

THE PRESSURE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

A COUPLE of weeks ago Southern California's listener-supported radio station, KPFK, put on a program of what might be called "contemporary" folk music. It was a heroic effort by Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger to bring folk music up to date by putting together songs about how the English pour concrete highways and lay hot asphalt. The program sounded something like highlights of the romance of industrialism set to the tune of *The Coasts of High Barbary* and was presented with great verve and enthusiasm. If it didn't quite come off, it was not for lack of trying. The modern folk singers are a conscientious crew. They feel the lack of spontaneous, direct communication in the arts and folkways (if any) of today, and would like to do their part to restore some feeling of wholeness to people. If a sense of personal community with working people, good natural voices, and some skill on the guitar are not enough for this purpose, you can't really blame the folk singers. They aren't responsible for the subdivision of modern society and the partition and isolation of the emotional life of individuals. They do what they can.

You listen and you wish you could say to yourself, "Gee! That's great!" Instead, you say, "These people are doing what they think they *ought* to be doing, instead of something they can't help doing because it keeps on bubbling up." There are probably several reasons for dissatisfaction with current attempts to contrive the feeling of folk expression, the most obvious one being that there is very little folk feeling at all, these days. Folk feelings come naturally to people who work with their hands, and whose work has a direct relation to human need. The present-day wave of interest in folk-singing is doubtless evidence of a strong nostalgia for folk emotion, but people get it only in terms of the past. When the jack-hammer put John Henry out of business,

a great wedge of folk-feeling died with him. People try to recall feelings of human solidarity by singing the songs of protest of two or three generations ago, when the lines of the class struggle were more clearly drawn, but again the emotion depends upon nostalgia, not upon any sense of present struggle. There has to be clarity and emotional simplicity in folk music. Folk art is made of the spontaneous response of people to simple situations and issues. Mort Sahl probably comes closer to representing this sort of response, in our time, than any folk expression. Maybe Mort Sahl can make folk music, but the idea seems a contradiction in terms. The situations and issues of our time are not simple.

Then there is the problem of producing an upward and onward feeling out of the idea of building a lot of concrete highways. To get such a feeling, you have to feel good about the use of the highways. You have to think about people carrying things for other people on the roads—transporting food and other materials to satisfy genuine human needs. You can make the effort to think this way, but you are haunted by other considerations. Like, for example, the *New Yorker* cartoon back in the forties which showed a winding concrete ribbon going around a hill, with a sign on the turn reading, *Drive Carefully, Save a Life*, while coming up the hill is a long line of tanks bristling with turret guns.

It isn't that you want to be cynical; there's just nothing folksy about tanks.

It is natural to have similar feelings about contemporary politics. Let's say you read the programs and make a real effort to see a difference between the Democrats and the Republicans. You want to be a good citizen. If you don't take part in national elections, how can you feel right about criticizing the way things are

going? You can say all these things to yourself, but you find yourself answering back that these people don't really give you a *choice*. What does it matter which way the economy goes, so long as it is a war economy? Of course, if you still think it is possible for anybody to win a nuclear war, these remarks may not make much sense. But almost anybody will admit that the time is coming when preparations for war will make no sense at all. A man would like to see a little preparation for the national decisions that will have to be made at that time, or at least some honest awareness that that time is on the way. So, for reasons like this, politics may leave you cold.

Well, what ought a man to be interested in? What about this idea of trying to carry the weight of the world on your shoulders?

That is an interesting question, in itself. Only for a century or so have ordinary human beings engaged to think about the *world*, what is the matter with it, or what it needs. You could say that in this sense, people have been rapidly growing up during recent history. Until modern times, the idea of *the whole world* and its welfare was always a religious idea. The ordinary man wasn't expected to have theories about the world. But now he has them. They may not be very good theories, but he thinks about them. Not many men can say to themselves, "That's God's problem," when the question of what is going to happen to the world comes up.

Maybe individual human awareness of the entire world is simply a result of the big technological mirror which in its faulty technological way tells us what is happening all over. But there is also the possibility that this perspective on the world is a part of the psychological evolution of the human race—a process in which technology is no more than a mechanical instrument.

In any event, the men of this epoch do have the problem of deciding how much personal responsibility they are going to accept for the condition of the world. And there are puzzles

connected with this question, since it seems that some people willingly accept and are equal to much more responsibility than others. Once only the Son of God worried about the whole human race. Now you can actually count up people who give expression to this concern and who are active in various ways in behalf of the whole human race. This might also have some evolutionary significance.

It is obvious, at any rate, that it would be foolish to try to make rules for people about how to react to the world situation. People are bound to react *differently*. Some individuals are going to experience a kind of permanent mental woe which, like an uninvited guest, will never go away so long as the patterns of gross human behavior are in the direction of an all-consuming war. The rest of their lives, outside this concern, will seem made up of the most incidental preoccupations. And if you ask them the reason for this concentration on world issues, they will tell you, in some words of their own, that they are "about their Father's business."

What determines human decisions of this sort? One plainly important factor is the power to communicate at the broad level of general human welfare. Not everybody has this power, certainly not in the same degree. Leaving explanations of such differences aside, it might be argued that they are so great as to constitute a major reality of human nature and human experience. If this is the case, then the individual has extraordinary latitude in making up his mind what to do. The question of what he *ought* to do no longer depends upon some conventional doctrine or theory of human behavior, but upon himself. No expert can tell him. His relation to the world is not in the hands of either the preachers, the scientists, or the statisticians, but in his own hands. He can be the kind of a person he wants to be, choosing what burdens he will bear and how he will bear them. This, you could say, is the *ethical* meaning of individualism.

In a paper read before a symposium on mental health, earlier this year, Dr. A. H. Maslow, of Brandeis University, articulated a similar view of the individual in relation to the question of mental health. His subject was "Health as Transcendence of Environment" and he began by saying:

My purpose is to save one point that may get lost in the current wave of discussion of mental health. The danger that I see is the resurgence, in new and more sophisticated forms, of the old identification of psychological health with adjustment to reality, adjustment to society, adjustment to other people. That is, the authentic or healthy person is being defined not in his own right, not in his autonomy, not by his own intra-psychic and non-environmental laws, not as *different* from the environment, independent of it or opposed to it, but rather in environment-centered terms, *e.g.*, of ability to master the environment, to be capable, adequate, effective, competent in relation to *it*, to do a good job, to perceive *it* well, to be in good relations to *it*, to be successful in *its* terms. To say it in another way, the job-analysis, the requirements of the task, should not be the major criterion of worth or health of the individual. There is not only an orientation to the outer but also to the inner. An extra-psychic centering point cannot be used for the theoretical task of defining the healthy psyche. We must not fall into the trap of defining the good organism in terms of what he is "good for," as if he were an instrument rather than something in himself, as if he were only a means to some extrinsic purpose.

What this means is that the individual is and must be the maker and reviser of environments, not merely their product. An individual defined by his environment—by, that is, the *status quo*—cannot remake the environment. He has no authority to do so. Where can he get the authority? He can get it from himself. The access every man has to inner values and concepts of the good is the meaning of individuality.

One thing which becomes plain from statements like this one by Dr. Maslow, from manifestoes like that of Albert Camus concerning "man's transcendence in respect to history," which includes both theologies and ideologies of history, and from Erich Fromm's insistence that "man is

not a thing," is that we shall have to begin to develop a vocabulary for the elements of subjective reality in man. We shall have to learn to speak and write with some discipline about whatever it is in human beings that conditions but is not conditioned, that chooses out of consideration for some transcendental reference, and not by reason of a chain of mechanistic causation.

Dr. Maslow's writings show that he has been busy for years at this task, trying to make this new vocabulary *functional*—that is, to develop it independent of old metaphysical, theological, or mystical concepts. This is in keeping with Dr. W. F. G. Swann's reflections on the need for "some kind of new entity"—

I shall not be surprised to find the new entity playing a part in the survival of pattern so dominant in living things. I hesitate to limit its potentialities by giving it a name already appropriated and endowed with properties of vagueness too foggy to be permitted in a scientific discussion, and so I will not call it by the name "soul." . . . In discussing such matters I think it is essential to avoid all theological doctrine as a starting point. I would rather see a theological doctrine emerge spontaneously as part of the over-all scheme of nature, than I would see the workings of nature forced into a frame provided by a preconceived theological doctrine as a starting-point. . . .

I should expect to find it [the "new entity"] play a role in those phenomena which for long have lain in the borderland between what is accepted only by a few, even though representatives of the few may be found in all periods of man's history. I refer to such things as extra-sensory perception, the significance of the immortality of man, clairvoyance, and allied phenomena, and the significance of the fact that our universe exhibits what we may call a planned design, whether or not we are willing to admit the hazy notion of a planner, or say what we mean by that postulate.

One thing is certain, we shall not be able to hurry very much this process of finding new words to describe the workings of the inner side of man's nature. Dr. Swann's proviso seems a good one—to derive the meanings, at least, of the new terms from our experience of nature, in this

case man's nature, without jumping too far ahead into theological preconceptions. Even so, we may find in ancient systems of thought ideas which exhibit a similar freedom from dogma. It would be most remarkable if it should turn out that we are the first men to think in this way!

But it may be the case that we are the first *ordinary* men to think in this way. If our own epoch has a genuine meaning—if it is in some way unique and different from all other epochs—then we might say that it is the first great historical epoch in which men generally began to think independently in philosophical terms, almost as a condition of their survival.

For it is evident that, on the other side of the ledger, this is an epoch in which the external environment has come to dominate almost every phase of human existence, exerting multiple compulsions to self-destruction. The power of the environment to control the individual is so extensive that Dr. Maslow is obliged to point out that psychologists have no right to define the human being *in terms of* his environment, which is really a way of erasing him from existence.

In the past, "freedom" has been a group concept and has been defined as a group phenomenon. The way of getting freedom has been to set one environment up against another—that is, make a revolution or a war for independence. But now the military means prohibit such measures—except in so-called "backward" countries. How can you use violent means to create the environment of freedom, when the unleashed power of modern weapons will destroy any conceivable environment? In these circumstances, freedom must revert to what it has always been for the philosophers—a *conception of individuality*.

Again, for the first time in history, we may think about human excellence and the differences among men without any conscientious democratic inhibitions, since it is no longer possible to justify the forcible control of some men by others with the argument that some men know better than

others. Today, the men who know better will be the ones who will not use force. This latter assertion, we suggest, is on the way to becoming a Public Truth.

What this point of view does is liberate us from the dreadful and unfulfillable "Historical Tasks" which Camus spoke against. It enables a man to look at the world around him in much the same manner as a new settler looks at a wilderness. He doesn't expect to change it all at once. He has a good life to live, and he will live it as best he can. He isn't going to ravish the landscape in the name of progress. He isn't going to call out the marines or send out a fleet of bombers. *He is going to be his own man.* For this is the only real correction, he has discovered, of what is the matter with the world. He has abandoned what has become the "gang" theory of progress.

What values are left, after you get rid of the gang theory of progress—the theory which says that for survival of the good life it is necessary to be ready at any moment to kill millions of people?

Well, if you want these values ready-made, you could go to Marcus Aurelius. No one has stated them better than he did. But an independent lot are likely to insist upon making these values up for themselves, and the people who have some hope of working out of the present historical trap, for others as well as themselves, are almost certain to be an independent lot.

We are going to get these values from intuitive sources—from the natural tropisms of the human soul whenever it feels and thinks in an unprejudiced manner. We are going to say that the good life is always the best life a man can live by means of his own resourcefulness and resolve; that this has always been true, that it never stopped being true, despite certain apparently plausible scientific and collectivist theories, and that it will continue to be true so long as human beings remain human beings.

This does not necessarily mean the abandonment of science in relation to man. What it means is the beginning of a proper use of science in relation to man. Ortega y Gasset addressed himself to this problem in the first chapter of *Man and Crisis* (Norton, 1958). Ortega wrote:

I would like to leave in the air, as a kind of hint, certain very general assumptions which, in my judgment, make possible a type of history that is truly scientific.

The historians, to excuse themselves from arguments with the philosophers, customarily repeat a phrase which was written by one of their most able leaders, Leopold von Ranke. His opposition to the discussions of his day in regard to the form of the science of history was expressed (with the air of one hacking at a Gordian knot) in these words: "History proposes to find out *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*,"—how things actually happened.

At first this phrase seems comprehensible enough; but in view of the controversy which inspired it, its meaning is rather stupid. What happened! What occurred! What was! Which *what*? Is the science of history to occupy itself with the eclipses that have occurred? Obviously not. The phrase is elliptical. One assumes that history deals with what has happened to, what has occurred to, what has befallen, mankind. But this is exactly why, with all due respect to Ranke whom I believe to be one of the most formidable constructors of history we have, his phrase seems to me a bit stupid. Because what it means is that many things happen to man, an infinite number of things; and these things happen to him in the sense of a roof tile falling on a passerby and breaking his neck. In this type of occurrence man would have no other role than to act as the wall of a handball court, against which hit the fortuitous balls of an extrinsic destiny. History would have no other mission than to record these bouncings, one by one. History would be empiricism, pure and absolute. The human past would be a basic discontinuity of loose facts, without structure, form, or law.

But it is evident that everything which occurs to and happens to a man occurs and happens within his lifetime, and is converted, *ipso facto*, into a fact of human life; this means that the true nature, the reality, of the fact lies not in what it may seem to hold as a raw and isolated happening, but in what it may signify in that man's life. An identical material fact

may, if inserted into different human lives, have the most diverse realities. The roof tile which falls is, to a despairing and anonymous passerby, an act of salvation; when it strikes the neck of an empire builder or a young genius it becomes a catastrophe of universal importance.

So a human fact is never a pure matter of happening and befalling—it is a function of an entire human life, individual or collective; it belongs to what one might call an organism of facts in which each one plays its own active and dynamic role. Strictly speaking, the only thing which happens to man is the act of living; all the rest is within his life, sets up reactions in it, has within it a value and a significance. Thus the reality of the fact lies not within the fact itself, but in the indivisible unity of every life.

So that if, following Ranke, we want history to consist in finding out how things actually and truly happened, we have no choice but to turn back from each crude fact to the organic, unitary system of the life to which the fact happened, the life which, so to speak, lived the fact. . . .

In the light of this observation, which is certainly an obvious one, history ceases to be a simple matter of finding out what happened and is converted into something a bit more complicated—it becomes an investigation into what kind of human lives, and how many of them, have made it up. You will note that I did not say an investigation of what had happened to men—as we have seen, what happens to anyone can be known only when one knows the complete history of the life he has led.

Thus, on at least a dozen counts, the man of the twentieth century can no longer avoid philosophy and ethics and still pretend to know anything at all about either his own problems or the problems of his time. What is mental health? The question is meaningless without reference to ethics. What is the meaning of history? It is the meaning of human life. And what is that? We cannot answer without an ethics which transcends history. Never before have the circumstances of an age pressed so hard to make human beings become altogether themselves.

REVIEW

THE PASSING OF POLITICAL OPTIMISM

THE FUTURE AS HISTORY by Robert L. Heilbroner argues that American optimism in respect to short-range measures for achieving international well-being is delusive, and undertakes to prove it. Dr. Heilbroner proposes revision of a number of U.S. attitudes as well as policies. The conclusion of this volume sums up the positive need for recognition in America that "the forces which shape the future" are not, and cannot be, the forces upon which American policy has traditionally depended. Faith in "the idea of progress" is appropriate only to the extent that, during the next thirty years, Americans learn to adjust to a set of historical forces they have as yet barely begun to recognize:

Dr. Heilbroner writes:

It is very difficult while America and the West are at bay to feel a sense of positive identification with the forces that are preparing the environment of the future. Less and less are we able to locate our lives meaningfully in the pageant of history. More and more do we find ourselves retreating to the sanctuary of an insulated individualism, sealed off in our private concerns from the larger events which surround us.

Such an historic disorientation and disengagement is a terrible private as well as public deprivation. In an age which no longer waits patiently through this life for the rewards of the next, it is a crushing spiritual blow to lose one's sense of participation in mankind's journey, and to see only a huge milling-around, a collective living-out of lives with no larger purpose than the days which each accumulates. When we estrange ourselves from history we do not enlarge, we diminish ourselves, even as individuals. We subtract from our lives one meaning which they do in fact possess, whether we recognize it or not. We cannot help living in history. We can only fail to be aware of it. If we are to meet, endure, and transcend the trials and defeats of the future—for trials and defeats there are certain to be—it can only be from a point of view which, seeing the future as part of the sweep of history, enables us to establish our place in that immense procession in which is incorporated whatever hope humankind may have.

First of all, of course, it is necessary to revise the context in which we evaluate "Communism," and judge, as well, the hurtling efforts of underprivileged nations to move toward conditions that will eventually bring them equality with American standards of living. The first few chapters of *The Future as History* trace the transitions in thinking about "determinism" as a political theory. Once, "determinism" was but another name for the inevitability of inequalities among men. In the eighteenth century a new kind of determinism began to emerge and finally marched around the world. This view held forth the positive hope that the "natural laws" of free enterprise would eventually lead to economic utopia for all. But, long before the twentieth century made its appearance, critics began to declare for what Heilbroner calls "an inexorable outlook of a very different sort." Finally, "all the reformers agreed that capitalism, *left to itself*, would not be the vehicle of a 'naturally improving' future. All agreed that if true social progress were to be achieved history would have to be reshaped for the better *against* the onrush of its own uncontrolled forces." It is at this point that we encounter the dynamics of Marxist thought. Marx reinterpreted "the forces of history" and claimed that what was *inevitable* was that capitalist society would be dethroned and socialist society would emerge. Here is Heilbroner's comment:

Curiously, it is this widening abandonment of faith in *deterministic* progress which, in retrospect, makes Karl Marx so important in the intellectual history of optimistic thought. For unlike his radical contemporaries Marx did not call for an opposition to the forces of history. On the contrary he accepted all of them, the drive of technology, the revolutionizing effects of democratic striving, even the vagaries of capitalism, as being indeed the carriers of a brighter future. The difference was that he envisaged this future as lying beyond the confines of the existing structure of society. To Marx, one last barrier had to be crossed before the promise of history would be fulfilled. That was the overthrow of the outmoded system of private production, and the passage through a transition of socialism into the ultimate communist destination of social history. The achievement of the communist revolution—itsself both a "heroic" act and an "inevitable" culmination of the forces inherent in

history—was thus to be the true realization of the optimistic content of the present.

However, the result of the Russian experiment with a "dictatorship of the proletariat" has served to disillusion socially minded people everywhere concerning the inevitable benefits which were to flow from the uprooting of capitalism. As Heilbroner says: "Ironically, it has been the very object lesson of Russia which has given the *coup de grace* to the optimism of the rest of Europe. For, at least to an important group of European intellectuals, the Marxist transfer of optimism from capitalism to socialism was a sustaining hope amidst the catastrophes of their homelands. To them Russia was history incarnate, the living expression of those forces of progress which were elsewhere aborted by the social order in which they were confined. But when 'humanity's leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom' turned out to be a leap into a realm stricter, crueler, and more intellectually stifling than that of bourgeois capitalism, a kind of spiritual fatigue set in."

Since there is no real hope in the prevailing operations of capitalist societies either, the resultant mood has been one of pessimism, and Toynbee's monumental study of history takes for its theme "the process of the disintegrations of civilizations." As Heilbroner shows, the only clear optimism today resides in Russia and China. For many in the undeveloped countries, despite offerings of financial aid from America, wish to believe in a permanently better future which history will bestow upon them, and the communist appeal tempts an affirmative psychological response. The reasons for this are not difficult to isolate. Discussing "The Wrath of Nations," Dr. Heilbroner writes:

With each painful step forward, the peoples of the world become more alive to the conditions of humanity in countries other than their own. And of all these conditions the one which stands out is the terrible disparity of living conditions in their own lands compared with the lands of a favored few. The division of the world into the abjectly poor and the grossly rich—a condition of which the poor were always dimly aware, but which appeared as a matter of immutable fate, as an inscrutable destiny—suddenly becomes a dispensation of human history

which seems iniquitous, intolerable, and infuriating. Their economic development, their catching up, becomes not just a matter of social policy, but of social justice.

It is not difficult to project the effect of a race in which the poorer nations would watch the richer draw steadily ahead of them, or in which after their vast labors they would find the gap in no wise diminished. It would expose us to a wrath and fury of a kind we have never heretofore known—a *proletarian* wrath.

For all these reasons, Heilbroner shows, America needs a resolute determination to face up to history as it is actually occurring, and not as we would wish it to be. He continues:

The probabilities, in other words, are that "history" will go against us for a long time, and that the trend of events, both at home and abroad, will persist in directions which we find inimical and uncongenial. It would be foolish to pretend to a degree of prescience about the future which no amount of analysis can provide, or to be doctrinaire about the evolution of events. Yet surely, to hope for the best in a situation where every indication leads us to expect a worsening, is hardly the way to fortify ourselves against the future. Optimism as a philosophy of historic expectations can no longer be considered a national virtue. It has become a dangerous national delusion.

But if our optimism fails and misleads us, what shall we put in its place? How shall we prepare ourselves for the oncoming challenges of the future? What might be the character of a philosophy suited to our times? These are deeply meaningful questions.

There is a most practical reason why this sort of "facing up" is mandatory, since "as a consequence of the new weapons technology we have not only lost our accustomed military security, but also any possibility of enforcing a military 'solution' to the problem of communism. The weapons stalemate has thus magnified the influence of the nonmilitary determinants of the central struggle of our times. The 'historic forces' of politics and economics, of technologies and ideologies, are therefore of crucial importance in the resolution of this contest."

Dr. Heilbroner, a Harvard economist, now teaches at the New School for Social Research. Portions of *The Future as History* originally appeared in the *American Scholar* and the *Reporter*.

COMMENTARY THE "CRUDE FACTS"

A BOOK by G. K. Chesterton on St. Francis of Assisi may seem an odd place to find useful comment on journalism in the twentieth century, but it is there, and is very nearly the best thing in the book. Newspapers are important because they very largely determine how people make up their minds about national and international issues. In this book, published early in the twenties, Mr. Chesterton said:

The modern innovation which has substituted journalism for history, or for that tradition that is the gossip of history, has had at least one definite effect. It has insured that everybody should only hear the end of every story. Journalists are in the habit of printing above the very last chapters of their serial stories (when the hero and the heroine are just about to embrace in the last chapter, as only an unfathomable perversity prevented them from doing in the first) the rather misleading words, "You can begin this story here." But even this is not a complete parallel; for the journals do give some sort of a summary of the story, while they never give anything remotely resembling a summary of the history. Newspapers not only deal with news, but they deal with everything as if it were entirely new. Tut-ankh-amen, for instance, was entirely new. It is exactly in the same fashion that we read that Admiral Bangs has been shot, which is the first intimation we have that he has ever been born. There is something singularly significant in the use which journalism makes of its stores of biography. It never thinks of publishing the life until it is publishing the death. As it deals with individuals it deals with institutions and ideas. After the Great War our public began to be told of all sorts of nations being emancipated. It had never been told a word about their being enslaved. We were called upon to judge of the justice of the settlements, when we had never been allowed to hear of the very existence of the quarrels. People would think it pedantic to talk about the Serbian epics and they prefer to speak in plain every-day language about the Yugo-Slavonic international new diplomacy; and they are quite excited about something they call Czecho-Slovakia without apparently having ever heard of Bohemia. Things that are as old as Europe are regarded as more recent than the very latest claims pegged out on the prairies of America. It is very exciting; like the last act of a play to people who have only come into the

theatre just before the curtain falls. But it does not conduct exactly to knowing what it is all about. To those content with the mere fact of a pistol-shot or a passionate embrace, such a leisurely manner of patronising the drama may be recommended. To those tormented by a merely intellectual curiosity about who is kissing or killing whom, and why, it is unsatisfactory.

The newspapers are very like the movies in their power to establish emotional attitudes by showing people dramatic segments of action, isolated from the past. It is the *sensation* they are after, the "kick" that means circulation, or, in the case of the movies, box office. The movies, however, are less culpable because they are openly intended for entertainment, while the newspapers are supposed to inform their readers of what is actually happening in the world.

Years ago, just before the outbreak of World War II, the Japanese envoy, Saburo Kuruusu, appealed to friends in Washington, suggesting that in order to understand Japan's behavior, it would be helpful to recognize that his country had already been at war for years. Hoping for patience on the part of Americans, he pointed out that the nerves of people so strained by military struggle tend to be raw and abnormally touchy. Japan's war during that period—the conquest of large sections of China—was no doubt a bad war, but what modern nation, in the midst of a war, would be able to see the wrong of the undertaking? A press really interested in the preservation of peace would have responsibly discussed questions of this sort for the benefit of the American public.

What the newspapers do in presenting only isolated segments of world events is make us demand of other nations and peoples what we would never really demand of ourselves. Very likely, most Americans, if they had been fighting with Castro for six years for Cuba's revolution against the Batista government, would be far less patient than the Cuban leader, and he, from all accounts, has not been very patient in his relations with the United States.

As Ortega says, if we want to *know* "how things actually and truly happened, we have no choice but to turn back from each crude fact to the organic, unitary system of life to which the fact happened, the life which, so to speak, lived the fact."

Failing to do this, we adopt the Devil theory of history. This man, this people, we say, has done this thing—the kind of a thing only a devil would do. We do not ask what we would do in the circumstances. We do not ask about the circumstances under which the thing was done, and, worst of all, much of the time we do not want to know about those circumstances.

The result of such ignorance—partly imposed upon us, partly willful—is that we become self-righteous and bigoted.

This attitude was never good, but it was in a sense tolerable, so long as the human race could afford to have occasional wars. You could fight for the Right, perhaps win the war, or think you won it, and suffer only the loss of a few hundred thousand men whose places were soon filled up by the population curve. War might brutalize the men, degrade the women, demoralize the young, and vulgarize the common life, but these things have never troubled self-righteous people very much, since they can usually find scapegoats for their troubles.

But now it is different. An angry, prejudiced population is a population which refuses to try to understand the behavior of other peoples when subjected to extreme situations and is itself the victim of an extreme situation. And the newspapers, when they cater to anger and self-righteousness, instead of serving international understanding, become the creators of that situation.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

NOTES IN PASSING

BY suggestion from a reader, we have received a copy of an unusual and amusing publication of "children's writings"—special issue of a New York publication called *Birth* (edited by Tuli Kupferberg, Birth Press, 222 East 21st Street, New York 10, N.Y., 112 pages, \$1.00). A paragraph provides the editorial perspective:

Children do not suppress the natural ridiculousness of life. Therefore their writings are full of it. It is mostly unconscious of course but to the adult this only makes it all the funnier. The adult has too much "at stake" to admit the ridiculousness of much (most?) of what he does. To the child *everything* is equally important. It is this disproportion that the adult laughs at, but he cannot laugh at *his own* disproportions. To the naïve everything is important. To the sophisticated nothing is important. The adolescent is so awkward because he cannot decide what is important. (Ah but what *is* important?) The eternal question? This makes man the eternal adolescent in a universe older than time.

We have two samples. The first is a dream told by an eleven-year-old New Yorker, mixing television, illness, friendship, and animals:

A DREAM

I was sleepy and tired it had been a hustling bustling day. I went to bed after I watched a play on the T.V.

I'm not sure what happened for I was nervous and sleepy.

It all happened when I was asleep or half awake.

It seemed I walked out of the house and met my friend.

I said he looked as speckled as a trout. He said he was very sick

I replied, what is your sickness. The Chickenpox said he. Why don't you go to the doctor. Then and there we went to the doctors together.

To our surprise the doctor was an elephant. He asked my good friend what is your sickness. He replied The chickenpox. The doctor said he never heard of the chickenpox. Elephants never have the

chickenpox. But I'm not an elephant argued my friend. Oh then here is some chicken medicine.

We went to my friends house depressed. We heard a knock on the door. It was an alley cat. I heard that you are sick. Maybe I can cheer you up said the alley cat.

I told him my friend had the chickenpox. The cat said I love chicken—I will eat up the chickenpox, and he did. My friend was so happy he thank the cat heartily.

I left and went home or you might say I woke up.

Now for a bit of philosophy and morals in the second sample. The subject is "Saints":

Why were the Saints, Saints? Because they were cheerful when it was difficult to be cheerful, and patient when it was difficult to be patient; died because they pushed on when they wanted to stand still and kept silent when they wanted to talk, and were agreeable when they wanted to be disagreeable.

That was all.

It was quite simple and always will be.

Oh, yes, and we can't leave out the following from a nine-year-old's diary:

Friday, March 22. Mother is going to give me a vacation. She is going to give it to me for one week. That means Sat. Sun. Mon. Tues. Wed. Thur. Fri. Sat. Sun. Mon. The vacation is because I do not sleep very well at night. I wiggle in bed.

Thursday, April 11. We studied about Benjermen Franklin. Miss Peters (my teacher) reads to us about all the famous people. We right in our notebooks about them after Miss Peters reads to us.

These are some of the things he invented

1. Electrecity
 2. Cleaning streets
 3. sidewalks.
- and many more things. We wrote about his sayings. These are some:

1. Don't pay to much for a wistle.
 2. Early to Bed, Early to rise makes a man Healty, Wealty and wise.
 - 3.
- and many more things, too.

Incidentally, the editor of *Birth* will welcome examples of children's work—drawings as well as writing.

* * *

"The Gandhian Contribution to Education," an article in a recent *Gandhi Marg* (quarterly published in New Delhi) examines the Indian leader's rigorous version of learning-by-doing. The Gandhian teacher-training center and school at Sevagram seeks to avoid artificial devices usually employed in the West to encourage "training for citizenship." In the Gandhian school the children do not make a model of a flood control project, of a store, or a factory. Instead, they are taught to perform some productive labor of immediate value. The writer in *Gandhi Marg*, G. Ramachandran, who recently chaired the tenth World Conference of the New Education Fellowship at the University of Delhi, summarizes:

In choosing a craft or production work for use in a Basic school, the following considerations are to be kept in view: (1) Since the purpose of a craft or productive work in a Basic school is mainly to learn through it, it necessarily follows that the craft or productive work should be full of possibilities for education; the more the better. (2) It should be a multi-process craft or work involving different activities. One good example is gardening and another is cotton craft. This latter involves plucking of cotton, cleaning and sampling cotton, ginning, carding, spinning and weaving, leading on to dyeing and printing and also to tailoring. (3) It should be capable of being regulated from simpler to more complex processes, suiting the capacity of children from earlier to later grades. In other words it should be a craft capable of growing with the children from grade to grade. (4) It should be a complete craft and not a truncated one. This means a craft from the raw-material stage to the finished product at the end of the eighth year. This will bring in the pride of consummating whatever is begun and the joy of production. (5) What is produced should not be fancy goods to be kept in a glass shelf for exhibition. Products should have a social value and should be capable of being utilised by the school and the surrounding community. This does not rule out artistic production. In fact, unless what is produced is also artistic, it would not generally be acceptable to anyone. (6) The craft or productive work should be

capable at some stage of being broken up into projects encouraging group work and cooperativeness in production. (7) Such craft or productive work should be germane to the locality or the region. Raw materials should be within easy reach and some traditions of skills should be available in the area—whatever possible concerning the craft or productive work chosen.

FRONTIERS **Baptizing the Bomb**

THE war psychology has acquired such a grip on the minds of the mass of our countrymen and their leaders, it seems, that nothing will deter them from making all possible haste toward the senseless atrocity of nuclear annihilation. The flimsiest rationalizations are pressed into service in a desperate attempt to justify the grisly preparations; while our self-styled moral leaders, the clergy, with a handful of conspicuous exceptions, either employ the religious tradition to sanctify these preparations outright or condone them by their silence. Is there any limit to which some persons will not go in blessing what used to be called "infernal machines," but which have now become types of the everyday playthings for children?

The "Letters to the Editor" column of the Philadelphia (Pa.) *Evening Bulletin* for June 21, 1960, carried the following communication, headed "Wants Christian Names for Rockets":

Every time I hear reference made to our rockets and missiles named Thor, Jupiter, Atlas, etc., I think how strange it is that we have named these weapons after those pagan gods.

After all, it is we who are the Christian nation and the Communists who are the atheists. How the Russians must smile to see us get our inspiration from heathen religions instead of our own!

We know that in their heroic struggles for the Holy Land the Crusaders used crosses on their battle flags and armor, and that in recent wars our brave fighting men have sometimes sung "Onward Christian Soldiers."

I propose that, in order to prove to one and all where our faith lies, we should begin to name new rockets and missiles not after the pagan gods but after the heroes and saints of the Christian religion.

(signed) Concerned

This was followed in later issues by comments from readers. I was particularly interested in this exchange because, though I don't subscribe to a word of it, I had written the letter

myself. It may have its amusing side, but I did not write it for laughs. My purpose was perhaps to prod some few to fresh thinking on a matter of importance and, incidentally, to probe the extent to which the war psychology has distorted the values of a people largely lost somewhere in the No Man's Land between confusion and depravity. Would a sane society soberly consider whether or not to sprinkle holy water on the H-bombs? Ours does, it seems.

Big newspaper policy being what it is nowadays, it is next to impossible for a point of view other than the orthodox one to get a hearing. Well, if I couldn't get my idea across right-side-up, maybe I should invert it and float it over in disguise. How far toward the ridiculous must an insane attitude be pushed before its contradictions become apparent to everyone? If so much of institutional Christianity has betrayed the spirit of its alleged founder, is it possible to make the point clear by depicting the prostitute as a professional instead of an amateur?

I took the most blasphemous gesture which came readily to mind—a kind of ultimate absurdity—and advanced it as a serious proposal, scarcely expecting anyone to take me at my word. But this prominent newspaper apparently did (it would hardly enjoy being the victim of a hoax), printed it in condensed form and, subsequently, the responses of a number of readers. I had underestimated the depths of our corruption! These readers too, suspecting nothing amiss, took the proposal at face value, though to their credit it must be said that none approved what it said.

One correspondent thought the writer was "unduly concerned over a triviality," and that in order to show where their faith lies, "Americans . . . should try to rid themselves of prejudice. . . . And, perhaps something could be done about the shocking crime rate, drinking and gambling, adultery, illegitimate birth rate, broken homes, and so forth. Aren't these things of greater importance than the names of rockets?"

Another reader was moved to verse to express his objection:

Dare we chant,
 "Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
 Tell the folk you fall upon
 You come from a Christian nation
 Of most Christ-like motivation,
 Sanctified each megaton
 From Matthew, Mark, Luke and John"?

A third reader said:

Your letter column has afforded me infinite amusement for many years. I have long been content to chuckle in silence, but the little gem appearing over the signature of "Concerned" who desires Christian names for rockets, has broken the back of my resistance.

Ah, what solace, what comfort, what peace of mind for the dazed and numb survivors of an atomic holocaust to know that they have been obliterated by a St. John the Baptist, St. Martin of Tours, or perhaps Martin Luther. . . . We may be sure of one thing. The Communists have no monopoly on stupidity.

(signed) Amused

The *Reporter* (for July 7) quoted from my letter in a believe-it-or-not-this-was-said context. Only radio personality Jean Sheperd in New York seemed to have caught on. He chuckled as he read the letter over the air, strongly suspecting that it had been done tongue-in-cheek. Apparently the letter is still making the rounds. An item on it appeared in the Aug. 27 *Saturday Review*.

I sometimes wonder how many persons could be convinced that Christian rockets are a fine idea, if only it were effectively promoted.* However, I intend to let well enough alone now and not risk my remaining shred of faith in man (and my sanity) by pursuing the question further, as with a street corner opinion poll

RICHARD GROFF

Ambler, Pennsylvania

* Actually, the idea for the letter wasn't mine. My brother Porter thought it up. I just executed it.—R.G.