

PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS

POLITICS has been called "the art of the possible," making a definition which has the virtue of brevity and the quality of sharp illumination which good epigrams always afford. In an article in the December *Progressive*, Judge Learned Hand, for forty-two years Chief Judge of the Second Federal Circuit Court of Appeals (he retired last year), gives profound content to this definition by quoting from a statement by Benjamin Franklin, in which this peculiarly "American" thinker explained why he supported the final draft of the Constitution of the United States. Franklin, it seems fair to say, was a philosophical statesman and politician. This is what he wrote:

"I agree to this constitution with all its faults, if they are such, because I think a general Government is necessary for us and there is no form of Government but what may be a blessing to the people if well administered, and believe further that this is likely to be well administered for a course of years, and can only end in Despotism, as other forms have done before it, when the people shall have become so corrupted as to need despotic Government, being incapable of any other. I doubt too whether any other convention we can obtain may be able to make a better constitution. For when you assemble a number of men to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably assemble with those men all their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests and their selfish views. From such an Assembly can a perfect production be expected . . . ? Thus I consent, Sir, to this constitution because I expect no better, and because I am not sure that it is not the best."

Since the golden years of the radical movement in the United States—the depression-haunted '30's—the expression, "political maturity," has been a familiar phrase. For most of those who used it, however, the politically mature person meant a person who held certain views concerning the social and economic organization of society—views which, for the most part, contended that government is and ought to be responsible for the

well-being and economic prosperity of the people. "Maturity" consisted in acknowledging this responsibility. It was a matter of belief concerning the nature of the good society.

Franklin, who seems to us to have genuine maturity, felt that the important considerations in politics were of an entirely different order. Instead of urging the infallibility of certain political doctrines, he recognized the fallibility of all political undertakings. Franklin's kind of wisdom, we might argue, makes for success in government and in self-government, while an anxious insistence on political doctrines makes for fanaticism and loss of freedom.

Judge Hand, in his *Progressive* article, endeavors to revive the practical sagacity of the Founding Fathers in respect to problems of government. First, he discusses the essential character of the first and fifth amendments to the Constitution of the United States. The first amendment establishes freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the right of the people to assemble peaceably and to petition the government for redress of grievances; the fifth amendment denies to public authority the right to deprive any man of life, liberty, or property without "due process of law." Some laws are easy to interpret, but what about these provisions of the Bill of Rights? As Judge Hand points out:

. . . the situation is quite different when we are dealing with the broad clauses on which the conduct of a free society must in the end depend. What is "freedom of speech and of the press"; what is the "establishment of religion and the free exercise thereof"; what are "unreasonable searches," "due process of law," and "equal protection of the law": all these are left wholly undefined and cannot be effectively determined without some acquaintance with what men in the past have thought and felt to be their most precious interests.

Indeed, these fundamental canons are not jural concepts at all, in the ordinary sense, and in application they turn out to be no more than admonitions of moderation, as appears from the varying and contradictory interpretations that the judges themselves find it necessary to put upon them. Nor can we leave to courts the responsibility of construing and so of enforcing them, for the powers of courts are too limited to reach the more controversial questions that arise under them.

It is the people, finally, who are responsible for the meaning of these constitutional guarantees. It is the people who must give practical definition to the Bill of Rights, by their understanding of such incommensurables as "freedom" and "unreasonable" and "equal protection." It is the people who, through their grasp of these issues, or lack of grasp of them, determine the kind and quality of laws which are allowed to become constitutional.

Laws, Judge Hand proposes, are both prophecies and choices. They are prophecies in that they attempt to forecast the results of a measure; legislators, when they pass laws, must assume at least a partial knowledge of how the measures enacted will affect the society to which they apply:

Such prophecies infest law of every sort, the more deeply as it is far reaching; and it is an illusion to suppose that there are formulas or statistics that will help in making them. They can rest upon no more than enlightened guesses, but these are likely to be successful as they are made by those whose horizons have been widened, and whose outlook has been clarified, by knowledge of what men have striven to do, and how far their hopes and fears have been realized. There is no substitute for an open mind, enriched by reading and the arts.

Laws are more than prophecies; they are also momentous choices "between the desires and values of conflicting social groups." What guide have we, beyond our own preferences, in these decisions? Judge Hand replies:

I submit that we have none except in so far as we can imaginatively project ourselves into the position of the groups between which we must choose. . . . It is not enough to be personally detached,

although that is of course a condition; we must also acquire a capacity for an informed sympathy with, and understanding of, the desires and values of others; and, I submit, only those have any chance of attaining this whose experience is supplemented by some acquaintance, the wider the better, with what others have thought and felt in circumstances as near as possible to those of the groups in question.

I dare hope that it may now begin to be clearer why I am arguing that an education which includes the "humanities" is essential to political wisdom. By "humanities" I especially mean history; but close beside history and of almost, if not quite, equal importance are letters, poetry, philosophy, the plastic arts, and music.

Most of the issues that mankind sets out to settle, it never does settle. They are not solved, because, as I have tried to say, they are incapable of solution properly speaking, being concerned with incommensurables.

A concluding counsel from Judge Hand is this:

Just as in science we cannot advance except as we take over what we inherit, so in statecraft no generation can safely start at scratch. The subject matter of science is recorded observation of the external world; the subject matter of statecraft is the Soul of Man, and of that too there are records—the records I am talking about today. The imagination can be purged and the judgment ripened only by an awareness of the slow, hesitant, wayward course of human life, its failures, its successes, but its indomitable will to endure.

We are moved by these wise words to repeat the judgment of a *Progressive* reviewer who, describing a collection of papers and addresses by Judge Hand (*The Spirit of Liberty*, Knopf, 1952), remarked in passing that the refusal of the Truman administration to appoint Judge Hand to the Supreme Court of the United States, passing him over in favor of political hacks, was one of the conspicuous failures of the Truman administration. Surely this man should have had a seat where Louis Brandeis and Benjamin Cardozo once presided, as one of the great judicial minds of our time. One is led to think, by such neglect, that lack of Franklin's kind of political maturity, coupled with growing anxiety, is slowly

eliminating any place at all in American public life for men of philosophical temper. Are we already come upon the days when we shall "*need* despotic Government, being incapable of any other"?

But where did Franklin get his wisdom—the kind of wisdom we need, today? There is, as Judge Hand says, no "formula." And, while books are important, even more important than good books is good thinking. Intensive reflection on the problems of freedom—on the sort of problems Hand says are incapable of solution because they are concerned with incommensurables—is most important of all. But when Judge Hand says these problems cannot be solved, he means, we think, that they cannot be signed, sealed, and delivered to the public by a battery of experts, nevermore to trouble us with their enigmas. It is rather that such problems represent the kind of inquiry a Persian philosopher had in mind when he said: "Truth is of two kinds—one manifest and self-evident; the other demanding incessantly new demonstrations and proofs." It is the so-called "scientific" truth which, when once established, remains "manifest and self-evident." The kind of truth we need for statecraft, for self-government, concerns the Soul of Man, "demanding incessantly new demonstrations and proofs." A writer in *Fortune* (July, 1943), discussing the needs of modern education, touched upon this point by saying: "We can probably cope with the air age more successfully by reading Swift, Cervantes, or Goethe—or even by being exposed to Dostoevski, the Bhagavad-Gita, and Lao-tze—than by confining ourselves to courses in aerodynamics."

The truths which incessantly demand "new proofs and demonstrations" are precisely the truths which we have most neglected. Some years ago, a reporter remarked to Stringfellow Barr, who for years headed St. John's College (offering education based upon the 100 Great Books), "You know the trouble with the present generation? They've never read the minutes of the previous meeting." Why should we, since we can

always hire somebody to read up on the scientific brand of truth?

This is how we have been spending our money for some years, now. We have the best technicians and we make the best atom bombs. What is a technician? Sir Richard Livingstone makes a good answer to this question: "A technician is a man who understands everything about his job except its ultimate purpose and its place in the order of the universe."

Unlike some of the advocates of classical learning, we do not suppose that the wisdom the world needs has all been written down. The minutes of the previous meeting, while important, are not the same as wisdom. No ultimate wisdom is written down, nor can be, since ultimate wisdom is the wisdom which guides human judgment in the unique instant of the present, which is the same as no other instant in time, and is an essentially private decision for each man who is trying to be wise. All that books can do is suggest that other men have found wisdom, become wise, in their day and for their time. From such books we may learn what wise men have thought important, but our important thoughts must be our own.

So, it seems to us, politics—the foundation, that is, of public and private decision in matters of the common good—is rooted in philosophy, and philosophy begins and ends with an inquiry into the nature of man. If we acknowledge this, and relinquish some of our cherished illusions concerning how the good life may be obtained, then there may be some hope for political intelligence in the United States and in the world.

Letter from **JORDAN**

AMMAN.—The American in the Middle East, unlike his compatriot who travels or visits in the so-called Western world, is required to learn an entirely new language of the understanding. He is beyond his habitual depth in a land where cleanliness and godliness—those two pylons of Western, democratic, middle-class virtues—are not only not next-door neighbors, but are in fact not even on speaking terms. He is all at sea in a land where sanitation and happiness have no visible relation, where wisdom is venerated in rags. He rapidly learns to distrust his normal reactions in a country where devils are still exorcised from the mentally ill by the traditional method of branding a cross on the scalp or by tying a victim beneath the constant slow drip of water on the unprotected head. He is astonished to realize—if, indeed, his penetration reaches this far—that Christianity has in the land of its birth become a readily-used instrument for the preservation of social position, financial status and economic privilege. (Not, of course, without some assistance from its neighbor, Islam.)

His problem is really twofold. He must, on the one hand, accomplish what in *Richer by Asia* Edmond Taylor describes as "getting inside" this other culture; he must absorb it until it becomes a natural medium for understanding. On the other hand, since Jordan is an area of turbulent conflict, he must remain sufficiently detached to maintain perspective. This is quite a trick, as only those who have attempted it may realize. Those who have failed, in Taylor's terms, to get "inside," are certainly the more numerous, and include, sadly, almost all American tourists, most of our businessmen and diplomats, and an unfortunately large segment of our missionaries. Of all these, surely the diplomats (including Point IV personnel) are the most unfortunate, since their actual and potential influence is great; whereas the most pitiful failures are the missionaries, who

remain self-consciously the possessors of the Right Way, even when that Way is so consistently rejected by its unwilling or contemptuous prospective beneficiaries. Those who are swept along on a tide of sympathy for the Arab cause are fewer, but not less erring, and the apparent hopelessness of their chosen cause frequently results in a deep, hard bitterness which quite automatically eliminates the possibility of that sympathetic understanding without which the Arab-Israeli conflict will not be settled.

For the sympathizer emotionally committed to the Arab cause cannot admit that any fault lies with the Arabs. Just oust the Jews from Palestine, he says, and all will be well. Unfortunately, this would not be the case, for the phenomena of the twentieth-century Middle East are those attendant upon the failure of a society—the Arab society—to handle the problems arising out of the conditions which have been so cataclysmically thrust upon it. That these problems derive from the cupidity and double-dealing of the Great Powers and from the frightening power of World Zionism to put across a point of view and take possession of another people's country should not obscure the fact that the Arab society has failed in the crisis, and must be rebuilt from the bottom up in order to serve its people in the modern world.

These columns are no place to argue such a thesis. Let me, however, briefly illustrate the quality of two factors which have gone far to create the present unhappy situation: first, the slightly-disguised but nonetheless effective control of the Arab world by the West and, second, an interesting point of weakness in Arab social structure.

Very shortly after arriving in Jordan, one begins to be aware of the problems of relations between controllers and controlled. I give a few of the British on the ground credit for an honest attempt to permit Jordanians, within a certain sphere, to develop their own ways of handling their own development and problems. Even so, among the responsible British group are those—a

predominant majority—who have no intention of relinquishing *de facto* control, and no faith in the ability of Jordan either to become a viable entity (abhorrent UN gobbledy-gook as the phrase may be), or even to manage its own affairs as an economic and social dependency. However, since it is difficult to give a definitive account of those attitudes, let me instead cite two existing conditions which, although seldom recognized, clearly betray the facts of the situation. (1) The cost of sending a telegram from Amman to Beirut, Lebanon (*circa* 200 miles) is J.D. .056 (56 fils or 14 cents U.S.) per word; while the cost from Amman to New York (*circa* 6000 miles) is J.D. .040 (40 fils or 10 cents U.S.) per word. Why? Jordan's only exterior telegraphic connection is via London, which in the case of a message to Beirut requires transmission over a total of perhaps 6000 miles, and then re-transmission in London. (2) The cost of inferior gasoline here is about 45 cents per imperial gallon (about 36 cents per U.S. gallon), though the oil wells are not far away and are connected with a refinery in Tripoli, Lebanon, by pipeline. Why? The price is said to be based upon the cost of shipment of crude oil to the U.S., refining there, and return of the finished product by tanker.

These may or may not be important as individual economic costs. The reasons I have adduced may or may not tell the whole story. I don't know. With MANAS (Frontiers, June 25, 1952), I believe that for the assistance an underdeveloped country needs from the West "the price *need not*" be too great to pay; but I think it must be admitted that it usually has been, and still is, unwarrantedly high. What can we do about it? How can we who are attempting private and concerned use of the instruments of "technical and social assistance," not only avoid exacting this cost, but also help to build our relations with dependent areas upon a sounder and more mutually beneficial basis?

The second question, concerning what for want of a better name I have called "social

confidence," has interested me here in the Middle East more, perhaps, than any other. The lack of confidence between man and man, family and family, village and village, seems to me a basic cause of the predominantly ineffective social relationships, at every level from the personal to the international (within the Arab world), that characterize the area. Literally, no one trusts anyone else. Trust does not normally exist even between persons thrown together in a day-to-day, continuous face-to-face relationship. I am mindful of the explanations usually given, including the historic lack of public security, the normal desert methods of roughly equalizing the available wealth through the system of raiding, the rudimentary moral doctrines of Islam, etc. But examination of these causes does not immediately reveal by what methods it may be hoped to improve the disastrous condition. How does public confidence grow? It is certainly one of the essential elements of any community. Are any methods or instruments open to us, whose influence is at best a short-term one?

What explanation can one offer, after more than a year in the Middle East, for being still in the stage of asking, rather than answering, such questions? I know some Western experts who do know the answers, after a much shorter time in the area; but their answers are Western answers, couched in Western concept and language, and as such are almost useless. We shall just have to go on trying to get inside, to learn the necessary language of understanding.

CORRESPONDENT IN JORDAN

REVIEW **SPARTACUS**

THE imagery suggested by the four years' struggle of the "Servile War" in ancient Rome—during which a gladiator named Spartacus held at bay the legions of the most powerful army the world had ever seen, with nothing save slave recruits and fellow gladiators at his side—has long thrilled all those who know the tale, whether as legend or history.

Spartacus is a symbol, still, of many things. His story, for instance, whenever told, occasions a spontaneous human outgoing of heart to the downtrodden of all ages, showing that all men have a little, at least, of that transcendent compassion for which the Buddha was honored.

The story of Spartacus awakens another kind of sympathy, too, based upon our genuine love for the man who fights courageously against great odds. Is this not perhaps because every man feels, somewhere deep within himself, that the ultimate of striving is the only striving fully worth while; that only when men give of themselves, more, actually, than they know that they have to give, they are gaining the sort of destiny for which they were born?

Other themes of aspiration awakened by the Thracian include the dream of a better social order, and the dream of a fabled Golden Age upon which Spartacus may have based his first hopes for a different society. Finally, there is the dream of freedom from oppression, which all men save oppressors can understand—and the dream of glorious death in struggle to reach that freedom. This last source of fire in the human heart was the one evoked by Elijah Kellogg's "Spartacus to the Gladiators," which used to make schoolboy declamations for our forefathers:

If ye are men, follow me! Is the old Grecian spirit frozen in your brains, that you do cower like a belabored hound beneath his master's lash? O comrades, warriors, Thracians! If we must fight, let us fight for ourselves. If we must slaughter, let it be under the clear sky, by the bright waters, in noble, honorable battle!

Howard Fast's *Spartacus*, a 1951 printing, published by Fast himself, is the book best loved by the author among all his works, perhaps for all these reasons. Readers who admire his stories will not be

disappointed with *Spartacus*, for the dignity of drama, earthy but moving, which has caused Fast to be widely read, and the slow building to a powerful series of climaxes, are alike present in this volume. One cannot discuss Howard Fast, however, without taking cognizance of the charge that he is communistically inclined. There is much, circumstantially, to support this opinion, for Fast writes always in the imagery of class-warfare, and one might surmise that *Spartacus* is his own favorite book because it allows him to imply that all class-struggles embody the same simple nobility.

So, for all we know, Fast may be a "fellow-traveller" or an orthodox Marxist—even a Stalinist—yet whether he is such or no seems essentially beside the point. Literature, either good or bad, should be judged in terms of its own intrinsic merits, and if the social observations Mr. Fast makes in *Spartacus* are to be questioned, the questioning should be solely on the ground of a tendency to oversimplify the factors of social unrest. Even this criticism becomes somewhat difficult to substantiate in respect to *Spartacus*, for many of the cruel Romans are shown to *wish* that they were different, although Fast does imply that corrupt social systems will inevitably produce individuals who *cannot help* being corrupted. This is a Marxist-like form of historical materialism we cannot quite accept, though not because it is official "Communist doctrine."

Mr. Fast writes as few others can when he is inspired, and the figure of Spartacus has certainly inspired him. There are subtleties, too, in his best passages. Take for instance one which describes the introspection of Gracchus, fat old politician, in pondering why, even after the Servile Revolt had been crushed, Spartacus himself hacked to pieces, and six thousand survivors of Spartacus' army nailed to crosses along the Appian Way, the patricians continued to hate so fervidly the slave leader:

Like Cicero, Gracchus had a sense of history; the important difference was that Gracchus never confused himself concerning his own place and role and therefore he saw many things far more clearly than Cicero did. He wondered whether the meaning of their own lives was not contained in the endless tokens of punishment which lined the Appian Way. Gracchus was not troubled by morality; he knew his own people. . . . But for some strange reason, he was most deeply troubled.

The answer was in a flash of understanding which left him cold and shaken in a way he had rarely been shaken before; and it left him full of fear of death and of the awful and utter darkness and non-existence which death brings; for the answer took away a great deal of the cynical certainty which supported him and left him sitting there on the stone bench bereft, a fat and paunchy old man whose personal doom had suddenly become linked with an enormous movement of the currents of history.

He saw it dearly. The thing which had come into the world so newly was a whole society built upon the backs of slaves, and the symphonic utterance of that society was the song of the whip-lash. What did it do to the people who wielded the whip?

It was not a simple matter of corruption, but a monster which had turned the world over; and these people, gathered together for a night at the *Villa Salaria*, were obsessed with Spartacus because Spartacus was all that they were not. Cicero might never understand whence came the virtue of this mysterious slave, but he, Gracchus, he understood. Home and family and honor and virtue and all that was good and noble was defended by the slaves and owned by the slaves—not because they were good and noble, but because their masters had turned over to them all that was sacred.

As Spartacus had a vision of what might be—the vision arising out of himself—so did Gracchus have his own vision of what might be, and what he saw in the future made him cold and sick and afraid.

Probably many men in public life today are occasionally made "cold and sick and afraid" by a sudden "flash of understanding" concerning courses they have been following. Probably most, like the millionaire Crassus, a famous Roman general, are unable to discover how to end this sickness, and hence take their feelings of disgust out upon their contemporaries. Gracchus, in Fast's story, forbears a reaction of this sort, because of the same basic honesty which distinguished him from Cicero, and, before killing himself to escape Crassus' wrath, performs an act of great kindness, generosity and understanding.

But there must be other ways of responding to self-revelation than vindictiveness or running a sword through one's breast, and we cannot approve the final colors in which Fast paints the alternatives.

Just as Crassus and the Roman generals, politicians, and patricians are shown as corrupt and decadent, so is Spartacus made a symbol of almost perfect virtue. But if, in this case, Fast has over-idealized, we have no difficulty in forgiving him.

There will never be too much of idealization; providing it is not a simulation to attain a political goal through personality worship, and Spartacus, as Fast presents him, is worth telling our sons about. Here are the thoughts of his trusted first lieutenant:

David never forgot the first time he heard Spartacus recite verses from the *Odyssey*. Here was a new and enchanting music, the story of a brave man who endured a lot but was never defeated. Was there ever such a man as Spartacus! Was there ever a man so gentle, so patient, so slow to anger!

In his mind, he identified Spartacus with Odysseus, the patient and wise Odysseus; and forever after the two were one so far as he was concerned. Boy that he was then, underneath all, he found his hero and pattern for life and for living in Spartacus. At first, he was mistrustful of this tendency in himself. Trust no man and no man will disappoint you, he had said to himself often enough, so he waited and watched and looked for Spartacus to be less than Spartacus. And gradually, the realization grew upon him that Spartacus would never be less than Spartacus—and the realization was more than that, for there came to him an understanding that no man is less than himself, not the whole understanding, but a glimmering of knowledge of the wealth of wonder and splendor that lies in each separate and singular human being.

What has Spartacus given me? I must ask myself that question and I must answer that. I must answer it because he has given me something of great importance. He has given me the secret of life. Life itself is the secret of life. Everyone takes sides. You are on the side of life, or you are on the side of death. Spartacus is on the side of life.

COMMENTARY

ROOTS OF THE GOOD LIFE

THE parallel between the psycho-moral conditions of the Middle East (see Letter from Jordan) and the background of human attitudes in Ignazio Silone's great trilogy, *Fontamara*, *Bread and Wine*, and *Seed Beneath the Snow*, is too striking to be ignored. Our Correspondent in Jordan says:

The lack of confidence between man and man, family and family, village and village, seems to me a basic cause of the predominantly ineffective social relationships, at every level from the personal to the international (within the Arab world), that characterize the area. Literally, no one trusts anyone else. Trust does not normally exist even between persons thrown together in a day-to-day, continuous face-to-face relationship. . . .

In *Bread and Wine*, Silone's protagonist, Spina, discovers exactly this condition prevailing among the Italian peasants, merchants, and officials of his native village. It is a discovery which marks a great turning-point in Spina's life. Spina has been for many years an advocate of communist revolution. While in exile in Russia, he had written countless pamphlets and tracts to educate and convert the Italian peasants and proletariat to the cause of revolution in Italy. This literature had been brought into Italy by the underground and circulated in the towns and villages by the secret enemies of Fascism. When Spina himself returned to Italy, disguised as a priest, and renewed his direct contact with the people whom he longed to help, he found that an insidious corruption had made them incapable of understanding the abstractions of revolutionary doctrine. His pamphlets were meaningless to them. Whether from the moral disintegration of Fascist rule, or from deeper causes of longer duration, both the country and the city people of Italy trusted no one—not even their next-door neighbors. The hope of uniting them for the arduous struggle of social revolution was wholly out of the question.

The realization that his lifework is practically wasted works a great change in Spina. From theoretical revolutionary he becomes the most primitive kind of humanist. Abandoning doctrines and programs, and finding a companion or two, Spina sets out to restore man's faith in man. This, he recognizes, is the foundation of all good social relationships. He goes about, performing simple acts of human kindness, giving evidence that human beings *can* trust one another. As becomes plain in *Seed Beneath the Snow*, there is nothing else that he can do for the people whom he loves.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

AMONG the various subjects proposed by subscribers for consideration, here, we find two requests now overdue for treatment. One concerns the effect of political campaigns upon children, and what, if any, educational opportunities are presented by the complex phenomena of an election year. The second asks for further analysis of the effects of Big Holidays, particularly Christmas, upon the impressionable young.

It may be the better part of valor to treat both at the same time, for it is proverbial that the two most dangerous subjects in the world are politics and religion. It is virtually impossible to "analyze" Christmas without devoting attention to the Christian faith in general, while there is a supplemental appropriateness in discussing political elections and Christmas in consecutive paragraphs. Both religion and politics, as presently manifesting, involve *mass* emotions, and, true to the nature of anything primarily emotional, both resist any threatened encroachments of rational consideration. Clearly, this resistance should, if possible, be overcome.

Just as few ardent political partisans are willing to concede any equal or complementary virtues in a different party, so are most Christians unwilling to concede that anyone else may have the right to a different kind of Christmas celebration from theirs. This fact of itself suggests one recommendation for the moral education of children and proves that even "negative conditioning" may sometimes have its place; if our children can be helped to perceive and disapprove all manifestations of exclusively partisan attitudes by pointing out both their ridiculousness and unfairness, either at election time or at Christmas, we shall probably be helping them to become much more "democratic" citizens than they will otherwise manage to be. It is the fanatical, irrational, emotional outlook which has been

responsible for most of the wars of the world, and all of its dictatorships. No man ever rose to totalitarian power except in the wake of a "we're-better-than-you" campaign.

One ought to be able to look back at the recent presidential race, however, with sufficient objectivity to realize that there is little hope of our children maturing more rapidly until adults have come closer to discovering, themselves, what maturity is. Whether you wished More Power To Eisenhower or were Gladly With Adlai, your rational mind *ought* to tell you that there is not and has not been any radical difference between the moral qualities of the two major parties of the United States, and that they are as alike, in this basic respect, as Tweedledum and Tweedledee. This does not mean that important issues of integrity and conscience may not be involved in the matter of whom one votes for, but the important issues seem almost to be the *esoteric* side of politics—relevant only to individuals who discover that their thought upon some particular phase of the minor differences between the parties is a matter of great concern, or perhaps involves a matter of personal decision in terms of seeing a perspective previously overlooked. The ability to attain to fresh perspectives is manifestly of crucial significance, and even if the new outlook is only a little closer to "absolute" truth than the former, such a citizen's mind at least is not static.

The intensely emotional partisanship built up during the campaign months, however, is largely, on the other hand, just that—a "build-up." We do the building ourselves, of course, along with friends of similar persuasion, and before long we find that the whole campaign appears to take on the proportions of a struggle between the Powers of Evil and the Forces of Righteousness, after which no appeals to reason are acceptable and no mentally life-giving "shifts" possible. It is at this point that we must indeed beware, for the people who begin to "fight evil" in the name of righteousness are always the people who promote

wars, autocratize over their children—and progressively lose their own sanity.

Pursuing further the suggestion that strong "anti" movements are always dangerous, we can find ground for deploring the opinions of any man or group who, during political campaigning, tries to ride anywhere on a "hate Russia" or "hate Communists in the State Department" or "hate Communists in the School" plank. Such a plank does not deserve to float. We should take the water away, and encourage our children to see the wrong of hate and suspicion as involved in politics—or anywhere else. Another thing wrong with politics was illustrated in the methods of both major parties—the creation of stereotypes. A man from Mars, listening to the froth that accompanies the maneuverings of an election year, would conclude that the word "Communist" was synonymous with the word Unionist, and that the word Capitalist was synonymous with the word Fascist. During the last few months we watched in amazement the largely fictitious struggle supposed to be taking place between the Common Man and the Business Man. All of these labels are superficial enough to be called absolutely false, for they encourage all manner of oversimplifications of basically human problems. If we have found ourselves using such labels or thinking of the conventional and derogatory categories they foist on people who merely have differing political persuasions, we should humbly apologize to our children and then proceed to warn them against falling into the same trap in respect to the "out groups" among their schoolmates.

Even in respect to Christmas, we find that in a mild and sentimental sort of way the partisan spirit finds expression. As we have before remarked, Christmas was celebrated long before Jesus of Nazareth was born—celebrated with reference to the symbol of the new year as marked by the Winter Solstice. Christmas *should*, then, be the time for appreciating the universal appeal of a nature-cycle, rather than a time for thinking how wonderful and how much better it is to be

Christian than anything else; Jesus himself left ample direction toward a universal viewpoint. The real Christmas, then, should be an occasion for seeking bonds of sympathy and understanding with those of different persuasions, whether religious, political, or personal. The gift of such an attitude, if we can present it to our children, even in small degree, is well worth both the giving and the receiving.

We propose, then, that in however small, yet determined effort to stem the mighty tide, all worthy parents pledge themselves to a comparative and sympathetic study of political parties during election year, and to a comparative study of religions, come Christmas. This is just about all we should have to do for our children, for the launching of such truth-seeking ventures creates at once an atmosphere of tolerance, in sharp deviation from the prevailing climate in neighborhood and nation. Youngsters would soon be stung to curiosity by the contrast, and make it their business to discover the reasons for its existence. Children are notorious for their championing of parents against all comers, and it is probably a fine idea to provide something important enough to merit the devotion of their zeal. Non-partisanship is, after all, the only cause perennially worth being partial to, and when we lay our sacrifices on its altar we find ourselves in the company of men whose examples have lived through centuries and millennia. Not only was Jesus above partisanship in any sectarian sense; it is evident, we think, that the framers of the Constitution of the United States were men of remarkable stature, just because they looked beyond groups and factions to the Nation as a whole.

FRONTIERS Immortality—Again

A READER writes:

I continue to find MANAS a source of stimulation, though sometimes I am disturbed by what appears to be the necessity to posit a concept of immortality that seems somewhat theosophic in nature. I believe that the idea of proving the immortality of the soul is not so urgent as creating a pattern of living that will make mortal existence a rich, spiritual, and intellectual experience.

As we see it, the question raised by this subscriber resolves itself into another: Has the possibility of human immortality a bearing on the decision as to what will make "mortal existence a rich, spiritual, and intellectual experience"?

The way in which the comment of our correspondent is put seems to imply that immortality, as popularly conceived, is of negligible importance. To this we can only agree. The history of the notion of immortality in the West lends ample justification to one who would maintain that whether or not the soul continues its existence after the death of the body is irrelevant to the good life. A comparison of Stoic with Christian views on this subject, drawn from Lecky's *History of European Morals*, helps to make the issues clear. According to Lecky:

Panaetius, the founder of Roman stoicism, maintained that the soul perished with the body, and his opinion was followed by Epictetus and Cornutus. Seneca contradicted himself on the subject. Marcus Aurelius never rose beyond a vague and mournful aspiration. Those who believed in a future world believed in it faintly and uncertainly, and even when they accepted it as a fact, they shrank from proposing it as a motive. The whole system of Stoical ethics, which carried self-sacrifice to a point that has scarcely been equalled, and exercised an influence which has rarely been surpassed, was evolved without any assistance from the doctrine of a future life. . . . The Stoics, . . . taught in the most emphatic language, the fraternity of all men, and the consequent duty of each man consecrating his life to the welfare of others. They developed this general doctrine in a series of detailed precepts, which, for the range,

depth, and beauty of their charity, have never been surpassed. They even extended their compassion to crime, and adopting the paradox of Plato, that all guilt is ignorance, treated it as an involuntary disease, and declared that the only legitimate ground of punishment is prevention. . . . The central conception of this philosophy of self-control was the dignity of man.

Lecky now compares the Stoic outlook with Christianity:

The main object of the pagan philosophers was to dispel the terrors the imagination had cast around death, and by destroying this last cause of fear to secure the liberty of man. The main object of the Catholic priests has been to make death in itself as revolting as possible, and by representing escape from its terrors as hopeless, except by complete subjection to their rule, to convert it into an instrument of government. By multiplying the dancing or warning skeletons, and other sepulchral images representing the loathsomeness of death without its repose; by substituting inhumation for incremation, and concentrating the imagination on the ghastliness of decay; above all, by peopling the unseen world with demon phantoms and with excruciating tortures, the Catholic Church succeeded in making death itself unspeakably terrible, and in thus preparing men for the consolations it could offer. . . . That man is not only an imperfect but a fallen being, and that death is the penal consequence of his sin, was a doctrine profoundly new to mankind, and it has exercised an influence of the most serious character upon the moral history of the world.

With this as background, we are better prepared to consider the importance of immortality as a religious or philosophical idea. First of all, if one must choose between Stoic negation and Christian affirmation, it is plain that the Stoics will gain the vote of all self-respecting men. If immortality be no more than a device by which priests seek to frighten or cajole people into submissive attitudes and behavior, then the claim of the Roman Stoics that the soul perishes with the body is a vastly superior idea.

There is reason to think, however, that the earlier Stoics had a somewhat different opinion. "Their first doctrine," Lecky relates, "was that the soul of man has a future and independent, but not

an eternal existence, that it survives until that last conflagration which was to destroy the world, and absorb all finite things into the all-pervading soul of nature." They believed "that the human soul is a detached fragment of the Deity." This idea was also maintained by the Romans. Seneca declared that "a sacred spirit dwells within us, the observer and guardian of our good and evil deeds. . . . A God (what God I know not) dwells in every good man." Marcus Aurelius said: "Offer to the God that is in thee, a manly being. . . . It is sufficient to believe in the genius who is within us, and to honour him by a pure worship."

It seems fair to conclude that the Roman Stoics gave little attention to the question of survival after death chiefly because they saw how easily the idea could be converted into a means of catering to self-interest—as, indeed, the Christians used it—and the central Stoic doctrine that there is no real good but virtue made any rewards or punishments in an after-life irrelevant, if not positively harmful, to their ethical view.

In short, the Roman Stoics took a pragmatic view of the idea of immortality, decided that it did disservice to the good life, and therefore minimized its importance. The Christians—and we need to remember, here, that these Christians, unlike the Stoics, who were individual thinkers, represented a powerful theocratic institution interested in controlling the allegiance of its followers—also took a pragmatic view of immortality. The designers of Christian dogma formulated a teaching of after-life which was calculated to frighten the timid and the uncertain into the protecting bosom of the Mother Church. Thus, while denial of immortality seemed to serve best the highly moral purposes of the Stoics, affirmation of it contributed to the less than moral purposes of the Christians.

In the context of Western history, then, it is easy enough to accept the pragmatic argument against an interest in immortality.

There have, of course, been other civilizations or cultures with very different attitudes toward the

question of an after-life. Fielding Hall's *The Soul of a People* (Macmillan) is an engrossing study of a society in which the idea of immortality had a profoundly constructive role. Quite possibly, if Westerners were better acquainted with the oriental versions of immortality, their feeling about this idea would undergo radical change. What seems an excellent statement of Eastern thinking on immortality is provided by a passage in Edmond Holmes' volume, *The Creed of Buddha* (John Lane, 1908):

. . . the Eastern mind has always moved with ease through vast cycles of time; and as its philosophy brings all things—spiritual as well as physical—under the domination of natural law, and therefore forbids it, in any sphere of thought, to pass from finite causes to infinite effects, it has always instinctively assumed that the process of growth which is to transform the individual into the Universal Self is, speaking generally, of practically immeasurable duration. In other words, it has always believed that the soul will pass through innumerable lives on its way to its divine goal. That many of these lives must be passed on earth has always been taken for granted. The obvious fact that in one earth-life man can learn little of what earth has to teach him, and the further fact that most men die with the desire for the goods and pleasures of earth still strong in their hearts, lead one to expect (once the idea of a plurality of lives has been accepted) that the soul, in the course of its wanderings, will return to earth again and again,—will return, partly in order to widen and enrich its experience, partly in response to attractive forces which it has not yet learned to control. It was in this way that the doctrine of re-incarnation—of a re-incarnating self or Ego—became one of the cardinal doctrines of the faith of the East.

From the foregoing, it seems clear enough that the idea of immortality may have either a constructive or a corrupting role, depending upon how the after-life is conceived. So much for the "pragmatic" side of the question. There remains the problem of whether or not the idea of immortality is important to philosophers—important, that is, to people who are endeavoring to free their thinking from the limiting effects of historical conditioning.

It is fair to ask, then: Supposing that some essential part of the human being lives on after the death of the body, pursuing ends which belong to its own nature; would knowing this, and having some knowledge of what those ends may be, affect the way we live our "mortal existence" here? We think it might. And it seems fair, again, to say that, just because men of independent intelligence have been deterred from investigating this possibility by reason of theological abuses of the notion of immortality, it is important to examine it impartially. This would be one way of throwing off the last vestiges of our conditioning by dogmatic religion. To refuse to take seriously certain lines of philosophical inquiry simply because they happen to have been misused by bigots and scheming ecclesiastics is surely as bad as exhibiting contempt for "science" because some scientists have made their authoritative status in our culture into a sounding-board for mechanistic materialism and other assertions which have nothing to do with the spirit of genuine science.

Immortality may be something more than a notion to be adopted or rejected by educators, philosophers, or dogmatists, as the case may be, according to their varying purposes and ends. It may be a fact. If it be "theosophic" to hold that immortality is possible, why, then, we can do no less than to confess to the position. We could, we think, be discovered among worse company than those who have held this view.