

THE STRENUOUS LIFE

THIS title strikes only a glancing blow at the subject we want to discuss. Better, perhaps, would be some cliché such as "Man and Society," or "Society and the Individual," yet these expressions have become so familiar that they seem emptied of meaning. Then, actually, we do not know enough to deal with so large and deep a subject. We are not able, as yet, to distinguish between the variables and the constants (if any) in this relationship, so that what is offered had better remain simply the record of a few impressions. We have a letter from Harry Zitzler, of Chicago, which will get us off to a start:

A sentence in "The Focus of Hope" (MANAS, June 26) reads: "Resolution of the conflicts between the nations is an obvious goal, to which a world political order seems an inviting path, but it may turn out that the individual and certain of his personal problems are even more important than the larger, social situation."

There was a time, quite some years ago, when I would not have agreed with this statement at all, but would have considered it an expression of an escapist, apolitical sentiment. (Now, it is the political that I see as escapist.) Today I respond to this sentence as a statement of an essential, even profound, truth. I am not going to go into an analysis of the factors responsible for this change in my attitude—though I think that such an analysis would not be without its significance in understanding what seems to be a general change in outlook of which MANAS' statement is one expression. My interest here is in underscoring the truth of the statement and in pointing to it as the way out of our difficulties.

One theme seems to recur throughout the discussions in MANAS. Succinctly stated, this theme is that we are lost, old certainties and guidelines have failed us, and that we must struggle for a new vision in an age that has lost sight of where it is going, or has begun to doubt that the place it seems to be going is worth getting into. MANAS has not so much pointed the way out of our dilemma as called attention to the fact that we are in one. Yet I believe that, in the sentence quoted above, MANAS has

struck upon the solution to the ills that ail us. In pointing to the significance of personal concerns, it points to what has been neglected in the human condition, and calls for a re-assessment of this neglect. And it points, I believe, to the way out of our dilemma.

The psychoanalysts speak of the "slow return of the repressed." I should like to suggest that what we are witnessing in our time—the wars and preparations for future wars, the concentration camps, the meaninglessness of daily existence, the failures of our material progress—represents nothing less than a return of the repression of our personal selves and personal being. We have repressed what is most human in ourselves, and it is no wonder that what return to us are the inhuman nightmares which we have seen in our time.

To speak of what is personal should be easy, but it is not, and some men who use the word confess that they do not know what it means. This, I think, is evidence of the eclipse of the personal in modern times, . . . The loneliness, the alienation the meaninglessness, as well as the aggression, the inhumanity of man to man—these all stem from the dislocations in our personal relationships with one another. Here is where we have failed so miserably, yet here, by the same token, may well be the true "focus of hope" for a better morrow.

The key observation, here, is no doubt this sentence: "We have suppressed what is most human in ourselves, and it is no wonder that what return to us are the inhuman nightmares which we have seen in our time."

Now what is "most human in ourselves"? We could take our text from Pico della Mirandola, who said that the essence of being human is the capacity of the individual to remake himself. "Thou [man] shalt have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are animal; thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul's judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms of life, which are divine." (Pico's Oration, *Of the*

Dignity of Man.) Or, there is the following from a contemporary source:

Man is *not* fully conditioned and determined, but man ultimately transcends himself, a human being is a self-transcending being. . . . Man is the only being which is able to . . . emerge above the level of his own psychic and physical conditions. Thus, man is also able to objectify and even to oppose himself. By this very fact man enters, nay, he even creates, a new dimension, the dimension of noëtic processes—call them spiritual gropings or moral decisions—in contrast to psychic processes in general. (Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*.)

If we take this proposition about man as the basis for further discussion, we are obliged to ask what it means, not in one, but in several senses. We begin, then, with the generalization: Man has a destiny to fulfill. It is first, we may say, an *individual* destiny. Why do we say this? Because it is rapidly becoming apparent that there is no human destiny at all, but only the disgrace of nonentity and defeat, when human beings *fail* to make individual decisions. If destiny depends upon individual acts, individual thought, individual decisions, then there must be a sense in which destiny itself is individual.

But what is an "individual" destiny for human beings? Well, we may not know what it *is*, but we can say something about what men of the West once thought it to be. It was, to answer the question vulgarly, to "get to Heaven." Getting to Heaven has of course a variety of meanings. There is the mystic's version of loss of self in the fullness of Deity. There is the Fundamentalist's notion of an endless, sanctified existence at the right hand of God. There have even been sensuously (if not sensually) enjoyable delights to look forward to, in Paradise; and, in the early days of Christianity, no less a figure than Tertullian anticipated the satisfactions the righteous would find in looking down upon the torments of sinners in Hell. Sensitive readings of theological symbolism aside, these views of Heaven have one thing in common: they all represent *private* salvation. They isolate the faithful from the

unfaithful. They reward the virtuous and punish the sinners and unbelievers.

The equation is not without a moral logic. Good brings good, evil brings pain. Yet for Western man, the doctrine of a destiny fulfilled in Heaven gradually became unbelievable. Probably it was not so much a breakdown of this moral logic (which is by no means the highest conception of human fulfillment) as it was a gross violation of the behavioral requirements of that logic in the social practice of Christians, which caused it to be rejected; that, and the somewhat ridiculous "science" in Christian belief, which made theology so easy a target for naturalist critics to blast.

It is a matter of history that the alienation of the West from the idea of a "spiritual" destiny came more or less at the time when the idea of the possibility of human control over *social* destiny began to take hold of the European mind. Reformers, eager to generate activist emotions in the victims of centuries of exploitation, poured out their angry exposes of the sentimentality and selfishness of "Heaven" as a goal. A blow for matter (or "materialism") was now a blow for spirit—the spirit of freedom and independence. What need had man for "Heaven" when there were worlds to gain on earth: the world of political justice and the world of scientific progress? It took a strong-minded individual to stand against this powerful current of practical idealism and to insist that there are excellences which neither politics nor science know of. Who, for example, would have listened to Amiel, had the entries in his journal been published as he wrote them? Who, indeed, paid much attention to them when they *were* published—in the case of the passage to be quoted—thirty years later? Amiel wrote in 1851:

Tocqueville's book [*Democracy in America*] . . . leaves a certain sense of disgust behind. It makes one realize the necessity of what is happening around us and the inevitableness of the goal prepared for us; but it also makes plain that the era of *mediocrity* in everything is beginning. . . . Equality engenders

uniformity, and it is by sacrificing what is excellent, remarkable, and extraordinary that we get rid of what is bad. The whole becomes less barbarous, and at the same time more vulgar.

The age of great men is going; the epoch of the ant-hill of life in multiplicity, is beginning. The century of individualism, if abstract equality triumphs, runs a great risk of seeing no more true individuals. By continual leveling and division of labor, society will become everything and man nothing. . . .

The statistician will register a growing progress, and the moralist a gradual decline: on the one hand, a progress of things; on the other, a decline of souls. The useful will take the place of the beautiful, industry of art, political economy of religion, and arithmetic of poetry. . .

Is this indeed the fate reserved for the democratic era? May not the general well-being be purchased too dearly at such a price? The creative force which in the beginning we see forever tending to produce and multiply differences, will it afterward retrace its steps and obliterate them one by one?

By quoting Amiel, we gain a brief account of the idea of human destiny which eventually replaced the promise of Heaven, or Salvation, and at the same time an anticipation of many of the current criticisms of our society.

What, exactly, is wrong with the idea of *social* destiny? Nothing is wrong with it, so long as it does not displace the prior and more fundamental destiny of the individual. But why should the drive for social justice and general affluence have had this degrading effect?

We do not know that it did. But we can suspect that the intense preoccupations of modern man with political justice and economic progress have at least contributed to the exclusion of other pursuits. The fact is that we are pretty much in the dark as to what we *ought* to be doing with our lives. We have strong intuitions that something is radically wrong with our present mode of existence; we agree with Dr. Frankl that the hunger for meaning is the natural tropism of human life, and that it has been largely neglected; but we begin to tread most warily when a sardonic

critic makes the challenge: All right, what is this precious *meaning* that you think we all ought to be seeking, as Jason sought the Golden Fleece, or Galahad the Holy Grail?

The challenge must be met, no doubt. But we meet it at considerable risk of popular contempt, should our words prove inadequate.

The answer would be easy enough if we could go back one or two thousand years. Then we could say, with the Platonists, that human fulfillment is a Return to the One—a return to our place of divine origin, plus the deepening of being gained on earth. We could give the similar answer of the High Religions; of the Gnostic Emanationists among the early Christians; of Plotinus and other Neoplatonists.

But the answer is not easy at all, for the reason that the crucial truth of any age cannot be seen unless it emerges in terms of the meanings which have contemporary acknowledgement. And those terms, in our own age, must be a growth, an evolution, transaction of our own minds, and not the offering of any sort of Revelation.

Here, it may be, is the true contribution of the "Equality" of which, until recently, we have been so proud.

What, after all, has been the achievement of the Democratic Era? It has redistributed Rights and Goods. It has not done this perfectly—not even very well—but this is what it set out to do, and the ideal, at least, has been firmly seated as a model of the Good Society. Let us say that the principles have been established in constitutions, and that they are universally admired.

Self-government, then, to give ourselves full credit, brought a redistribution of rights, but at the same time it accomplished a redistribution of responsibilities. We feel, that is, the need to know for ourselves. We can no longer accept the ukases of authority. This is a characterological and temperamental trait of our times. It incorporates the most precious element of the

scientific spirit and embodies the essential good of the eighteenth-century revolution. We cannot put these historic gains behind us and take our explanations of meaning at second hand.

So the answer we obtain, when we ask someone what he means by "human destiny," is an answer that might have been put together by Gertrude Stein (Meaning is meaning is meaning . . . is meaning).

Of course, it isn't quite that bad. We have the full spectrum of the arts to suggest fulfillments of meaning. There are the intimations of modern mysticism, the climactic moments of the "peak experience." We have indeed a large collection of honorific synonyms which serve to indicate the highest values to which our age aspires.

Then, in addition, are thoughtfully-worked-out accounts of beneficent interpersonal relationships. People who are capable of non-possessive love are fulfilling destiny. People who by their presence enrich the lives of others are carrying around with them at least one of the goals of human development. The fact of the matter is—as we think about it—that in almost all cases the current idea of individual good, or realization, has also a *social* dimension: One's goodness of life includes the good of others.

So there is a sense in which we have not given up our feeling for social responsibility by turning to the quest for individual destiny. It is simply that, in seeking for a new significance in individual life, we take no interest in a private achievement or a separate salvation.

What occurs at this point is the possibility of a metaphysic to go with the psychological behavior that is becoming characteristic of this sort of individualism. We get into difficulty when we define our problem in terms of the ordinary meanings of "individual" and "society," proceeding to analysis as though the two had irreconcilable interests. The point is that the enlightened individual increasingly identifies himself *with* society. You could say that his "self"

is in some sense co-extensive with society. His good comes as society's values are elevated and fulfilled.

The being of the individual, then, in moral inclination and in metaphysical substance, has a variable radius. No self is truly a "private" self. The self of man, agreeable to Pico's account of the soul, can contract to a pinpoint of isolation, and thus produce all the unresolvable dilemmas which exclusive ends and goals inevitably bring; or, by a richer feeling of identity, it can expand with a sense of being-hood which suffers mutilation when it does not include the welfare of many others, or even all. What is a mother without her babe? What a patriot without his land? A Christ without disciples, or a Buddha without an Orient?

But again we are confronted by the comparative emptiness of generalization. There is always this objection to intellectualizing about courses and dramas in human existence whose justification comes from an emotional symmetry that gives them wholeness and the riches of fulfillment. Here, indeed, is the wonder and the miracle of our capacity to *feel*. Feeling, we might say, is the textured depth of life itself. It is the ecstasy of being, from moment to moment. One sees a child humming to himself, breaking into snatches of song, making his own music, chanting dialogue, crying responses, gurgling his joy, reproofing, asking, acting out, and we know that his moments are all fulfilled, all wholes, his orb of being overflowing. *He* needs no explanation of being. *He is*. So with the world and all the beings in it. So, at least, for some of the time. These enchantments are all about, starting, stopping, repeating, and endlessly resuming. A man's sense of his own being somehow creates a fullness in his life. Then comes an unexpected encounter with some facet of "reality." The sphere of being suffers dents, the feeling turns to pain. There are readjustments; new rhythms are established. Theories are revised. He becomes more watchful; or, perhaps, more deeply involved.

As witnesses to as well as participants in this spectacle, what we should like to know more about is the thread of continuity in all such voyages of being and discovery. We cannot leave to the statisticians and the social scientists the task of classifying and generalizing these images of the good. Pursuing the question, we come upon the varying intensities of individuals. The idea of equality, of individual responsibility, has not effaced the differences among men, although our enthusiasm for social welfare has led to some neglect of individual human distinction. Human distinction is all about, but it has become ideologically irrelevant. No doubt it should *stay* ideologically irrelevant, since the high quality of a good man is not a matter for political exploitation. But it is not humanly irrelevant. Politics and economics have their importance only in removing obstacles to the expression of human excellence. If we do not understand this excellence, if we do not care about it, have been led to ignore it, then we make false gods of politics and economics and become their slaves.

This brings us to an area of great historical mystery. It is plain enough that the ancient classical societies, the hierarchical societies—the societies we know about chiefly from their abuses of authority, their stratification of class, and their arbitrary definitions of role and human purpose—originated in the intention of some men to give to others a general pattern of balanced existence. Why did they fail? Or why do they no longer succeed? Did some bud of individualism burst into flower in the human plant, changing the requirements of both social and individual development? Have we now to *internalize* the hierarchical order of antiquity? How can we find an order that will accommodate the principle of originality and self-determination in human behavior?

We have been trying, abstractly, to answer this last question for about two hundred years, but have almost totally neglected to instruct ourselves in the meaning and the good of originality, and in

the moral foundation of self-determination. We cannot make an order for the expression of qualities that have withered into mediocrity and conformity. The good life is not a precipitate which foams to the surface simply from the boil of political revolution. It is not the climactic technique of a technological culture.

Our skills hardly apply to a problem of this sort. We are used to manipulating the predictable materials of the physical world and regulating forces of nature which are responsive but not self-moving. The good life, then, let us say, has an ethical ground. Its materials are conscious and alive. It is a vast experiment in being. Every equation in human life has an incommensurable term—man. The situation is just as Pico described it. The frame of the good life will come into existence in souls—in *minds*, not in systems of government. The good life is a social organism the chief process of which is the self-education of individual unpredictable units. How do you get such a living order? We have been getting it, by fits and starts, whenever and wherever individual humans have lived *as if* it already existed.

This seems a gloomy picture for those who want plain signs marking the whole way to a better future—and who of us does not? Yet there is a sense in which all conditions of life are matrices for the development of the good society, or some of its aspects. A rich store of illustration lies in the literature of biography. For example, take *From Every Zenith*, an autobiographical memoir by John Collier, just published by Alan Swallow (Sage Books), of Denver, Colorado (477 pages, \$6.50). This book is so filled with color, a combination of rich human and æsthetic feeling with deep penetration of the world of ideas, that the reader feels as though the spirit of the Renaissance had somehow swept into the twentieth century and found, not a resting-place, but a fountain of renewed expression. We cannot review this book here, but it is a splendid illustration of how a temper of the human spirit can make space for the good life.

In every age are born men who find themselves drawn insistently and irrevocably to a twofold mission—the quest for meaning and the lifting of the burdens suffered by the great mass of human beings. Let us call these men Prometheans. Their theories often vary, their doctrines differ, yet their animating principles always have a family resemblance and their comparative indifference to discomfort, coupled with a prodigious capacity for work, sets them off. First of all, they do not fit into any "mold." They do not submit to the categories of "the times." Always to them the times are but the raw material of their lifelong labors. They live a strenuous life, and—it had best be faced—a model of the only good life now possible for human beings.

"Meaning" has two aspects. Philosophically, mystically, and metaphysically, Meaning is the fruit of consubstantiality with the Whole. It comes from conscious identification with "the real" and from the sense of completeness which must result. This is the abstract, one might say, the "passive," account of meaning. But meaning is also the active realization of a larger self by identification with other fragments of life which are working through the vast grid of existence, hour by hour, day by day, life by life. There is a hidden radius of infinite extent in every living thing. The one whose awareness grows along this radius has some perceptive grasp of the unfathomable deeps in the rest of life. And here one sees the delight and wonder of the arts, since they give expressive play to the endless variety of form and content in existence. Always the universe is throwing up climactic moments, and the artist somehow contains their presence in a particular instant of time. The artist resounds the harmony of life and extends the "specious present" to an interval which others can enter and enjoy.

Meaning also includes knowledge of evil. Evil is the taking of limit as the real. Having the capacity spoken of by Pico, men can confine themselves by notions of limit. They can turn away from others, declare for a private, isolated

good, and fear the threat of impartial reality. They can reject the Pantheist Deity and worship gods of separateness and alienation. They can deny the radius of infinite being that exists potentially in all men, and *feel* themselves separate from the rest. What can a pale intellectuality do to quiet a child's fears, or an angry man's resentments? What we will not learn with our minds we must assimilate through the long trial of pain.

But pain, again, is of two sorts. All men are bound by either greater or lesser unities. One of the two must give way, so there is pain in either case. The Prometheans suffer pain along with the rest. The good life includes the experience of pain. But this pain is the pain of creation.

REVIEW "HONEST TO GOD"

To the best of our knowledge, the public reception accorded the book of this title by the Bishop of Woolwich (Church of England) is unprecedented for a tract on religion in the twentieth century. Contained in 150 pages of plain speaking, Bishop Robinson's thesis seems to be producing a sort of Lutheran revolution among the liberals in several Christian denominations. (First published in England in March, 1963, *Honest to God* reached its sixth printing in April. Canadian magazines and newspapers have been full of pro-and-con discussion, the *Manchester Guardian* has carried several evaluations, and even *Time* managed to give a fair impression of the radical orientation in Bishop Robinson's work.)

Somewhat uncharitably to Christian readers, Cecil Northcott observed in a newspaper article that *Honest to God* had been "launched on an unsuspecting world of theological simpletons." He went on: "The book was greeted by loud outcries of 'heretic' and 'disturber of the peace.' True, such views had been whispered in theological conferences—but not by bishops. Because a bishop has had the courage to say what he is thinking the spring storm is blowing. Dr. Robinson is trying to get people to rethink their concepts of God, to ask themselves some awkward and difficult questions and to be honest with themselves—and with God—in their answers."

Previous notice in MANAS of Dr. Robinson's book was based on material serially published in the London *Observer*. With a copy of *Honest to God* now at hand, we quote from the preface to indicate the writer's temper of thought:

I believe we are being called, over the years ahead, to far more than a restating of traditional orthodoxy in modern terms. Indeed, if our defence of the Faith is limited to this we shall find in all likelihood that we have lost out to all but a tiny religious remnant. A much more radical recasting, I

would judge, is demanded, in the process of which the most fundamental categories of our theology—of God, of the supernatural, and of religion itself—must go into the melting. Indeed, though we shall not of course be able to do it, I can at least understand what those mean who urge that we should do well to give up using the word "God" for a generation, so impregnated has it become with a way of thinking we may have to discard if the Gospel is to signify anything.

The honest Christian, Bishop Robinson thinks, is bound to be an ambivalent, perplexed Christian. He may sense or feel truth in the reality of the life of Jesus; he may believe that there is a high source of inspiration in ultimate values not made available by science; but he is also bound to recognize that a partisan God and partisan prayer strike discordant notes. For example, Bishop Robinson's reaction to his own theological training finally led him to question the tacit assumption that "communion with God" could only be attained during "withdrawal" from mundane affairs. Since Christianity became an official religion, its special votaries have, by custom, been "withdrawn" men, ideally members of the contemplative orders. But this suggests that prayer, also, is a specialized function, presumably practiced to the full only by those whose training has made them experts. Yet the experts often become uncomfortable when they realize that they have been charged with so much responsibility. Such, at any rate, was the case with Bishop Robinson:

I can testify to this most strongly from the time I spent in a theological college, both as a student and as a teacher. Here was a laboratory for prayer. Here one ought to be able to pray if ever one could. For here were all the conditions laid on—time, space, quiet. And here were the teachers, the classics of the spiritual life, and all the aids and manuals. If one failed in these circumstances what hope was there later on—when one was surrounded and sucked down by "the world"? And yet I believe I am not alone in finding a theological college the most difficult rather than the easiest of places in which to pray. In fact I know I am not. For I discovered there what I can only describe as a freemasonry of silent, profoundly discouraged, underground opposition, which felt that

all that was said and written about prayer was doubtless unexceptionable but simply did not speak to "our" condition. It was a real relief finding kindred spirits.

If God is called into question, if prayer be subjected to reevaluation, it is natural that "Christian morality" can also stand some critical inspection. And when Bishop Robinson begins to investigate morality, he finds himself often more at home with liberal and radical views than with the accepted traditions of his own church. "Caring enough," writes Robinson, "is the criterion for every form of behavior, inside marriage or out of it, in sexual ethics or in any other field. For *nothing else* makes a thing right or wrong." The essence of a Christ-derived morality, he says, would be "the utterly unself-regarding *agape* of Jesus Christ—and upon the calculation of what is truly the most loving thing in this situation for every person involved." Bishop Robinson continues:

Such an ethic cannot but rely, in deep humility, upon guiding rules, upon the cumulative experience of one's own and other people's obedience. It is this bank of experience which gives us our working rules of "right" and "wrong," and without them we could not but flounder. And it is these, constantly re-examined, which, in order to protect personality, have to be built into our codes of law, paradoxically, "without respect of persons." But love is the end of law precisely because it *does* respect persons—the unique, individual person—unconditionally. "The absoluteness of love is its power to go into the concrete situation, to discover what is demanded by the predicament of the concrete to which it turns." Whatever the pointers of the law to the demands of love, there can for the Christian be no "packaged" moral judgements—for persons are more important even than "standards."

Seeking to retain his integrity in these judgements will inevitably bring the Christian into conflict with the guardians of the established morality, whether ecclesiastical or secular. He may often find himself more in sympathy with those whose standards are different from his own and yet whose rebellion deep down is motivated by the same protest on behalf of the priority of persons and personal relationships over any heteronomy, even of the supranatural.

Honest to God closes with a characteristic blend of forthrightness and philosophical humility:

I have not attempted in this book to propound a new model of the Church or of anything else. My aim has been much more modest. I have tried simply to be honest, and to be open to certain "obstinate questionings" which speak to me of the need for what I called earlier a reluctant revolution. In it and through it, I am convinced, the fundamentals will remain, but only as we are prepared to sit loose to fundamentals of every kind.

We are still only at the beginning of our task. But the beginning is to try to be honest—and to go on from there. And that is what in a very preliminary, exploratory way this little book has attempted to do.

A soft-bound edition of *Honest to God* is published in the United States by Westminster. The price is \$1.65.

COMMENTARY

MILLER'S MORALS

IT has finally happened, as no doubt it should: a reader has raised the question of whether or not there is inconsistency in the writings of Henry Miller:

Miller in his essay writing is a moralist and seer. In *Tropic of Cancer*, Miller has no morality, no standards, no virtue. I would very much like MANAS to comment upon this schizophrenic split, and moral lapse, in the work of what MANAS regards as one of the great men of our time.

First, an essential point: MANAS is not a literary magazine and its editors feel no compulsion to read books which give little promise of serving their purposes. We have not read the *Tropic* books. Our reading in Miller has been sporadic, but most of what we have read has proved very much worth the time. What we like and admire, we often quote. From time to time passages of undeniable greatness occur in Miller. For these we feel only a profound gratitude to the writer. It does not seem to us that we are under any obligation to "explain" Mr. Miller. If we could consistently produce insights equal to his best expressions, we might be able to rephrase our correspondent's judgment, and comment on it, but our present position is that we don't know enough to do this with any confidence.

However, certain general facts about our time may be looked at. There is a vast confusion in the minds of very nearly everyone concerning the role of sexual experience in human life. Culturally, Western attitudes toward sex have varied from one extreme to the other, over a period of two or three hundred years, and the subject has been so blown about and mistreated by the winds of doctrine that the inward sense of fitness, with which all human beings are endowed, is probably stultified in relation to the questions that arise. We have the idea that what is wanted is a basic human maturity, and that when this is obtained, there will be common sense and a natural morality in relation to sex.

Meanwhile, it is possible to understand the eagerness with which some writers disregard traditional taboos. They see the spurious morality in conventional attitudes and undertake to redress the balance. Eventually, hypocritical standards are worn away, these writers will find that they can no longer feel like "liberators" and righteous campaigners simply from "shocking" their readers, and they will have to dig into their essential ethical feelings to develop both good taste and authentic moral attitudes. To be against ignorance and emotional prejudice and "guilt-feelings" is not enough to shape a balanced philosophy of life.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

EXPERIMENTS IN EDUCATIONAL SYNTHESIS

A GOOD experiment in education reflects the process of scientific inquiry in that it tests assumptions and evaluates the evidence collected to support the assumptions. An illustration is found in a current bulletin of the Midtown School (Los Angeles), which stresses parent-participation in the school activities. The Midtown staff report observes:

Parents are the crucial element in augmenting the contributions of the full-time staff. We feel that parent participation at Midtown has helped bridge the long-existent gulf between the American home and school—a gulf that has been detrimental to the growth of children, parents and teachers. We know that the parents who participate in their children's learning experiences achieve better understanding of themselves and their peers, and of their own and other children.

The children progress faster and attain a more realistic view of our society when their environment includes adults of diverse personalities, vocations and economic and ethnic groups. And finally, the presence of parents suggests new insights and challenges to our teachers. Midtown has moved far this year in creating an educational environment where various elements feed each other.

Midtown has demonstrated that a small privately-owned educational center, by exploring often-neglected factors in education, can help to educate other educators. The same is true—largely in respect to older children—of the Summerhill School in England and the recently established Summerlane School and Camp in North Carolina. A newsletter issued by Summerlane provides perspectives favoring the ultimate in "permissiveness":

Robert Hutchins has suggested that teachers in a democracy are about the business of "educating rulers." We agree. Democracy, however, cannot be taught through copybook exercises. Democratic leadership cannot be learned in Play Congresses with contemptible means and make-believe ends. If

children are to learn true responsibility, they must be given true authority.

We believe that nearly sixty years of experience with free schools, in Homer Lane's Little Commonwealth and A. S. Neill's Summerhill, demonstrate that the democratic community of adults and children is the necessary form for human education.

As for "teaching the teachers," Summerlane offers the following advice, based on the experience of the staff:

A teacher is someone who has first of all learned to keep his mouth shut. He knows that the child will learn much more quickly than he can teach if he supports the child in his search. When the child comes to him as the "master" of his subject, the teacher seeks to transmit the method by which he developed his authority in the subject. He is not importantly interested in the accretion of data, but in the process by which data are evaluated, sorted, structured, held together. If he is wise, the teacher lets the subject teach and the student learn. He is a midwife to the pregnant world and word.

The teacher is, too, a needler, a pointer of the way. He is a bit of a poet, and prophet and seer. But, above all, he is a lover: a lover of the world and rich involvement in it, a lover of men and women and children who knows deeply the first law of love, cherishing the preciously unique identity of each individual.

The teacher is a bridge between the child and the world. He waits to be walked upon, and supports the child whatever pace he sets, no matter how long the chuckling water, the bright blossoms delay his passage.

At the college level, new, relatively small institutions seem to be finding considerable stimulus in the direction of sociological synthesis. A symposium conducted at Central Washington State College on the topic, "The Idea of a College," proposes various means for integrating education with life:

The 1963 symposium has four main purposes. One is to provide an historical account of the influences which have shaped the idea of a college in America. Another is to describe and appraise those needs and desires of society which influence the college today. The last two purposes relate more

directly to the activities of the individual student and teacher in the academic community. The second is to look at the way human knowledge and experience, whether for convenience, necessity, or whatever, have been fragmented into academic "disciplines" and to see if there is a way to bring the fragments meaningfully together again.

Important questions need to be asked with respect to each of these purposes. For example, how well has the American college responded to the needs of a democratic society? Does society today encourage the degree of autonomy the college has to have in order to perform its essential tasks and at the same time respond to the needs of a democracy? Can and should the college community significantly affect the values of its membership? Can and should the college be as concerned about an individual's knowing himself as it is about his knowing the world? Do the various "disciplines" actually exist in isolation from one another, or have we failed to identify their inter-relationships? If the latter, what effect does this have on the way the individual sees himself and the world he lives in? These and other questions will occur to the individual who believes that a free society especially needs an institution such as the college, an institution permitted the autonomy necessary to encourage detachment and nurture convictions about what human beings can aspire to.

If education be conceived as chiefly the transmission of "the cultural heritage," a number of psychological difficulties arise. In the first place, "the" cultural heritage is only one of many outlooks, a relatively closed system of reference points. And also, along with this bias comes the inevitable tendency to compartmentalize the fields of learning. But philosophy is crippled without psychology, while sociology and politics are increasingly disabled unless they are related to both philosophy and psychology. Small wonder, then, that significant educational "experiments" seek to break the artificial barriers between accepted categories, and to expand the functions of those who presumably represent them.

FRONTIERS

A Letter on "Aristocracy"

ACCOMPANYING Richard Groff's article, "The Tyranny of Equality" (MANAS, June 5), is an editorial comment that "the reader who encounters here for the first time a vigorous criticism of equalitarian dogma is likely to feel both puzzlement and indignation." I, for one, did not feel either. What did disturb me, however, was the feeling that some subtle element was missing in what Mr. Groff said, making his points incomplete.

Finally, I decided that both his premise and his conclusion contain within them the key to my discomfort. He proposed that aristocracy has its basis in "the great tradition of Western thought," and ended his article by saying that "if the great Western tradition of individual excellence is to resume, we shall have to recover our lost values and learn to reconcile them with modern life."

The trouble, as I see it, is that the West has never had any enduring values which would inspire men to a true aristocracy. This seems to have been the case across long centuries, despite Mr. Groff's citation of Socrates and Plato, who lived at a time when Athenian culture was suffering a decline, the interest being in form rather than ideas. At best, he can adopt Aristotle, who was the most influential in setting the pattern of "Western tradition" and who, through the Scholastic thinkers, helped to shape Judeo-Christian culture. Apparently, Mr. Groff would have us accept a hierarchical structure with aristocracy at the top of the pyramid. As he puts it: "The same eye with which we see our inferiors also shows us our superiors, and the mature mind will recognize the latter as surely and as quickly as the former." Have we not now a debasement of this idea, with our dollar sign holding court at the top—no more "almighty," in these days of anxiety, but none the less a fitting symbol of cherished values in the present age?

Is it any wonder that "mass man" follows the example set by those who have the most money, who therefore stand for the highest excellence, regardless of their lip-service to forgotten ideals? Would not this all-pervasive motive of acquisition account for the levelling-off process? The true spirit of man is as absent at the top as elsewhere, and thus the rot proceeds simultaneously throughout.

It is sometimes contended that people who will neither lead nor think for themselves must suffer such consequences, and that there can be no new structure erected until the old forms are cleared to the ground to make room for other foundations. This seems to be the case in our crafts, guilds, and unions: originally organized on the basis of excellence and of responsibility extended vertically from top to bottom, the unions have spread out horizontally, relying on expediency and bargaining power.

Mr. Groff would have the individual oppose the current and set his own course. But to what end? Would it not be folly to sacrifice one's energies to no purpose? Why not anchor and save fuel until the current slackens or the tide changes; or, if we are in rough water, heave to and ride out the storm?

It might be better to accept the advice of William Mathes. In "The Lonely Revolution," he said:

We really do not need any more Great Leaders; we need populations of human beings who can sustain the privations and terror of being leaderless, of belonging to no one or no thing. Such people would be qualified to choose leaders. . . .

The level of action will have to be internal and personal. Probably it will be rare for one person to really help another in the effort. What has to happen cannot be communicated directly, if at all. . . . Any one in the fruitful phases of his searches will, at best, be a living example of the fact that it is possible and valuable to become human. We have each to look to his own search.

And finally:

We need a revolution. I can describe some aspects of it, but I cannot see ways to bring it about. It will be a bloodless, warless revolution fought with weapons stranger than the most exotic bomb or death-ray. There will be no barricades to defend, no Molotov-cocktails to hurl, no defense plants or war bonds, no ritual trials and executions, no fun at all. It will be a lonely revolution. . . .(MANAS, May 22.)

Some words by Viktor Frankl are in a similar key:

. . . everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way. . . . and there ... are always choices to make. . . . There is [even] purpose in that life which is almost barren of both creation and enjoyment and which admits of but one possibility of high moral behavior: namely, in man's attitude to his existence, an existence restricted by external forces.

Perchance the *lonely* man of our day is creating a true aristocracy for the future, with a vision of a pyramid the counterpart of which he is building within himself. It may not be too fanciful to say that such a man is unconcerned as to which hierarchy he serves, and indifferent to the level, his "aristocracy" lying in his growing ability to *stand alone* by pursuing an ideal of inner perfection—the sort of balanced life which finds itself in equilibrium no matter what the outer surroundings.

READER

There is not, it seems to us, so wide a separation between Mr. Groff and Mr. Mathes as this reader suggests. It helps, for example, to recall that Mr. Groff is the author of the MANAS series on Thoreau, published last fall, and later issued in pamphlet form. Thoreau was no "leader" in the accepted sense, but he has certainly been an example to the questioners and wonderers of the present. He was one of the first to participate in Mr. Mathes' "lonely revolution."

Richard Groff's article, "The Tyranny of Equality," has the wholeness and dramatic unity of a single, enthusiastic flow of the imagination. When a man writes thus, by implication he invites

the reader to use his own imagination and to add the distinctions and qualifications which belong to such a work. For example, one critic of this article found a note of cruelty in the reference to the ancient Greek custom of "exposing" defective infants to the elements. Yet it seems an unnecessary literalism to suppose that Mr. Groff endorsed this practice. He was, we think, making a comparison of mood between two cultures, not proposing a eugenic program in imitation of the Greeks.

Moreover, it seems beyond the call of duty to burden a writer who pursues an iconoclastic theme with responsibility for *total* replacement of what he condemns. In this case Mr. Groff made it plain that he had only broken the surface of a rather tough terrain, and that the ploughing and cultivating remained to be done. He said at the end:

Let whoever treasures his spiritual heritage and feels a responsibility to sustain and extend it, confront these questions and respond with the imperatives inherent in his being. It is uncertain what sacrosanct ideas might have to be examined under the searching light of aristocratic principles.

It is sometimes assumed that those who advocate a revival of aristocracy are intent upon a social ideal which is contemptuous of the weak or the inadequate. This could hardly be true of Mr. Groff's thinking, since at the outset he spoke of Jesus of Nazareth and Socrates as exemplars of the quest for individual excellence. These two were above all concerned with education, and their attention was turned to any who wanted help. For them, the ideal was a life of principle. This is not a restriction of the good life to the intellectually skillful, but rather reaches into the human essence to a trans-intellectual reality.

Let us look for a moment at the basic historical objection to the aristocratic principle. It has grown out of a reaction to the abuse of power by an arrogant, selfish, and egotistical class of men who came by their authority through an accident of birth, or by an exercise of unusual capacities

which they turned to self-advancement, in disregard of the welfare of humbler men. It seems clear that Mr. Groff's "aristocrats" are men who would be contemptuous, not of other men, but of *power*. Were such individuals to be held up to public admiration, what a reversal of popular attitudes might be accomplished!

In a society based upon principles of education, power would become the most useless thing in the world. A true aristocrat would found his life on the relationships that flourish in an educational society.

One thing that ought to be recognized is that our "equalitarian" society is honeycombed with clandestine and debased expressions of the aristocratic idea. The notions of the good spread by Hollywood public relations experts is one example of this misuse of psychological influence. The power structures in the dominant political parties, with their crude and unabashed determination to win elections at any cost, are another. Still another phase of the manipulation of mass behavior comes through advertising and sales promotion, and in the plausible apologetics for placing human good second to commercial and industrial progress.

The brute fact seems to be that the aristocratic principle cannot be suppressed; it can only be perverted. Arthur Miller's article in *Harper's* for last November showed how the perversion works:

Today power would have us believe—everywhere—that it is purely beneficent. The bank is not a place which makes more money with your deposits than it returns to you in the form of interest; it is not a sheer economic necessity, it is not a business at all. It is "Your Friendly Bank," a kind of welfare institution whose one prayer, day and night, is to serve your whims and needs. A school is no longer a place of mental discipline but a kind of day-care center, a social gathering where you go through a ritual of games and entertainments which insinuate knowledge and the crafts of the outside world. Business is not the practice of buying low and selling high, it is a species of public service. The good life itself is not the life of the struggle for meaning, not

the quest for union with the past, with God, with man, that it traditionally was. The good life is the life of ceaseless entertainment, effortless joys, the air-conditioned, dust-free languor beyond the Mussulman's most supine dream. Freedom is after all, comfort; sexuality is a photograph. The enemy of it all is the real. The enemy is conflict. The enemy, in a word, is life.

Forgetful of the fact that all human excellence is to be had only by *striving*, we have allowed the commercial Machiavellis to corrupt our achieved equality with the idea that excellence is some kind of purchasable commodity. It was against delusions of this order that Mr. Groff struck his blows.