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PROBLEMS OF MORAL JUDGMENT

THOSE—usually involuntary—philosophers, the novelists, have a way of presenting situations which are central to the issues of moral judgment at the time their books come out. Novels of war almost always involve human behavior in what are coming to be called "*extreme* situations," so that these books dramatize such issues in high relief, overshadowing the more commonplace settings of personal action and decision. One book which has haunted the editors of MANAS since the very first issue of this paper—in which it was briefly reviewed—is William Wister Haines' *Command Decision.* The theme of this book is the impotence of modern man. In it an American general sends scores of young flyers to almost certain death in order to destroy the threat of Nazi jet propulsion installations. His record of decimating losses loses him his command, but his successor, at the end of the book, is convinced that Dennis, the retiring commander, has been right and agrees to continue the same ruthless policy. In the MANAS review (Jan. 4, 1948), the writer said:

> Dennis is the strong, selfless man in torment, a warped Prometheus of the twentieth century. In order to do good, like Prometheus, he must suffer evil; but, unlike Prometheus the evil he suffers is that of having to inflict death upon both friends and enemies....
>
> The hero of *Command Decision* practices his short-term, good-soldier morality with all his heart, but the human predicament calls for something more. War is not a cosmic intrusion of evil, nor an Act of God. War is man-made, it is an accumulation of countless petty immoralities and the multiplying indifferences of many millions. But Dennis, as General, can only perfect the "superior ferocity" of his army while as a human being he simply endures the result.... The circumstance of war is simply given; the ordeal of Dennis neither erases the evil nor explores its cause. While *Command Decision* generates the stabbing thrill of pain and provides the spectacle of its endurance by brave men, there is no expiation, no spiritual catharsis, at the end. The furies are not appeased. When the new commander takes over, the same cycle of agony begins again.

Where do you go, in your mind, with a situation like this one? (We have another book to discuss, also about a man in war, which caused us to recall the Haines story, but we'll get to that later.) You can move in at least two directions. One is the direction of straight, humanitarian criticism, to which our 1948 review inclines, pointing out that there are things people can do to prevent war, that they need not accept the role of either victim or executioner. The other direction of inquiry is frankly metaphysical, and it is this direction which interests us, here.

The humanitarian view is collectivist and historical. It does not demand an explanation of the plight of the individual man—either of Dennis or of the young pilots whom he sends to fiery death. The metaphysical view, however, requires an evaluation of the individual as well as the collective situation. Metaphysics reduces a particular event to a timeless framework of relationships and asks, *What does it mean?* It does not accept the humanitarian extenuation—*Tomorrow* things will be different, when we have made our revolution and *changed* the human situation. For metaphysics, this is no answer at all. What about all the men who are rubbed out as unimportant ciphers before the revolution is accomplished? This is essentially the same question as that put to the advocates of the historical religion of Christianity: What about all the human beings who died before the advent of the Saviour? By what means do they escape the damnation ordained for all who do not accept the belief prescribed in Mark 16:16?

There is absolutely no way to make this kind of questioning irrelevant. Every human being has at least the germ of an awareness of individual destiny. Every man has at least a rudimentary

vision of the good and pursues it with the energy and talents at his disposal. We cannot say that this vision becomes important only for the present generation. The human longing for the good is a *principle* of value, not an end to be satisfied in some historical future. Or, since there are obviously some goods which are evolutions of the historical process, we should say that these goods are neither the only nor the major goods to be sought by human beings.

Here is this man, General K. C. Dennis, competent enough in his chosen profession, heroic enough according to its standards, who is nevertheless exposed to an agonizing dilemma. Instead of a romantic hero, he has become the official scavenger of a failing civilization. His immediate employer, the Army, has the role of corporate receiver of a morally bankrupt world. His fate can excite pathos, but little more.

Is there any model of the universe in which we can fit this man and his role and make some sense out of it? This is the metaphysical question.

The same question has to be applied to the lesser players—to the doomed flyers as well as to the miserable Nazis who are bombed in their abominable jet plane factories. Then there are all those pawns of the drama who do not even appear, but must be imagined—the children and other innocents who are "accidentally" killed or maimed.

We now begin to see the more general problem, which has always existed, but is today pressed home to us by the bitter drama of the extreme war situation. The unique feature of the modern novel—or of *Command Decision* as one type of the modern novel—is that the hero is no longer a hero, but a victim. This development (which is either a historical development or some strange aspect of a classical metaphysical situation) destroys the generality of meaning for human beings in this form of literature; or, you could say that its message is that *there is no meaning* for human beings in such situations. We are used to accepting the subordinate, unfulfilled roles of minor characters in the novel. But the story is not about *them.*

A great writer, of course, does not give this impression. A great writer never exhibits indifference toward any human being; but even so, the dramatic unity of his work will inevitably focus the unfoldment of meaning in two or three characters around whom the story turns. There is artistic justification for this. Let us, the author says, look at *this* man and woman, to see what happens in their lives, and how they deal with it. Some other time, we may look at the others.

It is of course true that some people seem to embody more of meaning than others. Under normal circumstances, the writer is drawn to such people as the material for his characters. Myths and legends are concerned with the trials and exploits of extraordinary individuals, no doubt because their lives provide more symmetry to the portrayal of struggle and achievement. The "adventure" side of the story, you could say, contains the secular appeal of entertainment. But back of the romance and action is the *meaning,* which has to do with fulfillment of human purpose. In shallow, moralizing tales, the romance and action are stereotyped, the traditional Meaning being forced upon the reader, almost in capital letters. And in melodrama, the meaning is stereotyped, a mere device to assure the reader that virtue and goodness will be taken care of.

But what happens in *Command Decision is* the collapse of meaning, except within the military convention. "Mr. Haines," as our 1948 review said, "shows us what a man of inflexible determination may accomplish after he has accepted—like a 'good soldier'—the ruthlessness of war as a kind of cosmic necessity."

Mr. Haines, however, has something more to say—an observation he puts into the mouth of a tired war correspondent:

> Never before had Brockhurst so entirely comprehended that war is waste, that armies are beyond help.

> They are conceived in the failure of human beings to help each other. He was one of those human beings. Like the rest he could not help now. He could only wait until, in their own way, the armies had produced a peace in which men might try again.... The army was only the projected form of a deeper malignance. It had been created as a shield against a more highly developed tyranny than its own; it would survive by a superior ferocity.

In this paragraph, possibly, the author regains a sense of meaning for his book, and for General Dennis. Dennis, you might reason, by keeping faith with the military logic of his program of destruction, helps to exhibit the insanity of the total program of his civilization—the "deeper malignance" of which the war is an incidental expression. A society which does things half-heartedly—even to fighting its wars half-heartedly, or sentimentally—will never find out anything important about itself.

This is a kind of social metaphysic of meaning for the novel, *Command Decision.* Do your job thoroughly, with martial vigor and devotion, never giving up, and you will drive the rottenness of the age to the surface, like pus from a boil. Then people will see what is wrong and know what to do. So the collapse of meaning in the book is not total. Dennis has the role of a man who completes the logic of insanity, in order that the disease may have a diagnosis and give the world some hope of regaining its health.

But whether a man acting out such a role could stand full realization of the meaning of his behavior is a question. The substitute for this kind of self-conscious horror, muting its pain, is the idea of *duty,* which helps a man to do his best, or what sometimes turns out to be his worst, without too much insistent questioning. The climax of self-realization comes only when a man demands, and obtains, the right to accept no definition of duty except his own.

Dennis is obviously not ready for this kind of definition, nor is the society which he serves. The age, however, is groping for such a definition. One was made, obscurely and abstractly, at the Nuremburg Trials, but no modern nation is capable of admitting the implications of the Nuremburg judgment, except as it applies to defeated powers which lie helpless before the bar of a victor's "justice."

Dennis, on this hypothesis, accepts his role symbolically—he does his "duty"—blindly hoping that some higher good is served as he orders out the bomber flights. And so with the rest of the characters. They are all of them "doing their duty." Even the Nazis, and even Eichmann, as he now declares, were "doing their duty." Such protestations ravage the theory of meaning, depending upon who makes them, but it is the only meaning we have left for *Command Decision,* unless we allow that all these men were intent upon proving to the world the insanity of the war system.

The other book we have for discussion is Al Morgan's *One Star General* (Rinehart, 1959, and Cardinal, 1960), also a war story. *One Star General* has the distinction of being a novel about a military man who wants to die in battle, and doesn't seem to care how many of his men he takes with him, yet holds the sympathy of the author and, most of the time, of the reader. The portrait of Bronco Bronson, the hero with a death-wish, develops in a series of flash-backs which explain why Bronson is so eager to die. Bronson hates the army, yet he graduates from West Point in the family tradition to please his mother, who lost her husband, also a regular army officer, in World War I. Denied a career of his choice, Bronson is also denied the wife of his choice through an accident which kills his fiancee. Bronson gets nothing that he wants, until the very end of the book, when he finally learns to want what he gets. The question which the reader has to answer is how he can forgive Bronson for his death-seeking military escapades—one of them kills three hundred men—and in the end feel good about Bronson's happy ending. For you do feel good about Bronson's final and successful heroism and the reconciliation with his long-suffering wife.

But you also think about those three hundred men—mere supernumeraries in the dramatic career of Bronco Bronson, no more than paint on canvas scenery, wiped off the earth by a single burst of enemy fire. This is surely a royalist conception of the good life—the life of Bronco Bronson. What do the peasants matter? They will die one day, anyhow. And then you wonder how the ledger can be balanced. Perhaps Mr. Morgan should write a book about each one of those three hundred men, to show that he, as another human being, is not indifferent to their fate. But Mr. Morgan might protest, and he might be right, that he has looked at those men and found only one or two of them worth a novel. They are, he could argue, dramatic or literary nonentities. Which means that their lives don't exhibit the stuff of a *story.* Again, it is a question of the symmetry of human struggle.

We keep wondering if the books by modern authors about very ordinary people are not conscientious attempts to be loyal to the "masses" who are to be liberated from every form of aristocratic exploitation—and even from distinguished and heroic behavior, since this sets a man off from the majority of his fellows. At any rate, one consequence of this preoccupation with ordinariness is the reduction of the novel, which used to be about individuals in a social setting, to little more than a portrayal of the social setting alone. By this means drama falls to the level of pageantry, and people are mass images caught in the grinding gears of a repugnant social machine.

Well, then, you can find æsthetic and literary justification for having a book about a single hero, but to support it on moral grounds you have to add that the hero is everyman. When this is understood, you are able to imagine a potential hero in all the supernumeraries, and say to yourself, when one of them dies, "His time will come." If you do *not* say this, you are guilty of a serious form of contempt for human beings, or participate in the collective cultural contempt for apparently unimportant individuals.

Mr. Morgan persuades himself and his readers that Bronco Bronson's death-wish is a necessary part of the working out of his salvation. You can't condemn Bronson for that. The problem, then, is to reconcile yourself with a formula for salvation that is so expensive in the life of others. You can't do it at all in the humanitarian context. A good, progressive, collectivist system would liquidate Bronson early in the game; or, if the collectivist system had reached its ideological high noon, it might keep Bronson around for especially dangerous projects like suicide attacks, attempting to direct his zeal for personal risk to some fruitful military or political end.

If you take this problem out of the context of war, it will not be difficult to find illustrations of men who bring ruin upon their friends and associates through their driving ambition or neurotic risk-taking decisions. It is doubtful, in other words, that this sort of problem can be solved by better social arrangements. With the best possible safety measures, every large-scale building project kills some men through accidents. The safety councils are forever reminding us that there are more deaths on the highway from automobile accidents than occur from war. Both the social and the moral circumstances of these fatalities are very different, of course, from the casualties caused by a mad officer in the army, but what we are trying to get at is the idea that the fall of a man from the twentieth story of the steel frame of a sky-scraper creates just as much of a problem of meaning as the sudden death of a company of soldiers prodded to a foolhardy attack by its commanding officer. Further, a drunken diplomat's pettish disregard of matters of high importance to the lives of his countrymen, or a prideful and power-mad statesman's rejection of peace-gestures on the part of a weakening but still very dangerous enemy seems a far greater immorality than a line officer's neurotic wish to die with his boots on.

What seems apparent is that the "dreadful" things that men do are more singled out by convention—the conventions of particular situations—than by any impartial system of moral judgment. And it is also true that we are continually involved in unknown as well as known ways in the mistakes, egoisms, and follies of our fellows. To be intelligent, we need to acquire and practice a vast tolerance of the unintentional wrongs we suffer, since there is small likelihood that these misfortunes can be remedied by any sort of "social" measures. The most that could be hoped for is that they would be made invisible by doctrinaire ideological claims and slogans.

On this basis, perhaps, we can reach a working comprehension of our friendly feeling for Bronco Bronson and his suicidal tendency, mastered at the very end.

But again, there is the problem of a meaning for the life of one man which can seem so ruthlessly indifferent to the lives of others. Is our sympathy for Bronco Bronson a false sentimentality, a sickly, egotistical identification with the novelist's romantic figure, or is there some intuitive justification for feeling this way?

There is only one possible justification for the meaning of a novel which has a hero, and it is the same as the justification for the hero in the myths of antiquity. It is that the hero is everyman. But if we say this, we acquire new problems. How do the literary non-entities get their chance to actually *be* heroes? We can't let this question go, for if we do we may find someone reviving the *Fuehrer* theory, in which the colorless, obedient units realize their heroism in the surrogate self, the leader. Any such solution takes us back into the hungry jaws of a peculiarly vicious brand of collectivism.

But what other solution is there? This is a serious question—the kind of question which arises when you look into the innocent eyes of a sick or dying child, or when you read about the destruction of a population numbering hundreds of thousands, from famine, pestilence, or the explosion of an atomic bomb. How will these people, cut off suddenly from life, gain the fulfillment which is the birthright of every man? And the question applies to old men, too—old men who, all through their lives, marked time. They never took, or never had, the opportunity to *become* fully human. They never even flirted with heroic decision. They are not even failures, because they never tried. And yet they are men. We accept the novel's meaning, the myth's meaning, by irrepressible intuition, yet to work out the meaning in practical terms, especially in the terms of the modern world, with its failing forms of even historical or collectivist fulfillment, seems incredibly difficult, if not impossible.

We still have the means of intuitive moral judgment, but our rational grounds, the grounds found in traditional humanist philosophy, no longer supply us with much of a footing. Either we need a new kind of rationalism, or we should prepare ourselves, as the Existentialists have been doing, for stoic admission of defeat.

REVIEW
EDWARD BELLAMY TODAY

THE title of Edward Bellamy's popular utopian novel, *Looking Backward*—more than 600,000 copies sold in the United States alone—takes on an additional significance in the light of the most recent biographical work by Sylvia E. Bowman—*The Year 2000—A Critical Biography of Edward Bellamy* (Bookman Associates, New York, 1958). For apart from the fascination of all utopias, today's reader of Bellamy can trace a number of ideological and political confusions back to a time when "socialism" could be conceived in strictly idealist terms. This, we think, is one reason why *The Year 2000* makes provocative reading.

There is no better way of getting behind the ideological oversimplifications of the present global struggle than by becoming convinced, on the basis of historical evidence, that "socialism" has always had two faces. The two faces of socialism, from the beginnings of socialist thought, are portrayed with an inspired clarity in Edmund Wilson's *To the Finland Station;* and anyone who reads Wilson's book thoroughly can never again fail to find a measure of understanding for the *ideal* promptings of any socialist movement. Bellamy saw the ideal—a society based upon an awakened desire for the common good—successfully separated from the taint of vengeance or anger, and without any conception of violence. It was for this reason that Bellamy felt it necessary to avoid the word "Socialist" or "Communist," an intention recognized in a backhanded way by Louis Boudin, a Communist of the '30s, who asserted that the influence of Bellamy's point of view had been responsible for "retarding the growth of Marxism during its entire existence of some forty odd years" in the United States. As one reviewer of Miss Bowman's book puts it: "Bellamy was so compassionate for his less-happy contemporaries that he almost perforce produced a synthesis of what Americans in '88 thought about their life and what they wanted to be." It was to the idealists, then, that Bellamy appealed and, as the sale of *Looking Backward* showed, they were numerous indeed. It was as if, in a certain layer of national consciousness, there remained an intuitive perception that the work of establishing a "New Order of Ages" following 1776 had by no means been completed.

What apparently dissipated the influence of such men as Bellamy was the nemesis of violence, the violence of capital-labor disputes, the violence employed in a settling of issues among the Marxists themselves, and the violence of two world wars. But when the threat of violence is absent, or at least in abeyance, the current of Bellamy's sort of idealism runs strong. In a review of *The Year 2000* for the *Nation* (Jan. 9, 1960), Irving Flamm says that *Looking Backward* "had a profound influence on the intellectuals of his day. It sparked the organization of Bellamy clubs, and a 'Nationalist' movement which attracted many notables, among them William Dean Howells, Henry Demarest Lloyd, Frances Willard, Margaret Fuller and the youthful Clarence Darrow. The populist party gained much of its strength from Bellamy supporters."

It is sometimes pointed out that some of the greatest of American idealists are today better known abroad than in the United States. The names of Thomas Paine and Jefferson are still alive in the far corners of the earth, and Thoreau was a strong influence upon Gandhi. On this point Mr. Flamm adds a note respecting Bellamy:

> In Europe Bellamy is still a potent influence. Touring Holland a few months ago the writer learned that a Bellamy Society, still functioning in Rotterdam, circulates a fortnightly journal devoted to its Socialist principles. In the Amsterdam public library, the list of publications by and about Bellamy is longer than those found in most American libraries. Among oldsters here the memory of Bellamy is still cherished. . . .

Of particular interest to MANAS readers is Miss Bowman's exploration of the bearing of Bellamy's "metaphysics" upon his anticipations of an enlightened social order: Bellamy's socialism was of necessity evolutionary rather than revolutionary, because he believed that education in a higher sort of philosophy and religion was a necessity if people were to understand what "true equality" is. Bellamy evidently thought it impossible for a man to believe that the welfare of others is as important as his own unless he stops fearing and being suspicious. And

fear and suspicion are not likely to die unless what appears to be the ultimate fear—the fear of death—is eliminated. On this point Miss Bowman writes:

> Bellamy's conception of death robbed it of its sting, for he believed that just as man looked upon the death of a flower as a part of the frame of nature, so should he regard his own demise. Fear of death existed, he thought, because men did not actually believe in the soul or because the soul was merely a point of view and not a "fact of consciousness" to them. If man developed his spiritual side, death would become nothing more than "a slight and obvious step in natural evolution." That Bellamy had developed his spiritual side and that he had found solace in his philosophy were proved when he faced death in September, 1874, with equanimity and when he died in 1898 With the words, "I am but stepping into another room."

Bellamy was strong on the ethics implied in the Sermon on the Mount, and respected the image of Jesus of Nazareth, but he could not tolerate the idea of a God who was to be approached in fear. In Bellamy's own words: "What I want to know is why in the name of creation should I bow down to anything. I am. I know not that anything else is. If there be anything else, I deduce its existence from myself who am major premise in all metaphysics. To bow down then to aught I deduce from myself is flat idolatry, and catch me at it! I am; others may be; and shall the real worship the imaginary, the actual the possible? Good Lord deliver us from such folly." There might be some form of intelligence beyond that of man's as we know it, but this would reside most conceivably in a "hierarchy of beings above ourselves just as there are grades below."

Bellamy believed that there is an "impersonal aspect" of individuality yet to be fully developed. In other words, he was trying to set the groundwork for remedial economic and political reforms in an attitude identical with that which characterizes the profound dialogues of the *Bhagavad-Gita.* As Krishna would put it, a man is ready to assume proper control over the kingdom of his own nature—or an earthly kingdom—only when he reaches a state where he can no longer be raised to ecstasy by success or lowered to despair by defeat—when he has learned the meaning of "action in inaction and inaction in action," and when he has seen that "gold and stone are the same." Again we borrow a Bellamy quotation from Miss Bowman to indicate the difference between Bellamy and most socialist revolutionaries:

> The truth is . . . that the life of the soul is accepted by us as a point of faith rather than realized as a fact. It is present to our intellects rather than to our consciousness. That is wrong, all wrong. The life of the soul should be with us a life as real, as substantial, as positive as that of the body. This I believe to be the next development of human nature, and a development it will be which will realize the potential divinity of man. We should not regard the soul as something super-added to the body, but the body to the soul.

This is perhaps one of the reasons why Bellamy's movement has never really "failed,"—why those who read Bellamy are stimulated or exalted, unless committed to an ideology which requires violence and manipulation of the motives attached to self-preservation. It is to Miss Bowman's credit that in this, the first of two volumes on the life and influence of Bellamy, she allows us to see so clearly why this is so. Bellamy's writings are part of a current, as she says, "of the ideas of the *me* and the *not me* of Emerson, the Swedenborgians, and the Brahmins; and of the conception of absorption into the divine essence as set forth by Plotinus. The essay contains also the romantic's ecstatic, mystical conception of the relationship of man to nature such as is found in the poetry of Walt Whitman, as well as the idea of the submergence of the individual for the common good found in the philosophies of Epictetus, Marcus Antoninus, Fenelon, Christ, and countless others."

Arthur Morgan's excellent biography of Bellamy—reviewed at length in MANAS for Aug. 17, 1949—was followed by a later work, *Nowhere was Somewhere,* a study of utopias. In this book, Mr. Morgan penned three sentences which seem peculiarly relevant to the conceptions explored in the present review:

> The great utopias of the world are several or many steps ahead of the crowd. The qualities which make them failures at a particular time may be the very ones that give them enduring value. Elements of Bellamy's utopia which half a century ago made it revolutionary and dangerous, within a few years may be a guide to social stability and conservatism.

COMMENTARY
FLOATING ISLANDS OF MEANING

THE word "Nature" is used frequently in this week's Frontier article, but with no attempt to spell out what it means. The reason for this neglect should be obvious: It is quite impossible to tell exactly what Nature means. Nature belongs to our non-scientific, classical humanist vocabulary. It is a value-charged term. Its meaning changes, from writer to writer and from century to century. In his *Studies in Words* (Cambridge University Press), C. S. Lewis takes fifty pages to tell about some of these changes in the meaning of "Nature."

Today, Nature is a word with splendid overtones. Natural means spontaneous, free, undefiled, uncoerced—it is interesting how you want to pile tautology on tautology when you speak of Nature. What more can you say after you declare that it is *natural?*

But a thousand years ago Nature would have meant something quite different: the unregenerate, unsanctified earthly base, source of the Old Nick, the lowly and unsuccessful competitor of the Divine. And two thousand years ago, there was still another meaning—the meaning familiar to the ancient Greeks; but you will have to go to Mr. Lewis for that.

The point is that the value-charged words in our vocabulary—the words which used to convey *sacred* ideas—are none of them capable of final definition. They represent floating islands of meaning—amorphous bodies suspended in the sea of thought and feeling—which undergo constant although immediately imperceptible addition and subtractions. "Molecules" of implication come and go. Sometimes the islands of meaning acquire a luminous glow, and then they become beacons of revolutionary vision. *Nature* took fire in this way a few centuries ago, and gave sparks to countless patriots and dreamers. We still respond to the inspiration of this word, without knowing exactly why.

How do the value-charged words get their meaning? They get it in two ways: from undying and largely ineffable intuitions, and from the consensus of culture and history. The meaning of a word like nature is a mixture of these two influences.

Sometimes one value-charged word replaces another. It is said, for example, that in the manuscript of his *Ethics,* Spinoza had used the word Nature in all or many places where we now find the word God. His publisher, fearing the anger of the orthodox, took out Nature and put God in. Obviously, the prudent publisher was trying to hold back the tide of change in the meanings of value-charged words. Nature *did* replace God for many of the leaders and shapers of Western civilization. (For lucid discussion of this sort of change in word-meanings, see the first chapter of Carl Becker's *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*.)

We must of course use these words with mutable meanings; they are the most valuable words we have. But it is of the greatest importance to take regular inventory of their contents, to make sure that we are not writing for the twentieth century with a nineteenth- or eighteenth- (or even a thirteenth-) century vocabulary, although even this may be permissible, on occasion—but only if we know what is going on.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE BEST OF THE WESTERNS

WE should again like to recommend the "Western" writing of Jack Schaefer—this time for children, youths and adults alike—in the form of a Bantam paperbook collection of stories called *The Kean Land*. There are many virtues in the "western story" tradition—along with occasional crudities and absurdities. The time and the setting of the Western story present a situation in which each reader is able to conceive of himself as a self-reliant wanderer. Courage and self-sufficiency, whether for good or evil ends, are the stuff out of which ballads and tales have always come; and in the United States the background has been the wild growth of virgin plains, rivers and mountains.

Even the "bang-bang" Westerns afford a crude reflection of these characteristics, and their popularity abroad, as well as in America, reveals the universal hunger for adventure in a vast untrammeled land. Our children obviously lap up the gun fights and Indian wars because they like excitement, and it is interesting that they continue to read the "Westerns" more consistently than they turn to spaceship melodramas. A case can be made for the Westerns, and there is some point in wondering what the characteristics of the best of the Westerns may be, so that we may offer improved fare to the young.

The Kean Land is a collection of stories which brings proportion to the characteristic dramatic situations of the Western tradition. No praise is too high for Schaefer's style, his genuineness, his humor, and his deft transitions from action to introspection. So obviously is this unusual writing that we furthermore predict both red-blooded children and their red-blooded parents will be equally enthralled. What Mr. Schaefer has done is to give living meaning to a sense of individual destiny—apart from any particular goal for personal attainment. His characters are worth writing about because they have discovered the "motion toward the fulfillment of destiny" which expresses their integrity. This is a subtle matter, and to convey the quality of these stories one is tempted to use Sanskrit words like "karma" and "dharma," instead of cant talk about "success" or "failure" as Occidentals conceive them.

In other words, Mr. Schaefer is a natural philosopher, but if this characterization causes anyone to think that reading him is a dull affair, he has only to sample one of the stories to discover otherwise. The fact is that the philosophical asides, the empathy which Schaefer establishes between himself, the reader, and one or another odd or bumptious person he writes about, add the extra dimension that makes the stories more memorable than others. At the outset of one short tale, "The Fifth Man," we find this musing example of the Schaefer approach:

> What was it Carlyle said? "It is a mathematical fact that the casting of this pebble from my hand alters the centre of gravity of the Universe."
>
> Just so perhaps with people, individual atoms of humanity, ranging from simple to complex, restless to serene, impinging upon one another in the cluster called society, civilization. What one, or a group of ones does, sends impulse radiating out, communicating atom to atom, person to person, in the wondrous involved web of existence. And who can know how many atoms it reaches before it fades into the mystery of surrounding space?
>
> That is a kind of nonsense, of course. You do not understand what I am saying. Who among us ever truly understands another, what another says or does, in full impact of meaning? I do not understand it myself. I simply see glimmers of a possible pattern, impulse communicating person to person, and am trying to pin down a manifestation of it in these words. A story perhaps, yet not really a story, simply an account and a wondering.

The "fifth man" was indeed an eccentric. Apparently Schaefer met such an individual, sensed a story, and finally dug it out—a story that goes back to the brutal and unnecessary hanging of a half-breed Cherokee. The story was real, and so was the man. After the tale is over, Schaefer takes us back to the outward appearance of the person whose long-ago dramatic interlude he recounts:

> There was an old man living alone yet not alone at an old abandoned stage station out in the arid

> hauntingly beautiful badlands of this Southwest where time is an almost tangible dimension of all things and the past is part of the present and life was worked through the dust of millennia. He was crazy, yes, if you see any meaning in that word. But he was a distinct independent individual, a character complete within himself, a whole man, an atom of humanity with a purpose, a meaning, that gave direction to his existence. Does it alter the essential balance that can be seen in that existence of his that its purpose, its meaning, would have seemed ridiculous, unreal, a delusion, to most other people?

In "One Man's Honor," three paragraphs illustrate how respect and self-respect can exist in the most unlikely situations. A thief and killer has just been run to earth because he delayed what would have been a successful get-away long enough to draw the posse to a family stricken with a plague—fatal if help had not been forthcoming. So the stagecoach robber loses his life in saving three others:

> The man in the buckskin shirt stepped forward and bent to slip a shoulder close against the saddle up under the body of the man in the brass-studded belt and lifted it away and went and heaved it over the saddle of the tall gray horse. He stepped into the shelter and came out carrying a spade in one hand. He took the reins of the tall gray horse with the other hand and led it away. Head low, staring at the ground before him, he led it, past the corral, across the almost dry stream bed, and stopped at last by the struggling row of stunted cottonwoods. He looked up. The other men had followed him.
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> "Don't be a fool," one of the other men said. "Drag him out somewheres and let the buzzards and coyotes have him. He wasn't no more'n an animal himself."
>
> "No," the man in the buckskin shirt said. He looked back past the shelter, on into the vast empty distance where the trail of a tired horse led northeastward towards the far lowering of the ridge, and returned. "He was a murderin' thievin' son-of-a-bitch. But he was a man." Quietly, bending to the hot task in the clean sun, the man in the buckskin shirt struck the spade into the red-brown earth.

Our greatest success in reading Schaefer to a seven-year-old came by way of a story called "Stalemate." The greatest bear and mountain-lion hunter and the greatest grizzly meet in a battle of wits. First the bear has the man at its mercy, approaching his camp in the dead of night:

> The man rolled over and up to sitting position in one motion and his muscles froze stiff and rigid because it was there, not more'n fifteen feet away, there on the cliff top facing him. It was big, up against the skyline from where he was low sitting, bigger'n any bear he'd ever seen, bigger'n any critter in any of the stretching tales he'd ever told. He could see the moonlight faint on the silver tips of its winter coat and gleaming low on the long claws of those forepaws that could snap the neck of a grown steer with a single stroke. He could see the bulk of it, shaggy with the long hair of winter, blocking out half the whole sky, and all the power and strength of the whole wide wild of the mountain in it. And there he was squatted low on the rock with the cliff edge right behind him and that .303 Savage far away at his camp and only his side Colt handy which wouldn't be more'n a kid's popgun to this bear and he couldn't use anyway because if he moved to pull it this bear could be on him afore he even cleared the holster.
>
> There they were, this bear standing still watching this man and this man sitting still watching this bear, and time just plain stopped being at all and there wasn't anything only the dark stillness of fifteen feet of space between them. This man wasn't afraid, not any more after the first shock of seeing. He was past being afraid. He felt empty and like he'd been pushed past some limit inside his own mind. Felt there was nothing he could do or not do that would change things at all. Felt this bear had him and the whole world right where a crunch of big jaws or a flick of a forepaw could wipe everything away into a nothingness and he watched it standing there big and still and it made him feel small and smaller and not just in size. He saw a thin vapor breath, held back till now empty from his own lungs and he saw it move, not hurrying, steady, turning and swinging and drifting, quiet as it'd come, out of sight back over and beyond and below the skyline.

Well, the next time the hunter out-manouvers the grizzly, the greatest prospective trophy of his career, his highest reward, but when he lines up the sights he can't pull the trigger. Instead, he gives up hunting and turns to ranch work.

All in all, one is almost bound to botch the review of a book of this nature. But if you will purchase a copy from Bantam for thirty-five cents it will be easy to understand why we had to make a try.

FRONTIERS

Half Truths and Whole Truths

FROM a distant rural area, a reader writes to comment on an editorial which spoke of the beneficent influence of a life in natural surroundings (March 8). This reader says:

> May I add another aspect of the matter? While not unacquainted with country life previously, it was six years ago that we moved to this little settlement.... Since then I have observed, not only the few families with whom we came to work, but also other residents of this valley and elsewhere, and have found the attitude of being satisfied with things as they are is not always a beneficial one. More often than not I have seen it settle into a complacency, a conservatism and a self-centeredness which takes care of one's own while ignoring both one's close neighbors and the rest of mankind, and tends to feel that one's own way of living is the only one. Our own little homesteads become almost *all* of our world.
>
> I have *not* seen it lead to the desire to find and practice new modes of living that are more in keeping with our human condition than those we have inherited from recent generations. A lack of perspective seems to breed an absolute *fear* of all things different. This lack of perspective can also be present in the cities, but there it seems not quite so all-encompassing; I find a great deal more acceptance by city people of country people and their standards than the other way around. In general, our liberals and radicals are not found in the country—unless they have moved there; it is the conservative and reactionary elements that make up much of our small-town and rural population.
>
> Much as I dislike the structure of life in cities and uphold the values of the small community and country living, I sometimes wonder if the roots of human progress are more usually to be found in the oppressive turmoil of society than in the comforts of isolated rurality. We escape to the country to regain our sanity, but if we stay too long we risk forgetting the very concerns which have driven us there and dropping our efforts to bring about justice, freedom, and love for all.

We are grateful to this writer for pointing out another term in the "life-with-nature" equation. Not everyone who moves to the country turns into a Henry David Thoreau or a John Muir. Not everyone born in a wilderness area becomes an Aldo Leopold. Not every writer who takes to farming sees with the eyes of a Henry Beston and not every scholar who goes to the desert heaps up the riches discovered by Joseph Wood Krutch.

The wonders of nature are like the innocence of childhood, which is regained in maturity only by arduous labors. The men who render nature's half-truths into wholes seem to have a twice-born aspect. As for "intentional communities," there is much, no doubt, to be learned from them, as microcosms of social experiment, but Tolstoy, who inspired hundreds of communiteers, never joined a Tolstoyan community, explaining that he feared it would isolate him from the main currents of human life.

The trap in the back-to-nature formula lies in the fact that it is a formula. If the mysteries of life could be made transparent by the construction or arrangement of access to the Perfect Environment, we should have to give in to the Communists, at least in principle, since that is the foundation of their project for human betterment.

Two great undertakings confront every human being. He has to try to read the meaning of his environment and he has to try to understand himself. It turns out that there is endless variety in the record of what men have thought about these fields of investigation. Not only is the natural scene, as well as man's view of himself, capable of very different readings, but there is also a reciprocal relationship between ideas of the self and ideas of the world. No man goes to nature without some kind of predisposition as to what he will find. Some nineteenth-century sociologists looked at the natural world and produced the theories of "rugged individualism" and social Darwinism. Kropotkin examined the same scene with different eyes and wrote *Mutual Aid.*

The plains Indian, uncontaminated by Western civilization, made a little ritual apology to the food animal he stalked before he killed him. By the tribes for whom the buffalo was the center of their economy, the shaggy beast was regarded

with a kind of reverence. The white man, obsessed by acquisitiveness, slaughtered the buffalo and very nearly all the rest of the wild life on the North American continent.

To say that we have something to learn from the Indians does not mean that we have need to live in wigwams or hogans. To value the community life of the Hopi Indians is not to suggest that the essences of human relations they have realized will persist only on the top of barren mesas in Arizona.

On the other hand, some kind of *touch* with the world which has proved hospitable to such realizations is surely indicated. How to get that touch remains a problem for private invention. Our editorial in the March 8 MANAS took up the musings of a man who had found and given expression to a natural wisdom while living alone with his family in an Alaskan wilderness. A person can celebrate discoveries of this sort without becoming the partisan of a particular way of life. He can find the highest enthusiasm, we suspect, by not claiming to know the exclusive truth, just as the best human intelligence can enjoy the presence of a thing of beauty without needing to own it as a piece of "property."

There is, finally, what might be thought of as a grand consensus to be found in the literature provided by distinguished nature lovers. We have named some of these men, and there are many others who have been moved to enduring utterances by personal experience of universal meanings in the natural world.

But what seems supremely important to note is that it takes a whole man to feel the wholeness of the world—or, a man on the way to becoming whole, and who travels the rest of the way by means of his discovery in himself of a common sentience which unites him with the rest without dissolving his identity.

Nature has the same role for human consciousness as have symbols which are used for communication. Always, there is the image as well as the underlying meaning, or often many underlying meanings. While the readings of nature's imagery will inevitably vary with the reader, and with his capacity to recreate in words or thought the meanings he divines, there seem to be generalities of feeling about the natural world which come to light as mythic realizations of entire cultures. Sun-worshippers are seldom far from being pantheists in their subtler forms of expression. The static or stable aspect of nature has one great lesson to teach; the dynamic restlessness, the ceaseless motion of the turning, cycling forms of life, another. Nature is filled with analogues of man's psychological states of being. It also has an apologetic or a justification for every human foible, if one is looking for excuses or rationalizations.

Nature, as ancient philosophers expressed it, is the *Mahamaya,* the source of all the world's illusions, and at the same time the manifest of universal creative intelligence. It is in one sense immutable, in another constantly changing. In its total symmetry, nature is no doubt the image of the self. But the image of the self is not the Self.