

## AN OPEN QUESTION

OURS is an age characterized by intellectual uncertainty and by moral dilemmas. The only people who show outspoken certainty are the people whom thoughtful men absolutely distrust—that is, the religious dogmatists and the politicians, those whose profession requires them to practice a pretentious assurance.

The rest of us are manifestly unsure of ourselves, apprehensive of the mass tendencies of the times, and deeply disturbed by the apparently uncontrollable nature of the historical forces which are shaping the future.

Pat theories or explanations no longer interest us. Especially are Big Theories at a discount. We do not live at a time when men have a strong sense of forging ahead. This is an age, rather, of criticism and analysis, of disenchantment and eclectic confusion. Such is its intellectual character, at any rate, and to our bewilderments of mind have been added the practical desperations of threatening total war. The moral dilemma affecting us takes many forms, but its essential nature seems to be a choice between an honest uncertainty and the undertaking of exactly those activities which we despise the most, simply in order to survive—undertaking, that is, the military program urged upon us by C. Wright Mills' *Power Elite*.

There are, among others, two contrasting means of examining the situation in which we find ourselves. One is to make some big assumptions—philosophical or metaphysical assumptions—about the nature of man, of the world, and of the processes of history—and then try to check the validity of the assumptions by seeing how their logical consequences square with the facts of experience. This is a good method—almost an inevitable one—and yet it often loses its audience before getting off to a good start.

The other method is to look closely at the specific character of our situation, hoping that more or less obvious conclusions about that situation will establish the starting-points of analysis on a more secure ground, with less basis for dissension and irrelevant argument.

For example, pursuing the second course, we are able to say that our civilization has developed magnificent skills, but turns them to only trivial purposes. This is true of the arts as well as of technology. If you go to a well-directed moving picture, say, the film version of Leon Uris' *These Angry Hills*, you will see extraordinary photography and exquisite taste in the framing of scenes; the actors are well cast and the nuances of feeling are delicately portrayed; but the picture as a whole is a tiresome cliché. Nothing is hackneyed except the *drama* itself. The film is filled with craftsmanship void of the meaning for which craftsmanship ought to be employed. You may say that this is the fault of the banks which now run the Hollywood studios, but the explanation is not as important as the fact. We have in the film business splendid actors, technicians who know about all there is to know about making movies, directors who have a vivid sense of the uses and scope of their medium, but stories which go nowhere at all. Hollywood films rarely rise above the level of a worn-out homily. The audience, if it is lucky, may be entertained, but it is almost never *engaged*. If the writers had the wit to take Henry Miller's advice—if you don't know what to say, make a drama out of *that*—the producers would refuse to go along. Even apart from the strait-jacket of notions about "box-office," our culture is impoverished of ideas dealing with value. As Doris Lessing said recently: "The best and most vital works of Western literature have been despairing statements of emotional anarchy. If the typical

product of communist literature during the last two decades is the cheerful little tract about economic advance, then the type of Western literature is the novel or play one sees or reads with a shudder of horrified pity for all humanity."

Well, what is going on? The theory that we have to offer—hardly a "big" one, at this point—is that our culture is engaged in wearing out the old assumptions of what is real, good, and worth doing. We are hanging up "No Exit" signs all around. We are saying that we do not know, have not known, what we are about. You go to tie up to some hitching post of psychological security, and the post falls over or crumbles into the powder of dry rot.

Fortunately, the intellectuals do not run the world or hold it together. The world goes on, carried along, if not forward, by the will to live and the thousand-and-one preoccupations and objectives of the great mass of mankind—by the legitimate hopes and naïve optimism of people in all lands. But the intellectuals—taking them as the types of reflective and analytical human beings—do provide the world with what self-consciousness it possesses, and it is this self-consciousness we are examining.

The intellectual leaders of an age supply the concepts of meaning on which the moral existence of the age subsists. Or, the intellectuals modify intuitive moral ideas in one direction or another, shaping what we call the *contemporary* spirit. They articulate the sense of meaning which men in general say is the animating principle of their undertakings. If there is talk of "progress," the definition of progress is made by the intellectuals. It is true, of course, that when the ideas of the intellectuals are turned into mass concepts or slogans, they are over-simplified and often vulgarized to a point where their original meaning is lost. But this is inevitable, and there is usually some increment of gain, despite the relative failure of the mass culture to comprehend the full implication of its by-words and slogans.

This is of course a Platonic theory of progress. The application of this theory to European history has obvious shortcomings, in the sense that it implies a moral excellence among intellectuals which not very many of them possess. It would be better, perhaps, to admit that few intellectuals gain their position of leadership from more than skill in the manipulation of symbols and their capacity to make generalizations; but, after this is admitted, it remains true that the intellectuals do supply the currency of ideas in which we find what collective self-consciousness we possess.

Various social historians have pointed out that the communist revolution was a revolution against the Platonic theory of progress. Not ideas, the communists said, but economic and material forces shape human history. The purveyors of ideas, the communists said, were only the apologists for the *status quo*, rationalizing the exploitation of the working classes or supplying supernatural sanctions for entrenched social injustice. The intellectuals, in these terms, are seen as useless parasites who must be done away with, along with the capitalist exploiters. Communist intellectuals (in the West) have had some personal difficulty with this general account, feeling obliged to "identify" with the workers, even to the point of dressing like them, avoiding refinements of speech, and pretending not to be intellectuals. The communist *mystique* lies in the image of the *worker*, the man who produces the goods needed by all human beings. He is a symbol of ultimate virtue. Because of this activity and because of his unsophisticated devotion to the needs of mankind, he acquires an almost oracular status, obliging the communist theoreticians to derive all that is good from the "worker" mentality. We are told what the worker "thinks," and how he "feels," as the basis for a proletarian Holy Writ. No matter who makes the actual theory, it has to come from the worker, or, at least, give expression to what the worker *ought* to think, to be accorded theoretical validity.

The legitimate moral ground of this view is obvious enough. In a world where comparatively few people get enough to eat, the man who supplies food or other necessities of life has a prime role. And in a world where this man has been misused for centuries, one would expect the revolt, when it comes, to set about doing justice to the worker. On this basis, it is possible to see in the Communist revolution a normal human reaction to an intolerable situation. Whether that normal human reaction produced a universal philosophy capable of guiding and sustaining all future human development is an entirely different question.

There can be no doubt, however, as to the fact that, for about a century, Western intellectuals have been largely persuaded of at least some of the contentions of the Communist revolution. It is only now, from a variety of causes, that these contentions are being questioned and re-examined. Take for example Doris Lessing's characterization of typical communist literature as "cheerful little tracts about economic advance." Miss Lessing has obvious commitments and obligations to the socialist tradition. Yet her work—at least her recent book, *Retreat to Innocence*—is a questioning of communist assumptions in a manner which fulfills all the conditions of artistic and intellectual integrity. This is a book in the great tradition of the human spirit. It contains and understands the motives of the great movements of the past, yet is a captive of none of them.

Lately we received another book from the same publisher that issued *Retreat to Innocence*—a two-in-one volume, containing an account of the progress of science and industry in Soviet Russia, "A Visit to Soviet Science," by Stefan Heym, and a collection of articles from the *Monthly Review*, now published under the title, "China Shakes the World Again." These two volumes are bound as a single paperback with the common title, *Socialism: 1959*. We have been reading and reviewing with considerable pleasure the books in

this series—Prometheus paperbacks—encouraged by the tendency of a "radical" book club to issue titles which need not be labeled as partisan expressions; but this present offering represents an obvious change of pace. It is hardly more than "a cheerful little tract." There is no question, here, of challenging the report of the "facts" of scientific and industrial progress in Communist countries. The bitter part of the experience of reading this book, or trying to read it—which is all we have done—is in its failure even to mention the real issues of human life. The book merely proves that the Communists have or will soon have as big a slop jar of economic prosperity as the ones in capitalist lands! The Communists, in other words, are still making nineteenth-century propaganda. Of course they are good technologists. It is not so very difficult to develop good technologists. But what has this to do with the fact that the Soviets can no more avoid the traps into which the industrial civilization of the West has fallen than they can change the direction, the content, and merit of the arts and literature by ukases from the Kremlin? They are sticking to their clichés, just as we are sticking to ours. They are feeding, clothing, and sheltering their people—granted. But are they thinking anything that is worth thinking? Is there something from Russia worth reading, besides statistics of production?

There is only one answer to this argument that has the barest shadow of validity, and that is the answer suggested in the correspondence from India three weeks ago. The poor of the world, our correspondent said, "not having at any time known the blessings of democracy, are not frightened if Communism threatens to destroy democracy."

Here, the word democracy must do service for considerably more than it usually means. Here it is obliged to signify the determination of people to find something worthwhile to do with their lives while they are being well fed, clothed, and sheltered. It may also signify the willingness to go hungry, or on short rations, in order to do what is

worth while. The Communist claim is that under socialism no one will be obliged to go hungry in order to do what is important, but the catch is that, in a Communist society, only the State is permitted to define what is important. The "cheerful little tracts" never mention the fact that this catch exists. Reference to the catch is disposed of as a reactionary, Platonic prejudice. You see, these people *know* what is worth while. They do not even dare to suggest that "some day," after the revolution is consolidated, the people will be permitted to make their own definitions of what is worth while, for this would be an admission of present inadequacy. So they are trapped, stuck with the narrow logic of a revolution begun a hundred years ago, under conditions vastly different from present conditions, and animated by assumptions which fitted those circumstances, but not ours. What we need is assumptions which fit all conditions, not just some conditions.

The primary concern in Doris Lessing's *Retreat to Innocence* is with the gap between the makers and the inheritors of a revolutionary society. The suggestion is that, once the material gains for which the revolution was fought are achieved, a new temper appears—a temper of indifference toward revolutionary ideals—and in *Retreat to Innocence* the love affair between a man of the old generation and a girl of the new one, while touching in its tenderness, is not enough to close the abyss. A foreign affairs article by C. L. Sulzberger in the *New York Times* for Aug. 1 contains factual material which supports Miss Lessing's conclusion. Writing in Belgrade, Mr. Sulzberger recalls that twenty years ago he spent hours in a Balkan café talking with young Yugoslav revolutionists. These young men were committed to the communist dream. "That," says Mr. Sulzberger, "was a revolutionary and conspiratorial generation. Members of the particular group I knew rose to great eminence in Tito's movement. Several died heroically. Others ascended in the party leadership. One is in

political disgrace for showing too much independence." But after twenty years—

Another generation has now replaced them in the conversation cafés. And this new generation is not yet entirely sure of its role.

The parents, those middle-aged schemers of two decades past, are worried about these boys and girls of university age. They are concerned with their apparent disinterest in politics, their more generous morals, their egocentric ambitions and desire for material ease.

Such typical "capitalist" attitudes are upsetting. Even Tito, Mr. Sulzberger reports, complained that "students do not comprehend how much better off they are than their predecessors and can't even imagine 'the gravity of the struggle' experienced by their parents." Mr. Sulzberger quotes Tito as saying, "My heart pains me when I see some of the youth who do not remember that."

The *Times* writer concludes with some generalizing paragraphs:

Youngsters admit their disinterest in politics. "We're not scared," one says. "But there's only one party here. That's our system. Why should we worry about boring things? We have our work. We have our plans, We want jobs. We want to get married. Let others concern themselves with government."

The aspirations of communism's first generation seem oddly bourgeois. It wants profitable jobs, motor scooters, foreign books, movie tickets, better housing and security. Those who are not members of the Communist Party don't seem to resent those who are. And those who are seem to regard their membership as tickets to worldly advancement.

Certainly this generation, judged by small samples, seems less audacious in spirit than that of its parents once was. It is confident, somewhat bored with its elders, convinced that everything it learns is an amazing new discovery, and on the whole quite reconciled to life as it is. Above all, it craves fame, comfort and a modest share of happiness.

"This," a bewildered American Communist might remark, if he visited Yugoslavia with open eyes, "is where I came in." He would probably go home and join the Republican Party, since, if this

is what the revolution brings, we have it already. There are other evidences of similarity in outlook between successful capitalist and successful communist countries. New Yorkers in close contact with the administrators of the Soviet industrial fair have been astonished to find the Russians behaving like American businessmen—the same sort of brisk efficiency, the same interest in the good things of life, and even the same sort of humor.

We are not, of course, comparing social systems or attempting to show that there is really "no difference" between Communism and Capitalism. We are suggesting, rather, that the psychological consequences of living under these systems, however different in form, seem to be very similar. You could even argue that Pasternak, as the first Russian author who has been able to publish what he really thinks, takes without difficulty his place along with the pessimists of Western literature—Camus, Sartre, Genet, and Beckett—those who, according to Doris Lessing, feel little more than "a tired pity for human beings." This would confirm the larger identity of the two cultures.

If, then, culturally speaking, there is not a great distinction to be made among the technological societies of the present, regardless of their political complexion, who are the rebels of today?

The rebels of our time do not seem very important to the world, however they feel about themselves. This indifference, however, may not last much longer. We might divide contemporary rebels into three categories—political, ethical, and religio-philosophical. The only political rebels worth mentioning, today, are the anarchists. (There are other rebels, of course, with just causes, but they are catching up on the revolutions and readjustments which have already taken place elsewhere, and here we are concerned with an attempt to anticipate the forward direction of history.) The one sound political judgment that can be made today, and which no one is able to

dispute, is that the primary political evil of our time is the overwhelming, arbitrary, and immeasurably destructive power of the State. The anarchist is the only political thinker who addresses himself directly to a correction of this evil. What is an anarchist? A contributor to *Freedom*, the British anarchist weekly, recently wrote: "Perhaps the outstanding distinction between Anarchist and non-Anarchist is that the former alone seeks no power over others." We are not suggesting that the Anarchist position is without difficulties, or that it contains an ultimate political message for the future. We are suggesting only that the anarchists have shown realistic recognition of the dominant political evil of the age. Their solution may sound unrealistic—we do not argue this point. But whatever is said about anarchist programs, it remains true that a realistic diagnosis with an inadequate prescription is better than a frivolous diagnosis followed by a "realistic" program which does not even touch what is the matter with us, but instead makes it worse.

The ethical rebels are the pacifists. Pacifists are people unable to do an ultimate evil to another individual (kill him) in order to (supposedly) produce a general good. Further, pacifists find themselves unable to put their consciences in the charge of the administrators of the modern military State. The pacifists are the gadflies who are creating so much concern over present-day preparations for all-out nuclear war. The pacifists do not have a sure thing—they make no guarantee of anything but a reasonably clear conscience; and those who consciously reject the pacifist position do have a sure thing. But the sure thing of the non-pacifist (if historical evidence has any validity) is that the world will destroy itself if the nuclear arms race continues as it has been going during the past ten years or so. Pacifism is an incomplete philosophy, just as Anarchism is an incomplete philosophy. But these two views speak to our condition as no other outlook has spoken for generations. It is not the logic of the pacifists and

the anarchists that men reject, but the uncertainty of the unknown country to which this logic leads.

The third rebel of our time is hardly in evidence as a type, and he is certainly not militant, since militance has little part in the things he is doing. This third sort of rebel is the person who is finding new or rediscovering old reference-points of reality. We might call him a representative of the new empiricism—the cautious investigation of mystical experience and of the elements of the contemplative life. The most encouraging thing about this new emergence in modern thought is its lack of any dominant sectarian tradition and the noticeable support it is gaining from an experimental mood of modern rationalism. The inspiration of this trend—it should not yet, and possibly never, be called a "movement"—is far from clear, although the dropping out from modern, technological culture of the elements of authentic human value has doubtless pressed many thoughtful men to look in strange places for a new sense of reality. What is unmistakable is the fact that this trend is finding dozens of expressions, among people of very different backgrounds and interests.

Are we, perhaps, developing the elements of a new type of mankind, by these several means? This is an open question. It is plainly too soon to say. But the Renaissance came into being from just such small currents of a fresh human inspiration. Great epochs are not deliberately fashioned by the planners of human society, so much as they result from a wide variety of new tendencies which have something in common with one another. Centuries must elapse before the type becomes clear, and when it does, the time has already arrived for the premonitory symptoms of still another new beginning. If there is such a thing as progress, we may be sure of one thing—that it proceeds in a spiral course, and that, at any given moment of history, it is possible to find regions in which practically every epoch of the past is represented. For this reason, historical generalization is difficult, and its conclusions may

always be questioned. Yet the fact of these great changes cannot be denied.

## *REVIEW*

### JUDGE—JUDGE NOT

AS MANAS has before remarked, Willard Motley is an author who is moved to large undertakings. True, one should become certain that Motley is not merely fooling around with a "reverence for life" sentiment. But he isn't.

His first work, *Knock on Any Door*, could be recognized as a work of art when one reached the concluding pages and saw the symmetry of the intent set off against the compassion of the writer. Motley's second book failed to win praise from critics. It lacked definition, and only a reader who was particularly appreciative of *Knock on Any Door* could be sensitive to the author's tendency to write about everything at once. This tendency is always a bad one, so far as literary people are concerned, but from the standpoint of a reader primarily concerned with philosophy and psychology, stimulus is always present in Motley's work.

The latest from Mr. Motley, *Let No Man Write My Epitaph* (Random House, 1958), was probably criticized as "an inept leaning toward Steinbeck," since Motley portrays the warm kindness of some of Chicago's derelicts. And some no doubt said that the book is repetitious.

But part of what Motley repeats needs to be repeated. The portrayal of potentially ethical man in an actually unethical society helps to keep one from despair—the same despair which makes drug addiction a way-station on the road of destruction for so many of the characters in *Let No Man Write My Epitaph*. Incidentally, and not forgetting Nelson Algren, this book is the most informative and complete story of drug addiction, its causes and the possible cure, that we have encountered. Its main impact, however, lies in protest against the execution of criminals.

The death of Nick Romano in the electric chair at the close of *Knock on Any Door* was a powerful piece of writing. This theme has so preoccupied Motley that in *Let No Man* he continues his probings into the horrors as well as the meaning of the killing of Nick. Many of the same characters appear and,

since they were friends of Nick when he was alive, the manner of his death leaves an indelible stamp upon every one of them. Motley writes:

And all those in the family who knew bore the burden. Their faces had never been the same after that night 12:04 A.M. Even smiling their faces showed it. It was a secret that trembled in their eyes, a tragedy that lay there. Reflection of a certain horror and disbelief. What had been done to him had been done to them. . . . They had killed him. Sat him in a chair and killed him. Will we ever get over it? Will we ever forget it? Even when we seem to forget it?

They had put away the name unspoken for years.

Life goes on. He dies. They live. But they do not live by a clock turned backward and stopped. The face of the clock is not turned to the wall. The minutes tick forward. The everyday things of life.

Life goes on.

Pestilence comes. Death comes. But when with violence, in war, in electric chair, then it is never forgotten. It need not have been this way.

This shows in their faces.

And now for those passages which belong together with the closing pages of *Knock on Any Door*—too much, perhaps, to put into one book yet it all should be remembered. Motley returns to the details of the execution of Nick Romano (a handsome young Italian boy who grew up in a tough neighborhood, and who kills a policeman who was out to get him). *Let No Man* fittingly closes with the same execution, because it is the underlying theme of both books:

Death would be quick and cheap in the little brick and plaster execution chamber. They would kill him with a penny's worth of electricity.

There would come a growling sound like that made by a truck going up a steep hill under a heavy load. Out of the dynamo would race the lightning. It would hit Nick's brain first, knocking him senseless and throwing him, tense and shuddering, against the taut straps. His mouth would gape open, almost breaking the jaws, in a silent scream more horrible than any sound. The tendons in his neck would stick out like water pipes. Across his forehead the veins would pop, large as pencils.

Yellow would creep into the row of bulbs in the control room, and the legal agents of death, without

turning to look, would pour more current through Nick. There would be no blinking or dimming of the lights throughout the jail, for the chair will have been switched to special current piped into the jail for the purpose. Into the chair and its occupant the electricity that rapes the heart of its last heartbeat would run, true and hot. . . .

Four times the million needles of death would stab him. Most of the current, following the nervous system, would pass along the blood vessels and through the heart. For five seconds 1900 volts of electricity would crash through him. The lightning would still the heart and ravage the reflexes—

Break in the current—

The heart that had stopped immediately at the first touch of the electricity would now beat rapidly and strongly and Nick's arterial pressure would rise fantastically.

Then—900 volts of lightning surging through him.

Steady murder.

Fifty-five seconds with the marker at 900.

The thunderbolt would come through burning hot. His brain would be heated to 140 degrees Fahrenheit. The current would actually fry him. He would be well cooked.

Third charge—1900 volts for another five seconds.

The great vessels would be full of fluid blood. The lungs deeply overfilled with blood. Already there would be deep fissures and hollows between the layers of the brain.

And the lightning would continue to streak through him.

Break in the current, cutting its flow from 1900 to 900 volts.

Current running at the 900 marker to complete the second full minute of frying in the electric chair.

Two minutes. . . .

"The chair," writes Motley, "kills more viciously than any killer," and this is what society does in cold and lengthy premeditation, affording full opportunity for study of the endless psychological consequences:

The chair would show its work and the doctors would come from their seats at elbow's reach from the dead man. First would come the jail physician, his stethoscope dangling from his neck. He would lay the stethoscope on Nick's chest, then step back while the other doctors came forward. Not until every doctor

examines him and the jail physician has gone back for another search for a vagrant heartbeat, would Society be satisfied. . . .

The mute man waits. Waits on his throne, his black rubber crown slipped over his face. Waits with his arms regally upon the rests of the chair but no scepter in his hand. Waits in coldness and disgrace. Under the spotlight a blind-eyed boy on a little stage behind a frame of glass.

Then, no longer watching the dead statue in the chair, the jail physician would announce, slowly and officially, "This man is dead."

Nick never knew he had a son, the result of his attempts to assuage the bitter loneliness of a street girl. Nick, Jr., whose father had died in the chair, whose mother becomes a dope addict, seems to have had little chance to escape his environment. But he passes through the horrors and comes out on the other side, helped by an amazing collection of friends who desire to balance the horrors with kindness.



**COMMENTARY**  
**FOR A "MYTHOLOGY OF ADULTHOOD"**

JUDGING from the statements attributed to Tito in C. L. Sulzberger's Belgrade report (see page 7), J. Edgar Hoover is going to have to move over to make room for Communist moralists who also mourn the passing of old-fashioned goodness. Mr. Hoover periodically deplors the lack of sound morality in the young, and Tito says his heart pains him when he sees how young people in Yugoslavia neglect the revolutionary ideals of a generation ago. Of course, Mr. Hoover wouldn't think much of the ideals Tito is talking about, but they both have a similar complaint—the one that troubled Aristophanes when he saw the Athenians losing their ancient dignity and discipline.

We don't know what Tito can do about the fun-loving young Yugoslavians, except get tough with them—that's Mr. Hoover's formula, at any rate, that and his advocacy of a proper Sunday School attendance.

It would be a lot better, however, to find out what is really wrong. Why are the young unmoved by their fathers' ideals? Is the trouble with the young, or with the ideals?

Undertaking an inventory along these lines, Dr. Henry A. Murray, Harvard University psychologist, placed the blame on the ideals, in his Phi Beta Kappa Oration for '59. What is needed, he said, is a testament of faith which—

will carry us beyond the mythology of dependent and compliant childhood, same as that of the dependent childhood of our society in colonial days, that is, the authoritarian father-son mythology of the religion we inherited, and also beyond the mythology of adolescence, same as that of the adolescence of our Nation, the mythology of protest, rebellion, independence, rugged individualism. Both of these mythologies are still operative. In fact, the mythology of adolescence, stressing freedom without qualifications or conditions, constitutes our national religion. Please understand and hold in mind that in looking forward to a future that has moved beyond these idealisms of today and yesterday, I am not forsaking them. There is a helpless, suffering child

and a frustrated, rebellious adolescent in every one of us, and always will be. I would say, there is a time and a place for liberation from authority and the development and expression of a self-reliant personality. But, as I see the human situation, we are in need of a mythology of adulthood, something that is conspicuous for its absence in Western literature, a mythology of interdependence and creation, not only on the level of imaginative love, marriage, and the forming of a family, but on other levels, especially that of international reciprocities. Have we not pretty nearly reached the age when we can well afford to go beyond the glorification of vanity, pride, and egotism, individual and national?

It is time for us to give less attention to the atomic scientists, and start listening to the psychological scientists.

# CHILDREN

## . . . and Ourselves

### INFORMATION AND ISSUES

A SPECIAL education number of *New Age* (August, 1959) is a manifest of Masonic devotion to the principles supported by all "schools without dogma." One might expect an argument against the intrusion of religious interests, since the Masons have always been indefatigable on this point, but "Our Public Schools" is primarily concerned with still-needed instruction in the foundations of our democracy. Since the principal writers of this issue of *New Age* do not mention it, we may note that most of the Founding Fathers were themselves Masons, and that the ideals of "liberty" and "equality" were the international cipher of Masonic Orders in the eighteenth century. Jefferson's and Washington's God was a Masonic God, closer to Thomas Paine's deistic conception than any orthodox theological notion.

During the early days of New England, schools held their licenses from church authorities, and the Puritan creed was taught to all pupils. But the same philosophy which provided the foundation for the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights sought an instruction of children that would leave full freedom for later self-determination of religious views. The early American Masons and Deists inclined to experiment in a new kind of schooling, of which a noteworthy example was provided by Benjamin Franklin. The Franklin Academy deliberately avoided any and all religious issues. We quote from "Our Public Schools":

One school of colonial days is worth mentioning because it was different from all others, although its influence was confined to a small area. It had no counterpart in Europe and had no religious motive. It was the creation of the renowned Benjamin Franklin. It was attended by students of Latin grammar school age, but its purpose was to prepare students for life as well as for college. The curriculum advanced by Franklin included navigation, surveying, agriculture, the spoken languages of the day, natural history,

chemistry, physics, government and history. Although Franklin's curriculum was later forced into the classical mold of the Mid-eighteenth Century, his school is pointed to as the first American academy, which was the transition institution from the Latin grammar school and the English grammar school to the modern high school. Self taught, Franklin's designation of teacher-preparation as one of the purposes of his school is notable, although the language he used in doing so was no great compliment to those who aspired to teaching: "that others of the lesser sort might be trained as teachers." Franklin's Academy was destined to become the College of Philadelphia and still later the University of Pennsylvania.

Public schooling was not considered during the framing of the Constitution, save indirectly. Given and Farley, co-authors of "Our Public Schools," indicate why:

An inherent characteristic of our form of government is the sovereignty of the individuals who compose it. The preeminence of the individual is not attained through the use of a common mold. The builders of our Republic therefore wisely left the schools to the states and communities to be shaped to the needs of citizens as individuals.

Another reason why the school as an institution was not provided for in the Constitution was its long-recognized ecclesiastical nature so apparent in its instruction, supervision, curriculum and support. The school began in America as it had in England, as a handmaiden of the church.

Here we find reflected the sentiment that undoubtedly was a factor in the omission of provisions for education. When the Bill of Rights was adopted, nearly all schools were part of some religious establishment. Article I in the Bill of Rights states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . ."

As a concluding passage affirms: "The public school fosters unity in diversity. The school shapes the free, democratic society in which we live." And the only way to have "unity in diversity" is to provide a common language which depends upon no sectarian reference points. The real argument against "released time" for religious education and against the introduction of Christian prayers in the elementary school is that such

pursuits focus *public* attention upon religious concerns which should remain private. By "doing nothing" about religion, in other words, the ideal public school does a great deal by implication, and the *New Age* gives excellent reasons for why this should be so. In our opinion, every kindergarten and elementary school teacher would benefit from a reading of this pamphlet—nursery school teachers, too.

Our five-year-old has just "graduated" from what we consider to be a much better than average nursery school, but he did cause some discomfort, the substance of which was conveyed to a parent in the conscientiously furnished "progress report" for the period. The thinking was that this school, whose founders were devoted members of a Christian sect, felt that prayer was necessary training for good citizenship. First of all, our little boy thought that a little chant as thanksgiving for daily food was addressed to the cook—and that was all right, because that cook really was out to produce proper menus for five-year-olds. But when it finally penetrated that somebody named "God" was involved, the logical question was Why? And, since he couldn't quite get the drift of the answer, he stopped saying the prayer. He figured he didn't believe in God. Reaching back into whatever he had been able to gather from a parental attempt at home to do a little philosophy with him, he announced that praying to God was silly, because everybody was God, and why should you pray to yourself? He further informed two young friends that *they* were silly because they were God and didn't know it.

Well, as you can imagine, this led to an extended conversation at the time of the last progress report. We pointed out that the other little children wouldn't have been disturbed if a religious issue had not been raised, and that, since our little boy was a minority of one and didn't seem in the least disturbed, it might not be necessary to worry about the effect of his questions and assertions upon the others. We went on to say that we certainly could have no

objections to the running of a private school in the way determined by the consciences of its directors, but that in the public school we would formally object to a Christian prayer. And that brought the issue out into the open—the same issue which the *New Age's* "Our Public Schools" clarifies so well by the way of background.

A director of the nursery school wanted to know why just one or two non-believers in God should interfere with the beliefs of the majority. After all, she said, the essence of our democracy means that the minority go along with the majority. But this seems to be a failure in her own education. The essence of the democracy founded in the 1770's was a guarantee of minority opinion *by* the majority. And this is the whole point. The majority promises not to intrude its persuasions upon others, if only a few, in any matter of opinion or belief, and the majority, furthermore, agrees not to propoagandize in favor of any religious creed. As a treaty negotiated during Washington's presidency affirmed, "the United States is not a Christian country"—because the Constitution of the United States assumes a "beyond-creed" position. The first five presidents of the United States were in no sense orthodox Christians. That all chose to use the word "God," may be true, but for them "God" transcended any particular theological definition.

## *FRONTIERS*

### **Hazards—Random Sampling**

STRONTIUM 90 is no doubt innocent of the moods and twists of irony, but we can't help but be suspicious of the finding, recently made public by Atomic Energy Commission scientists, that whole wheat bread "contains roughly three to four times as much radioactive strontium 90 as does white bread." The tests were made in the New York office of the Commission, on bread bought in the city's grocery stores, but the presiding researcher, Dr. Allan Lough, said that the flour might have come from anywhere in the nation. White bread, he said, had no more of the fall-out substance than the typical amount found in milk throughout the country, but whole wheat went slightly higher, even, than the highest strontium 90 content found in milk. The *New York Times* (Sept. 4) writer comments, however, that "In terms of possible human hazard the milk and bread figures are considered low." Another report states that the high calcium content of whole wheat attracts the strontium 90, but then there is still another news story reporting that the Mexican diet of tortillas (made from corn, strong in calcium) is responsible for the absence of strontium 90 in Mexicans! Obviously, irrational forces are at work!

If you take a gloomy, animistic view of this affair, you might argue that the malicious bits of strontium 90 see no point in inhabiting white bread, which is bad enough without any evil fortification from fall-out, whereas the whole wheat is likely to make people healthy unless something is done about it.

But whatever the cause, it is plain that the guardians of the nation's health are as alert as ever. Another evidence of the watchful eye of public servants concerned with what we eat comes in a Food and Drug Administration warning that America is infested with food faddists who are running a multi-million-dollar racket, spreading "more bunk about food and nutrition than about

any other single topic in the health field—and perhaps any other field." This announcement was made (*New York Times*, Aug. 3) by Wallace F. Janssen, chief of the bureau's public information division. He continues:

"Food faddism today has aspects of an organized movement that is self-supporting and actively seeking new converts."

The nature of the racket, and the false concepts that promote it can be learned from the court actions brought by the Food and Drug Administration, Mr. Janssen said.

"The old-time patent medicine man is back again," Mr. Janssen went on, "but this time he is a 'nutrition educator' who rings your doorbell and tries to persuade you that a shotgun mixture of vitamins and minerals, plus some secret factor which nutrition scientists have not yet identified, is the answer to all your health problems."

Vitamin products have a recognized place in modern preventive medicine, Mr. Janssen said, "but they are not cure-alls, and it is dangerous for anyone to assume that such products can be relied on to treat unidentified ailments."

We don't propose to argue with Mr. Janssen about this. We haven't read the evidence and might not wholly understand it even if we did. But what is annoying about all such diatribes which come from some scientific "on high" is an obvious neglect of the background causes of so-called "faddist" or otherwise unorthodox movements in health. We recall, for example, an editorial which appeared in the *Journal* of the American Medical Association a few years ago, deploring the fact that a medical student can graduate from medical school and start out in the practice of medicine without ever having any formal education in nutrition. It seems obvious that a region of medical knowledge so important to health should have the primary attention of medical educators.

Such institutional attacks on activities which lie outside the pale of medical orthodoxy almost always reflect a dull partisanship. The implication is that if you have a license to practice medicine, you are somehow immune to fads. Yet the history

of orthodox medicine is notoriously filled with instances of belief in majestic nonsense. The fact is, we think, that the food faddists, for all their excesses and occasional wild enthusiasms, have done more for the health of the nation than the doctors, who usually wait till you get sick; the nutritionists are certainly on a sounder basis physiologically than the practitioners of "shot" therapy, however endorsed by the Food and Drug Administration.

A modest little note in the *New York Times* for Aug. 1 relates that "Permanent deafness continues to result from the use of one of the drugs in the streptomycin family." Already there are thirty-two victims who will not recover the hearing they have lost. The report continues: "The villain is dihydrostreptomycin, which is sometimes included in commercial preparations of penicillin and streptomycin."

Of course, if you get going on reports of this general pessimistic character, you'll never stop. There are so many of them. Early last month (Sept. 3) in England, for example, at the annual meeting of the British Association of the Advancement of Science, Dr. L. Harrison Matthews, a zoologist, declared that "unless the tempo of life slackened in the next few years the populations of the United States and Europe might suffer a catastrophic crash because of mass neuroses." Dat ole debbil, the "pace of modern civilization," according to Dr. Matthews, is "producing a syndrome, or group of symptoms, of mass stress." These effects of our nerve-wracking lives, he added, are accentuated by "the essentially unsatisfying, aimless and materialist outlook" of modern life.

Meanwhile, at a more "domestic" level, young Americans are succumbing to the "suburban jitters." An Englewood, N.J., doctor reports that his patients are suffering increasingly from ulcers, heart attacks, and other "tension-related psychosomatic disorders." The problem of getting ahead and staying ahead is getting them down. Even the children are affected by the

anxiety of their parents. The report (*New York Times*, Aug. 8) said that among three New Jersey towns—

Englewood has the highest percentages of patients with coronary thrombosis, duodenal ulcer, essential hypertension and hypertensive cardiovascular disease.  
...

While the report found that the "fiercely competitive" world the husbands lived in could explain their susceptibility it was said that the wives lived in a world often fraught with frustration, "Already," the report said, "in Englewood Hospital 40 per cent of the ulcer cases in young adults occur in women."

They are getting broncho-pneumonia more often, too. . . . Without family or friends they can rely upon, without maids they cannot go to bed with a bad cold, but must continue to care for small children, shop, and meet their husbands in the evenings. The result, the report said, was pneumonia.

The unrelenting drive to get a better job, make more money, buy a larger home, a newer car, and even to keep a greener lawn, is driving these people into ill-health. Boys and mothers suffer, also, from being uprooted from their homes when the "junior executive" breadwinner of the family is transferred to another area.

A similar pattern of emotional reactions is found in England. Dr. C. F. Bramley, health officer of Gloucestershire, reports (*New York Herald Tribune*, Aug. 16) that even children in the cradles are affected by the jitters. Asthma and skin complaints are commoner among children under five than they were twenty years ago, and more children appear to be born with allergies. The anxiety diseases are spreading, and our daily habits make them worse.

To these reports about children and young people, we may add the fact that a similar study of children attending the Pasadena schools was begun recently by a school psychiatrist, who had noticed the dangerous degree to which children reflect the nervous ambitions of their parents. This program of research, however, was disapproved by the school authorities and dropped

because one parent did not like the probing questions being asked of her children in relation to their home life.

Well, we do not expect any great good to come from compiling these journalistic portents of disaster. Yet the facts here related should not be ignored. They represent the conditions under which we live much more realistically than do the warnings of statesmen and military experts. It is difficult to sustain the conceits of our "great civilization" in the face of such reports. We might better give more attention to the quality of our lives than to the alleged necessities of "military survival."