about.

Here, in a few words, is the claim (1) that religion is opportunist (it "cashes in"); (2) that it appeals to weakened minds ("softened by war or poverty"); (3) that its hold on the people is through fear; (4) that it is the *churches* which seek to gain by entering politics, not people animated by a genuine religious spirit; (5) that religion is allied with conservatism; (6) that "God" is only a "puppet" ruler, his decisions reflecting the demands of Nationalism; and (7) that when people gain a balanced view of their affairs they desert the churches for more self-reliant credos.

While Mr. Freuchen himself evidences certain "doctrinaire" attitudes in his analysis of European politics, how will objectors who regard him as "irreverent" deal with these assertions? What he says is, generally speaking, supported by history. Any number of observers have noted how some religious organizations expand in power and authority as a result of the psychology of militarism and war. And in countries where "religious" politics has an important role, the independent thinking of the religious philosopher has practically no standing at all. Only institutionally-sponsored attitudes and statements are able to qualify as truly "religious." No one can dispute that orthodox religion seldom parts

company from the property-owning classes, while the partisanship of "God" in wartime is notorious.

But after these abuses are more or less admitted—and many Christians are quick to admit them—there is likely to remain a feeling that Peter Freuchen has neglected the heart of the matter. Underneath the shell of human imperfection, we shall be told, exists a core of spiritual verity, and it is this verity for which religion, and in some measure the churches, stand.

Suppose we can agree on this: we still have the problem of separating the shell from the core, and it is here, in respect to the need for this delicate operation, that a basic reluctance seems the sole response to strictures of the sort made by Mr. Freuchen. Actually, the question might be resolved by saying that the real issue is whether or not authentic religion would be possible without any churches at all. If a man answers that it would, then he, we think, is the sort of man who cannot be upset by critics like Freuchen.

This need not mean that there could be no religious *associations.* A church, as we understand or are presently using the term, is an institution which religious people think that they cannot do without and still remain religious. A man is dependent upon his church, while an association is a tool which self-reliant men develop to make their individual and group efforts more effective.

In the final analysis, the vulnerable man is the man who depends upon some force or power outside himself for fundamental moral support and moral decision. Such a man can always be swayed by circumstance, overthrown by doubts inspired by events, and either angered or humiliated by actions or expressions which make him conscious of this weakness in himself. Perhaps we should add, to avoid misunderstanding, that much seems to depend, here, upon the meaning of the word "self." If a man's self-confidence is based upon a petty, authoritarian notion of his own personal importance, he is likely to find that his egotism makes him as vulnerable to psychological downfall as would any other delusion.