

## THE PATH OF SELF-CONTROL

TWO words are now returning to popular use in our language—mysticism and mystic. After a century or more of contemptuous reference to these terms, suggesting that they signify either romantic nonsense or vague obscurantism, mysticism seems to be acquiring at least a little of its ancient dignity, although retaining a somewhat irresponsible fuzziness. Mysticism originated with the ancient Greeks who periodically enacted sacred mysteries in their dramas of initiation. Hidden meanings were said to be revealed, and the word "mysteries" was derived from the Greek *muo*, "to close the mouth," since what had been learned was not to be revealed. New initiates into the mysteries were instructed to keep their eyes and mouth shut concerning these matters, and were known as *Mystae*.

In our own time, the meaning of these terms has become much broader. As one authority puts it, mysticism "appears in connection with the endeavor of the human mind to grasp the divine essence or the ultimate reality of things, and to enjoy the blessedness of actual communion with the Highest." Historians find the origin of Western mysticism in the Neoplatonic philosophy, which unites metaphysical inquiry with pursuit of those states of feeling which have their climax in pantheistic unity. However, the popular mysticism of the day is infused with a spirit that can only be called hedonistic psychism, an almost vulgar worship of "feeling good," as distinguished from the ascetic discipline of Neoplatonism.

The Reformation released the longings of many people in Europe for mystical inspiration. Luther, they felt, did not go far enough in freeing Christians from authority. As a writer early in this century put it:

He became at once the conqueror and the conquered; although he freed the church from the old yoke of tradition, circumstances compelled him to

subject it at the same time to the new yoke of the interpretation of the Gospel. The need of inner freedom for mankind had not yet been satisfied.

But how could inner freedom be achieved without an almost total loss of order? The longed-for balance might be reached by individuals, but groups seemed driven by a demonic power to excess. The vision of self-government, earthly as well as spiritual, was common in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, yet seldom realized save by men and women distinguished by unusual personal qualities. In a book which covers this period thoroughly, *Milton and Jakob Boehme* (Oxford University Press, 1914), Margaret Lewis Bailey summarizes the views of a number of figures of the Reformation, showing how the Neoplatonic doctrines were revived and spread. She speaks of Cornelius Agrippa, von Nettesheim, Paracelsus, van Helmont, Tauler, and von Schwenkfeld, adding:

Doctrines similar to these were held by Sebastian Franck (1499-1542), who sought to give them an assured philosophical basis from the principles of Neoplatonism. As humanist, theologian, and historian, he was himself an epitome of the different elements of the reformation epoch in its teachings of freedom in every realm. Exile and persecution for heretical opinions in no way lessened his demand for religious toleration, even for papists, Jews, and Turks, or made less steadfast in his witness for the "inner light."

Turning to a somewhat later figures, Margaret Bailey's doctoral thesis continues:

Another supporter of mystical Christianity against the dead religious life of his time was known in Valentin Weigel (1533-1588), and particularly after his writings were published and spread broadcast in 1612. Weigel had studied Platonic philosophy according to the Neoplatonic interpretation of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, also the writings of Dionysius and Erigena. In him

there was a union of the two traditions of the search for truth, to his study of the older mystics and to their teachings as transmitted by Schwenkfeld and Sebastian Franck, he added the study of natural sciences, astrology, alchemy, and magic, from the works of Agrippa and Paracelsus, both of whom were, as we have seen, indebted to the Jewish Kabbalah. It is thus the reconciliation of a two-fold philosophy that we find expressed in Weigel's system: all facts of life are to be learned either through ardent study of the "book of nature" or through the light of faith in a "still Sabbath," that is, in the absolute tranquility of soul in which God speaks to men; a union of these two sources of wisdom discloses all secrets. Since man is the microcosm, a knowledge of self is the key to knowledge of the world. The reality of all knowledge is in the observer or subject; the object is only the exciting cause of knowledge. . . . He believed in the universal priesthood of man, and that God's prophets are simple people, not the highly educated. False prophets are those who preach the righteousness of war, or who denounce as heretics any with beliefs differing from their own. By no means has church or state any right to persecute for conscience' sake.

After extended attention to the *Fama Fraternitatis* and the *Confessio Fraternitatis R C* of the Rosicrucians, she says:

The Renaissance saw the establishment in Italy of many Neoplatonic academies or free societies, following the examples given by Ficinus and the Medici in 1440. The ideal of the academies was not so much the increase of knowledge of the Greek language and literature, as the spread of a belief in the oneness of all mankind with the universe, an art of living rather than a system of thought, based on the teachings of Christ and Plotinus. The church feared a dangerous rival in these teachers of humanity; the members of the academies were branded as heretics and the academies suppressed. The ideas, however, did not die. The strong opposition of the Lutheran church since 1525, and then of the Catholic church during the counter-reformation, was offset in part by the toleration assured in the Netherlands after the beginning in 1568 of the struggle for freedom against the Spanish world-power.

Jacob Boehme (1575-1624) is the real hero of Miss Bailey's book. "A philosopher," she says, "he must have been," since he understood so much.

Yet he was only an illiterate, an untrained peasant,—a peasant, however, who was gifted with a most marvelous and astonishing genius for the transcendent. He was born near the Bohemian frontier at Alt-Seidenburg near Gorlitz. He had a little instruction in reading, writing, and religion at the village school. As a child he was quiet and thoughtful, living in imagination, in a world of German goblins and fairies. Wonderful visions came to him, to his excited fancy taking the form of external occurrences; such was doubtless his experience during his apprenticeship to a shoemaker, of talking with the stranger who predicted his future greatness and sufferings. . . . Outwardly, he lived a quiet, hardworking life; inwardly, he lived in a glory of illumination and revelation. The mysteries revealed to him he tried to explain, but he had no trained medium of expression. He must ever be rediscovered and reinterpreted.

Miss Bailey gives his teaching:

Boehme starts with the Godhead, the abyss out of which all being issues; it is the primordial condition of all being and therefore without substance, natures, or qualities; the eternal silence, the All and the No-thing; neither darkness nor light; manifest to none, not even to Himself. This principle of all things, the divine, unlimited, indivisible existence or ultimate unity, in its desire for self-expression or manifestation, includes within itself the Trinity: Love and the desire of love as the Son, and the expression of this love, the Holy Spirit. .

The possible good and evil latent in God and therefore in the human soul, become actual only when the soul in its primal freedom chooses the one or the other. The soul is not a being different from God, but, on the contrary, is fundamentally the divine substance itself, inasmuch as it brings into reality the possible opposition between good and evil. Therefore our rebirth and salvation through the Christ within us are but a return to our own primal divine being, but it must come as an act of the will. . . .

He upheld the necessity of government until all men return to full freedom in God, but hoped for reform along many lines. War was for him an abomination.

Of particular interest is the following account of Boehme's influence on Isaac Newton:

On the side of philosophical and scientific influence Boehme's most noted follower was Isaac Newton. William Law (1687-1762), the great

eighteenth-century disciple of Boehme, states in a letter to Dr. Cheyne:

"When Sir Isaac Newton died, there were found amongst his papers large abstracts out of J. Behmen's works, written with his own hand. . . . It is evidently plain that all that Sir I. had said of the universality, nature and effects of attraction, of the first three laws of nature, was not only said, but proved in its true and deepest ground, by J.B. in his Three first Properties of Eternal Nature. . . . Sir Isaac was formerly so deep in J.B. that he, together with one Dr. Newton, his relation, set up furnaces, and for several months were at work in quest of the Tincture, purely from what they conceived from him. . . . Sir Isaac did but reduce to a mathematical form the central principles of nature revealed in Behmen."

Boehme (the English spelt his name Behmen), Miss Bailey says, wrote his *Aurora* and the *Three Principles* in 1612, and wrote no more until 1618, In the meantime, she says, "the Rosicrucian movement started."

As representatives of the humanistic spirit, the true Rosicrucians were not distinguishable from the members of the academies Expressive of this movement was the great spread of ideas of world reform, of methods of getting the secrets of nature, of advance in the sciences of medicine and alchemy. Such ideas filled the minds of people of all classes. . . . Every one of Boehme's books is a protest against the dry scholastic method of teaching; like Comenius he depends on three sources of knowledge—nature, the Bible, and inspiration. Under his doctrines of free-will and freedom of conscience, he would extend the possibility of salvation to Mohammedans, Heathens, and Jews. Boehme's attitude toward the pretended alchemist was that of contempt, exactly the attitude of the man who really was filled with the spirit of Andreae's teachings, toward the man who boasted himself a Rosicrucian. . . . Boehme's importance is due not only to the tremendously valuable ideas added by him to the abounding stream of Neoplatonic mysticism in England, but also to the depth that he gave to this stream, to his ability to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a *reason* of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." Others had taught the "inner light that lighteth every man," but of the nature of man and of that inner light they did not teach, nor could they tell of creation, of the origin and reason of the evil under which the hearts suffered and bled . . .

of why "God is all in all, and Heaven and Hell are within."

Margaret Bailey's conclusion is impressive:

The living stream of thought and life which, since the time of the reformation, had poured from Germany into England, had produced there the sixteenth-century separatistic attempts at church reform, and then, during the seventeenth century, increased by the spring of Boehme's genius, had worked so powerfully in the founding of sects and the development of the worth of freedom, turned back as a tide to Germany, and in the esthetic discussions of the Swiss attics centering around Milton and his genius, produced a Klopstock and the German *Messias*. The same stream carried the discovery of enraptured genius, the embodiment of creative power, from Young to Hamann and Herder, through whom it became a rushing cataract resounding with the praise of the creative power and the enthusiastic rapture of genius in the Storm and Stress period. Like an ocean it swept along, carrying the discovery of the folksong, of the people, of the human heart, into the German romantic school, where, ripened and refined, the humanism of Neoplatonism in the teachings of Jakob Boehme was again prepared to start on its life-giving mission to the world.

The ground of the Neoplatonic philosophy found expression as early as 1486, when Pico della Mirandola wrote his famous *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. Pico was then but twenty-four years old, but had become by that time one of the most learned men of Europe. He had attended several universities and was proficient in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Chaldee, and Arabic. Pico, then in Rome, had formulated 900 questions which he challenged the doctors of the Church to dispute with him, but the pope of that time found some of Pico's propositions on "the brink of heresy" and forbade their discussion. Pico's *Oration* was the introduction to his questions, and it became, as a modern scholar has said, "the manifesto of humanism." The heart of his contention is contained in an allegory of creation, in which the divine artificer muses aloud concerning the genesis of Man:

At last, the Supreme Maker, decreed that this creature, to whom He could give nothing wholly his own, should have a share in the particular endowment

of every other creature. Taking man, therefore, this creature of indeterminate image, He set him in the middle of the world and thus spoke to him:

"We have given you, O Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor any endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgment and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very center of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance around about you on all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior order whose life is divine. . . .

Whichever of these a man shall cultivate, the same will mature and bear fruit in him. If vegetative, he will become a plant, if sensual, he will become brutish; if rational, he will reveal himself as a heavenly being, if intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of God. And if, dissatisfied with the lot of all creatures, he should recollect himself into the center of his own unity, he will there, become one spirit with God, in the solitary darkness of the Father, Who is set above all things, himself transcend all creatures.

Who then will not look with awe upon this our chameleon, or who, at least, will look with greater admiration on any other being? This creature, man, whom Asclepius the Athenian, by reason of this very mutability, this nature capable of transforming itself, quite rightly said was symbolized in the mysteries by the figure of Proteus.

Thus man, for Pico, was a living thought, a figure and personage shaped by the ideas he held, which might go high or low, divine or diabolic. This, for humans, is the solution of the mystery of good and evil, metaphysically expressed, in a later century, by Jakob Boehme.

What, then, is meditation, of which there is so much loose talk these days? There can be no

actual instruction in meditation, since it is a self-devised discipline. If there is that in us which knows, because it is knowledge, taking instruction is bound to lead in the wrong direction. Yet there are counsels which may be followed—the kind of counsels given by Krishna to Arjuna in the *BhagavadGita*. In the sixth chapter of this sublime work Krishna says:

When he hath abandoned every desire that ariseth from the imagination and subdued with the mind the senses and organs which impel to action in every direction, being possessed of patience, he by degrees finds rest; and, having fixed his mind at rest in the true Self, he should think of nothing else. To whatsoever object the inconstant mind goeth out he should subdue it, bring it back, and place it on the Spirit. Supreme bliss surely cometh to the sage whose mind is thus at peace; whose passions and desires are thus subdued; who is thus in the true Self and free from sin. He who is thus devoted and free from sin obtaineth without hindrance the highest bliss—union with the Supreme Spirit. The man who is endued with this devotion and who seeth the unity of all things perceiveth the Supreme Soul in all things and all things in the Supreme Soul. . . . He, O Arjuna, who by the similitude found in himself seeth but one essence in all things, whether they be good or evil, is considered to be the most excellent devotee.

Arjuna objects that the mind is full of agitation, difficult to control, its restraint as hard as controlling the wind. Krishna agrees, yet says that control can be accomplished, if not in this life, then in the next.

All history can be read as made up of the vicissitudes of the project of self-control. Governments, as Thoreau suspected, are but expedient devices, and commonly misapplied, to make up for individual failure in control. The present interest in mysticism, vastly frivolous on the surface, is a reaching after the means of self-control through self-knowledge.

## *REVIEW*

### ART IN EARLY AMERICA

WHEN in 1941 Constance Rourke died prematurely at forty-one, her departure interrupted a work she had been busy with for many years—a history of American Culture, which was to have filled three volumes. Fortunately, what she had completed and the materials she had assembled came into the hands of Van Wyck Brooks, who saw its inestimable value and turned it into the contents of a single volume, *The Roots of American Culture*, published by Harcourt, Brace in 1942. In those days people said that Americans had no real culture of their own, that their arts were borrowed from Europe, but Constance Rourke knew better and set out to demonstrate the sources of American culture in the fabric of American life in revolutionary times and after. Enough of the riches of her intention are preserved in the volume Brooks put together from her writings to make it evident that something new and wonderful was born in those years. At the conclusion of his Preface Van Wyck Brooks says:

The motivating ideas from Europe were shaped to our own distinctive ends, and Constance Rourke shows how the fumbings of our nascent culture sprang from a life and experience that were peculiar to the country. There was no phase of American culture that she had not planned to include in this monumental survey, and it is more than regrettable that she was unable to finish the very ambitious task she had set for herself. I have been able to salvage only a few fragments from the great mass of her half-written manuscripts and notes, but these are enough to show, I think, how important the work would have been for artists and writers and students of American culture. As they stand, these fragments, side by side with her other books, reveal the rich stores of tradition that lie behind us, the many streams of native character and feelings from which the Americans of the future will be able to draw.

The Founding Fathers, who gave thought to this question, did not believe the country in its early days would have time for the arts and several of them said so in correspondence. Ben Franklin was explicit: "To America, one schoolmaster is worth a dozen poets, and the invention of a machine or the improvement of an implement is of more importance than a masterpiece of Raphael." Washington, although he enjoyed the theater, was of like mind,

and John Adams agreed. Yet this practical turn of mind had no effect on the spontaneous qualities of the people, whose bubbling enthusiasms found expression in native and original forms. Jefferson and Paine were complete masters of prose—which is indeed an art form—and the crafts flourished among iron-workers, potters, and even among the Quakers and Shakers. The religious music of the time gave birth to lively forms while the labors of farmers were lightened by ballads and endless versification. The Yankee appeared as a new folk character. Constance Rourke says:

Dry, drawling, shrewd, with a look and lingo of his own, he emerged as a type a little before the Revolution and was celebrated in a song that became its gay rallying cry, "Yankee Doodle." The jiggling tune suggests some of the complexity of the Yankee character, and it may also serve to dispel a pervasive myth, that the Puritans suppressed all music except for the psalms, nasally intoned, and that dancing was rigorously ruled out. "Yankee Doodle" would never have started up in New England with such vivacity if dancing had had no place there—dancing which was distinctly of the folk.

Again, she says:

If the theory as to the Puritan suppression of the arts were true, painting might have been expected to develop first where Puritan influence was absent, in the Southern colonies; yet its most vigorous native growth was in New England and in Pennsylvania, where the puritanical Quakers flourished. In the application of this theory, the forms most stressed have been the drama and the novel, but the curious fact is that the first play with an American subject, *Ponteach*, was written by a New Englander. Satirical plays written by New Englanders during the Revolution created a major direction of our early drama. A New Englander, Royall Tyler, wrote the first American play with an American subject to be publicly performed, *The Contrast*. And the slight narratives that appeared before and soon after the Revolution, which are generally considered the beginnings of the American novel, were also written by New Englanders. In other words, if these several arts failed in a vigorous early growth, this circumstance can hardly be laid at the door of the Puritans.

The longest chapter in the book is on the Rise of Theatricals, much of which is on the influence of the American Indians. It ends with the history of Junius Brutus Booth, an extraordinary English actor who came to this country early in life, enthralling

audiences both East and West. There is this anecdote about him:

Booth was religious in his way. He could deliver the Lord's Prayer in such a fashion as to move his listeners to tears and perhaps to make them shudder, but his convictions were set against formal religion and its exponents. His mournful burial of wild pigeons on one of his Western journeys was partly an expression of natural philosophy, partly a bit of macabre humor and partly a prank on a minister. The slaughter of these birds had been ruthless and great flocks were brought to earth within a few hours. Booth called a minister to his room in a small Western tavern, saying that he wished to discuss the burial of a friend. While the minister respectfully listened, Booth talked of the purity and worth of this dead friend, then, turning, drew back a sheet on his bed and disclosed a heap of slaughtered pigeons and eerily declaimed *The Ancient Mariner*. The minister, who recognized the meaning of this ceremony, departed feeling like the wedding guest. Booth then bought a lot in the cemetery and buried the pigeons with a public service, at which he declaimed poetry whose theme was nature.

One of the strangest episodes in early American history—which lasted into the twentieth century—was the advent of the religious group known as the Shakers, a band of six men and two women, led by Ann Lee, or "Mother Ann," who felt that she was a second incarnation of Christ, to inaugurate the Millennium. They believed that Deity was both male and female, and were celibates by both persuasion and conviction, which led to angry persecutions. In England they had been Quakers, where they were known as the "Shaking Quakers," since they would practice a ceremony of shaking their arms and sometimes their bodies to throw off sinfulness. Ann was given to visions and while still in England she said:

I had a vision of America. I saw a large tree, every leaf of which shone with such brightness as made it appear like a burning torch. . . . I knew that God had a chosen people in America; I saw some of them in a vision and when I met with them in America I knew them.

The Shakers arrived in America in 1774, and after spending two years in New York City migrated to the woods of Watervliet, a few miles from Albany. It was the time of the Revolution and they were suspected of being British spies, and after their imprisonment they settled in Lebanon, where the movement began to grow, through conversion,

eventually spreading over several states, partly because of the religious revivals of the time. Constance Rourke describes the Shakers by reason of the singular beauty of what they made, and the music they evolved for songs and dances. The Shakers, she says, "set up trades, harness-making, weaving, chair-making." The quality of Shaker crafts eventually became famous. "The Shakers loved symmetry, and balances were fundamental in their faith."

Whatever the Shakers turned their hands to seemed to be accomplished not only well but with a final perfection. Their seeds were put up in simple but exquisitely designed and printed packages. Their aptitude for the handicrafts appeared in many details, in finely woven braids for upholstery and beautifully finished woodwork for their buildings. . . . Functionalism, with an acceptance of change, likewise belonged to their concepts of church government, for which they devised no written forms. These affairs were to be determined "according to present circumstances." The Shakers had no written confession of faith, no creed. . . . The only absolute was God, and, with a humility which had not belonged to all other Christian sects, the Shakers believed that they could never see God. Their concept of God was close to that which Ethan Allen was evolving at about the same time in his "Oracle of Reason": that a concept of God which could be formulated and understood by man was clearly unacceptable, since infinity itself was beyond man's conception.

The Shakers, Constance Rourke says, "were acutely conscious of an identity with American principles," and said that Mother Ann "flew into the wilderness of America on the wings of Liberty and Independence." They sang, she said, "in praise of the rights of conscience":

Rights of conscience in these days,  
Now demand our solemn praise;  
Here we see what God has done,  
By his servant Washington,  
Who with wisdom was endow'd  
By an angel, through the cloud,  
And led forth, in wisdom's plan,  
To secure the rights of man.

Culture and the arts take on a new meaning in Constance Rourke's book, which deserves to be put back into print by some contemporary publisher.

## **COMMENTARY**

### **THE ONLY REMEDY**

THIS week's lead article ends with the suggestion that self-control is to be obtained through self-knowledge. What, then, is self-knowledge?

All that is possible along this line is an attempt to explain why self-knowledge is so obscure. One must begin by asking, What is the Self? The Self, it is safe to say, is the *subject*, the one who says "I." Nothing can be added to that, and nothing should be added, for that is all that we know. Does Self "do" anything? Not really. It has but a single attribute awareness.

Of what is the self aware? We begin by proposing that awareness is not possible without avenues of awareness. Our senses are avenues of awareness. Our mind is the higher instrument of awareness, since with the mind we are able to make general statements about the things of which we are aware. But these statements are not really about "things," but about the qualities of things which enable us to group them together. A "house" is no particular house, but the idea of all houses or dwellings. It is a place where we live—that is, where our bodies live. To be in the world, the self needs a body, and the body needs a house, so we devise it. The self needs no body unless there are things in the world which it has reason to become aware of.

The self has no need of a body unless it wants to be aware of the world. Why should it want to be aware of the world? Because being in the world brings the experience we call learning. Why do we want learning? Because learning extends the radius of the self. Do we have a name for this extension, or these extensions? Yes, we do. We call our learning the soul. The soul is the lens—or a combination of lenses, by which we see, hear, learn and understand.

The highest aspect of the soul is its understanding of how the soul works. This is indeed self-knowledge. The self cannot be pictured, seen, or known, but something called

"self-realization" seems possible. It is the feeling that we are, that we learn, and that there cannot be an end to learning. The more we see, the more we are, and this realization is what is added to the Self, which we call self-knowledge.

Self-knowledge has facets. The most important facet of self-knowledge is concerned with the meaning of our lives. We call this meaning ethics.

Ethics tells us what should be done and what should not be done. Ethics defines the fitness of things, all things. Ethics declares the unity of all things, all life. It says that what is good for the One is good for the many. Understanding "good" is the most complicated of the things we need to learn, and it includes the not-good, or evil. We are capable of both. In order to do good, we need to understand one another—the most difficult thing of all. We call this understanding wisdom. It is the essence of self-knowledge.

The being-hood of the Buddha was constructed of this essence. The true heroes of human history were all touched by this genius. Its operational substance lies in knowing what to say, what to do, how to teach, at a given moment of history, or in relation to a particular human, or group or nation of humans.

The fundamental truth of self-knowledge is that there is only one Self. An aspect of this truth is that selves are many, because only through differences can there be growth. How to distinguish in the many what is the same in each and what is different—this is the heart of self-knowledge. Look at the face of Abraham Lincoln, read his speeches, study his life. By this means we learn that he possessed self-knowledge. Many, alas, are untouched by it and bring confusion into the world. The world experiences pain as a result. There is only one remedy—self-knowledge.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves A MAN TO READ

WE start this week—and probably end—with quotation from Erwin Chargaff, a man of parts in the sciences. We do not call him learned, although he is, because in the *Harper's* May 1980 article we are drawing on, he is mainly concerned with exposing and attacking what is now regarded as learning, and with good effect. Close to the beginning he says:

Even if outdated in all its particulars, scholarship lasts as a total achievement; that is, it did so until not long ago. The institutionalization of all intellectual activities; a misunderstood and misapplied scientism; a crude reductionism exerted on what cannot be reduced; a galloping expertitis, degree- and prestige-drunk; the general persuasion that anything new automatically deposes anything old—all those agents have caused scholarship nearly to vanish after having been in a slowly accelerating decline for the past 100 years.

We should obviously add to Mr. Chargaff's qualifications that, while he was born in Austria, he is a master of the English language, as his *Voices in the Labyrinth*, published by Seabury in 1977, makes clear. He said in this book:

There is no question in my mind that we live in one of the truly bestial centuries in human history. There are plenty of signposts for the future historian, and what do they say? They say "Auschwitz" and "Dresden" and "Hiroshima" and "Vietnam" and "Napalm." For many years we all woke up to the daily body count on the radio. And if there were a way to kill people with the B Minor Mass, the Pentagon-Madison Avenue axis would have found it. Just as the streets of our cities are full of filth and crime, our scientific imagination has become brutalized, torn as it is by equally unattainable ideals, none of which is really worth attaining. The modern version of Buridan's ass has a Ph.D., but no time to grow up as he is undecided between making a Leonardo da Vinci in the test tube or planting a Coca Cola sign on Mars. Because the world is becoming uninhabitable, we reach for the stars; but shall we not succeed in making them equally uninhabitable? No doubt, we are the first generation that could think of building an atomic fire under mankind. We can

incinerate them all, but no radioactive phoenix will rise from these ashes. You may suspect that I believe Prometheus got what was coming to him. Did he bring fire to the world? That was nice. But did he perhaps immediately afterward proceed to set the whole world afire? Were not the gods right in cutting off his research grants? Greek mythology may, of course, not tell us the entire story. Perhaps, the gods were not so embroiled in trying to wipe out a disobedient little people that their National Institute of Cosmogony ran out of money for basic research.

Chargaff, as we see, is plainly disgusted with the world. Even the sciences, which were his first love and to which he made major contributions, have been overtaken by frauds and pretenses of which he is deeply ashamed. In a world of interdependence such as ours, there are no innocents: we are all guilty together, since we have all sinned together and will be punished together. All some of us can say in extenuation is that we didn't really want to sin very much, but that the system required it. So we share in the shame.

This is the reason why the present must be called a time of new beginnings. Where, we ask ourselves, can we find a clean place to start? But there are no clean places. Not any more. There were clean places in the past—places like America—but now they are all mussed up, as well as used up. But there may be a lesson for us in the lotus flower. Its roots lie in the dankest sort of mud. The plant rises through dirty water, and bursts into bloom in the clean air, amazing the world with its beauty—and inspiring us with its symbolism.

So we must find the right kind of dirty place for new roots. This, indeed, may be the value of Erwin Chargaff's prose. He may locate for us a proper sort of dirty place to set out some roots. He says:

Regardless of whether we think of Erasmus of Rotterdam or Grotius, Hobbes or Bayle, Albrecht von Haller or Alexander von Humboldt, the product of ancient scholarship reached a much wider circle of educated readers than could be found now. Gibbon's great work was certainly received, read, and



understood by a proportionately much larger audience than that of, say *Cambridge Ancient History*. Long before there were communications satellites and when real news therefore spread faster, Dr. Johnson was sufficiently well known in distant Königsberg for Kant to make a few unfriendly remarks about him in his *Anthropologie*. The indexes to the diaries of the poets Coleridge and Novalis display an immensely wider erudition than even nonreaders of *Scientific American* could muster now. I do not wish to imply that specialization and barbarization go hand in hand—I have met too many barbarians without specialties—but there is a connection.

I should find it difficult to define the period in which this process of encapsulation—the scholar making way for the specialist—began. That process probably had something to do with a change in the speed at which new knowledge was accumulated, and perhaps also in the conception of what constituted new knowledge. The triumph of the natural sciences has made people insensitive to the qualities of knowledge, one bit of information being as good as another. The old dispute about the relative value of a Madonna and a cabbage as the painter's subject does not pose itself to the scientists: he finds what he finds. (Of course, he may be wrong, and there are differences, even beyond the winds of fashion, between important and trivial; but that is beside the point.)

In any event, universities and institutes began to function as knowledge factories and to neglect their real task: the education of the young. They became bureaus for the issuance of professional licenses, and these required, in turn, the proof that one had produced new knowledge. Although the faded aureole of the scholar still encircled the hapless heads of the searchers for scientific truth, the real substance had vanished long ago: the change in quantity had produced poor quality. Sir Thomas Gresham, looking down from the bankers' paradise, smiled benignly.

If you know something about biochemistry and want to look up Erwin Chargaff, his book, *Essays on Nucleic Acids*, will supply the needed background. If you want further evidence of his wisdom, get from the library his later book, *Heraclitean Fire* (Rockefeller University Press, 1978). Toward the end of that volume, he wrote:

My life has been marked by two immense and fateful scientific discoveries: the splitting of the atom, the recognition of the chemistry of heredity and its

subsequent manipulation. It is the mistreatment of a nucleus that, in both instances, lies at the basis: the nucleus of the atom, the nucleus of the cell. In both instances do I have the feeling that science has transgressed a barrier that should have remained inviolate. As happens often in science, the first discoveries were made by thoroughly admirable men, but the crowd that came right after had a more mephitic smell. "God cannot have wanted that!" Otto Hahn is reported to have exclaimed. Did He ask Himself beforehand, or did He remain silent? I have the impression that God prefers to be left out of these discussions.

The impact that the discovery, the bloodstained discovery, of nuclear energy had on me I tried to describe in the first pages of this account. From that time the Devil's carnival was on, for me at any rate. As the dances became more frenetic, the air turned thinner and harder to breathe. That science, the profession to which I had devoted my life—and a life is the heaviest investment a man can make—that science should engage in such misdeeds was more than I could bear. I had to speak out, for I was bound to ask myself: Is this still the same kind of science that I thought I was getting into more than fifty years ago? And I had to reply: it is not.

Those seeking an education—for themselves or their children—would do well to read Irwin Chargaff.

## *FRONTIERS* An Israeli Dove Speaks

THE monthly newsletter, *Peacework*, is issued by the American Friends Service Committee, 2161 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, Mass. 02140 (subscription \$7 a year). Joseph Gerson is the editor. This year's April number has in it an article on "Israel's Disillusioned Hawks" by Mattityahu Peled, a member of the Israeli Knesset, who is said to "represent" the Progressive List for Peace. "Peled," Gerson informs us, "was among the founders of the Israeli Council for Israel-Palestine Peace in 1975," and "has met with leading members of the PLO over the past decade in the pursuit of peace." He fought in Israel's war of independence, in the 1956 Suez War, and was a member of the Israeli General Staff responsible for logistics during the Six-Day War of 1967. He is now a retired general.

After the 1967 war, he said to his comrade-in-arms, Yitzak Rabin, "Now we can establish the Palestinian state and finally have peace."

"What are you talking about?" asked Rabin.

Thus ended, Gerson says, three decades of friendship and cooperation between the two. "Their parting of the ways is in many ways symbolic of the major divisions in today's Israel."

In his article, by quoting others, Peled suggests that the Israeli hawks of the present lack the courage and self-confidence in Israel's ability to cope with the challenges of peace. The doves, however, possess this confidence, yet they are not in control. Peled says:

Even inside Israel not many people understand the predicament of the hawks—how desperate is their vision of Israel's future as a Jewish state, and how haunted they are by the nightmares of Israel going under due to the failure of the Zionist dream.

Stemming mostly from the pipedream of the Jewish state as the product of the heroic fighting of Jewish soldiers routing both the British Empire and the Arabs living in Palestine and elsewhere, the secular hawkish philosophy in Israel long has

vacillated between wild fantasy and deep despair. The fantasy is of a beautiful world in which the Jewish state, spreading on both sides of the river Jordan, attracts all the Jews of the world, radiates strength and confidence, and maintains a democratic, very liberal way of life which would allow even an Arab to become vice president.

Having contributed only marginally to the actual creation of the real Israel, the hawks—inspired by the vision of Jabotinsky and for most of the time led by Menachim Begin—have clung to the fantasies, criticizing the actual builders of the state as petty, short-sighted people of narrow vision and limited courage. They wished to see Israel conduct itself with dignity, elegance and chivalry, ensuring the achievement of its national goals by forcing the world to bow before Israel's sense of justice backed, as it would be, by a might swiftly applied when anti-semitism raised its ugly head; and virtually any opposition to Israel's wishes would be condemned as clear indication of deep-rooted anti-semitism.

Then, in 1977, the hawks achieved power for the first time. Their passion to give up their fantasies for Israel, to actually turn them into realities, was uncontrollable. They wanted everything they did to be big, impressive, awe-inspiring, and they were undeniably impatient to turn the visions into reality. But just as undeniable was their frustration. Under Begin's government the economy became a shambles. The two invasions of Lebanon were shameful and disgraceful fiascoes. Even the great achievement of peace with Egypt (still inexplicable in terms of their own philosophy and to this day sullenly resented) was accomplished with displays of the pettiness sometimes associated with small-town lawyers.

But their greatest despair is rooted in the failure of the Jews to congregate in Israel. . . .

We do not know how accurate Peled's account of the Jewish aspiration for a national state (and its frustration) is, but it *feels* fair and good, which is why we have quoted it. And we have quoted it, also, to show that the Israelis, like the rest of the "advanced" people in the world, have really outlived the uses of the national state but have no idea how to get rid of it—it seems so powerful and therefore inevitable or necessary. All around them is the Arab threat with its lunatic assertion (by some) of intending extermination of the Jews—and who, after all, would advocate

getting rid of the national state in such circumstances?

The Jews in power in Israel, Peled says, now "see the problem of the existence of so many Palestinians in the Occupied Territories as a mere inconvenience to be removed one way or another." He goes on:

When confronted with the question of how Israel would cope with the demographic problem of retaining its Jewish nature with so many non-Jews inhabiting its expanded borders, Begin used to dismiss it with a sneer: wait until we bring in millions of Jews from the Soviet Union, and just watch as the Jews from Argentina, South Africa and even from the USA all hurriedly arrive in Israel to finally find rest from their endless wanderings and the happiness promised by the prophets. Then you will realize how petty and shortsighted was your question!

That dream of Begin's also proved mere fantasy. Not only have Jews failed to live up to it, but Jews emigrating from the USSR have shown no particular preference for Israel. As many of them immigrated elsewhere as to Israel, American Jews have remained happily in the U.S., and Jews from Argentina, and South Africa have emigrated to other countries more prosperous than Israel. What is more frustrating, as if adding insult to injury, Jews have begun an exodus, with some 750,000 of them now living permanently outside Israel, mostly in the USA.

The panic of the hawks has become so uncontrollable that some have begun to wish ill to Jews everywhere if only it will cause them to return to Israel. . . .

In spite of such an abominable show of moral and intellectual bankruptcy, the hawks do not allow themselves to ponder the question of whether Israel might not have been a much more attractive place to live had it achieved peace with its neighbors, given back the Occupied Territories, allowed the Palestinians to establish their own state along side Israel, and applied its energies to making Israeli life agreeable, interesting and challenging in the sense of trying to turn the whole Middle East into a developed region where people could live happily and securely.

That the Israelis know how to do this is plain enough, especially to readers of *Kidma*, the magazine of ecological progress in Israel. But it is mere righteousness, easy for us all, to point this

out. All the other countries, caught in the throes of dying nationalism, have an equal obligation to recognize their humane alternatives and to begin to apply them.