

## THE DUAL LIFE

THE present seems a drab and bleak period in human thought. It is drab, since what energy and color can be discerned have a forced artificiality, as though they originated in some nervous compulsion which can be neither enjoyed nor controlled. It is bleak for the reason that a covert self-hate blights so much of what passes for daring and originality. Who would think that in our brave, new world of self-styled "creativity" and eager pursuit of "growth," there would come nostalgic longings for the measure and sobriety, the balance and controlled vision of nineteenth-century expression? One looks in vain for these qualities. We have no Thoreaus, no Emersons, no Edward Bellamys today. It is even a question whether these men would or could write anything if they were among us, for such minds are not entirely self-nourished; they need at least a handful of friends.

Some few years ago an acquaintance given to such musings wondered about the possibility of recapturing the mood of that period by means of a device which was proving astonishingly effective—the reading of poetry against a background of jazz. Kenneth Patchen was a pioneer in this, giving concerts and making at least one very good album. Our friend thought of doing Whitman in this way, but found that he couldn't make it work. Whitman wrote for a world in which a vaulting, muscular faith still seemed possible, but terrible things have happened since Whitman's time. The idea was to make Whitman speak today with a living voice, but the sound never became believable. And Whitman was too fine a poet to force him into a context which made him pompous or florid by comparison. This is not to suggest that nothing of this sort can be made to work, but only to point out the difficulties. After all, Sidney Poitier read selections from Plato with a modern musical

background composed by Fred Katz (Warner Bros. 1561), to the wonder and even delight of many who were at first extremely skeptical of the idea. The record, which is to say Poitier, has an almost magical persuasion.

Yet Poitiers are few, Platos scarcer still, and the age we live in seems almost wholly lacking in those spontaneous sympathies which still nourished men of a hundred years ago. How shall we explain this sterility of mind, this enfeeblement of the human spirit? Easy generalizations hardly give an account of what has happened to us. To speak of a "breakdown of faith" is ambiguous, since one of the causes of the decline has been the externalizing focus of faith in outworn and dying institutions, as though *these* must somehow be reanimated instead of the human qualities by which institutions are shaped. The matter was put simply in *Dr. Zhivago* by Pasternak: "The whole tragedy started from the fact that we ceased to believe our own opinion."

What seems worse, today, is that so many men, even among the young, do not even have opinions, and regard this inner sort of nakedness with pride, as though there could be no truth to cleave to.

This is a kind of death, and there may be value in recognizing it as symptomatic of the death of an age. Whether the present is also a time of rebirth remains to be seen.

But what caused this death? The explanation of three terrible wars comes almost too easily, yet the coarsening, vulgarizing and brutalizing effects of war have surely played a central part in the suffocation of the human spirit. It might be more accurate to regard the wars themselves as inevitable consequences of the incompatible elements in Western civilization—a mix of moral pretensions with acquisitive ends and exploitative

means that could not help but make hypocrites of leaders and partially drugged victims of the rank and file. It is not so much the "facts" of modern life that has turned so many into mindless rebels and extremists, but the moral revulsion from which hardly anyone can be exempt. The light fiction of the day is a casual reflection of the life of people who not only believe in nothing but feel no loss in their lives from this inner emptiness.

Why do not writers at least *try* to do other things? Why are the efforts toward health and restoration so few and hard to find? The fact may be that writers, despite their immeasurable prestige, are not really so original at all. Much more than making an age, they reflect it. They are sensitives rather than creators. Most of them need a strong current going to ride along with, and then they may improve it a bit, develop some of its possibilities, and perhaps contribute a monument or two to the spirit of the times. But the ordinary writer does not give birth to the spirit. He is the creature and offprint of the noosphere, not its evolver. The men who block in the changes in and additions to the noosphere are the seminal thinkers, and such men, in order to survive, require a soil in which to take root, an air to breathe, and some nourishment from their fellows. Often they must do with very little.

Teilhard de Chardin's idea of the noosphere may be helpful in understanding the intellectual sterility of the present. We could say that it is the common stuff of mind that men have generated and in which they have their being as more than biological beings or "creatures." It is the medium of what we call culture and entirely a human creation. Borrowing from Piaget, we could say that it is the man-made structure of our historical becoming. In rare intervals—what we call "great ages"—it is laden with the vision of superior men and overflows with the inspiration of genius. Something like this must have occurred in Periclean Athens, in the Florence of the Medicis, in Elizabethan England, and in the closing years of the eighteenth century in the New World, when a

rare company of talented and committed men united to bring the United States into being. Rene Grousset chronicled such a period in the history of the Far East in his recently published book, *In the Footsteps of the Buddha*. The epochs of the transcendentalist philosophy in Europe and America were similar times.

What brings such periods into being? The question can hardly be answered. One might as well ask how to produce great men. But if we take Pasternak's rule and reverse it, we could say that a great age becomes at least possible when men begin to believe in their own opinions. For then, we may think, the noosphere begins to lose its flabby and amorphous texture and affords a quality of firmness and direction to human thought.

Earlier we spoke of Edward Bellamy. He is not often mentioned today, but only thirty-six years ago, when John Dewey, Charles Beard, and Edward Weeks (editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*) were invited by Columbia University to list the twenty-five books of the preceding half century which they thought had most influenced thought and action, Bellamy's book, *Looking Backward*, was second on the list of all three. (Marx's *Das Kapital* was first.) Bellamy is rightly thought of as an economic and social reformer, and the study of his influence in these terms could occupy an entire book. Yet as Arthur Morgan points out in his biography of Bellamy (Columbia University Press, 1944), Bellamy's interests were far wider than the economic sphere. He did not commit himself to a life of economic and social pioneering until he was thirty, and his earlier years were filled with the active formation of his own opinions. He was born in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, in 1850, when New England was still under the spell of "the Calvinist doctrine of innate depravity." A chapter called "The Rebel" in Morgan's *Edward Bellamy* shows the unusual self-consciousness of this youth who turned from one aspect of the society around him to another, finding that each of them needed correction and change. Trained for

the law, he closed his office after having served one client, turning to newspaper work. He wrote for various New England and New York journals, and in 1880 started his own paper, the *Penny News*, which shortly afterward became the *Springfield Daily News*, which is still in existence. Most notable of all, however, in those early years, was his revolt against the traditional religion of his time and the heavy-handed doctrine of guilt which oppressed believers. By the time he was twenty-two, his orthodoxy had disappeared entirely, yet he did not become indifferent to religious questions. He projected his inclinations into the character of the hero of a novel he was working on at the time:

"This life is a mystery, men say, and therefore leave it as such and go about their business. This life is a mystery, I say, and therefore do no other thing until I solve it, in some measure at least. That mystery underlies all things, and therefore until I know what I am doing, I will do nothing. I will not live at random as men do. It is not that I necessarily expect to solve it. Not at all. It is merely that in the presence of that mystery none of the affairs in which men interest themselves seem to have any importance or attraction whatsoever."

This is sufficient introduction to the conclusion that Bellamy reached at the age of twenty-four, and recorded in a brief manuscript entitled "The Religion of Solidarity." He marked it with the following note:

I should like this paper to be read to me when I am about to die. This tribute I may render without conceit to the boy who wrote it.

It was written in 1874, when I was twenty-four, and represents the germ of what has been ever since my philosophy of life. I never offered it for publication. . . . I have always been slow to publish my opinion concerning these supreme matters. Yet by this time I begin to feel that this is the ripe judgment of my life, and that I should be justified in putting it forth as such.

We shall quote some passages from this fragment by Bellamy, for the beauty of the ideas, the strength of the conceptions, and the depth of the conviction of the writer. It is certainly fitting to say that these were ideas which sustained

Bellamy through his many labors during a short but enormously productive life. (He died at forty-nine.) Early in the essay he says:

Very often it must happen to everyone when wandering abroad at night to feel the eyes drawn upward as by a sense of majestic, overshadowing presence. . . . The soul of the gazes, drawn on and on, from star to star, still travels toward infinity. He is strange to the limitations of terrestrial things; he is out of the body. He is oppressed with the grandeur of the universal frame; its weight seems momentarily to rest upon his shoulders. But with a start and a wrench as of life from soul the personality reasserts itself, and with a temporary sense of strangeness he fits himself once again to the pigmy standards about him. The experiences which have been mentioned are but examples of the sublime, ecstatic, impersonal emotions, transcending the scope of personality or individuality, manifested by human nature, and of which the daily life of every person affords abundant instances.

What, then, is the view of human nature thus suggested? On the one hand is the personal life, an atom, a grain of sand on a boundless shore, a bubble on a foam-flecked ocean, a life bearing a proportion to the mass of past, present, and future life, so infinitesimal as to defy the imagination. Such is the importance of the person. On the other hand is a certain other life, as it were a spark of the universal life, insatiable in aspiration, greedy of infinity, asserting solidarity with all things and all existence, even while subject to the limitations of space and time and all other of the restricting conditions of the personality. On the one hand is a little group of faculties of the individual, unable to cope with the few and simple conditions of material life, wretchedly failing, for the most part, to secure tolerable satisfaction for the physical needs of the race, and at best making slow and painful progression. On the other hand, in the soul, is a depth of divine despair over the insufficiency of this existence, already seemingly too large, and a passionate dream of immortality, the vision of a starving man whose fancy revels in full tables.

Such is the estate of man, and such his dual life. . . . This dual life, personal and impersonal, as individual and universal, goes far to explain the riddle of human nature and of human destiny.

There are hardly more than twenty pages of this material by Bellamy, but the essay is well

developed, with great strength and unity. Where did he get these ideas? He got them out of himself. The work has a splendid wholeness, as though Bellamy had moments when he saw from above that he was both sorts of being, the personal and the impersonal, and the latter reality left so firm an imprint upon his memory that he could set this down in words as personal knowledge. He was, indeed, a *writer*. But the glimpses he reports have little to do with any sort of skill. One could of course name what happened to him as a "peak experience," but it seems almost pointless to classify (dispose of) what ought to be considered for far better purposes. The very roots of beinghood are involved:

There are few of an introspective habit who are not haunted with a certain very definite sense of a second soul, an inner serene and passionless ego, which regards the experiences of the individual with a superior curiosity, as it were, a half pity. It is especially in moments of the deepest anguish or of the maddest gaiety, that is, in the intensest strain of the individuality, that we are conscious of the dual soul as of a presence serenely regarding from another plane of being the agitated personality. It is at such times that we become, not by force or argument, but by spontaneous experience, strictly subjective to ourselves, that is, the individuality becomes objective to the universal soul, that eternal subjective. The latter regards the former as a god is conceived to look upon man, in an attitude passionless, disinterested, yet pitiful. Often does it happen in scenes of revelry or woe that we are thus suddenly translated, looking down calmly upon our passion-wrung selves, and then as with an effort, once more enduring the weeds or tinsel of our personal estates. At such times we say that we have been out of ourselves; we have only just realized the greater half of our being. We have momentarily lived in the infinite part of our being, a region ever open and waiting for us, if we will but frequent the highlands. We call such an experience abnormal; it should be normal.

"Normal"—"abnormal"—who qualifies to settle the meaning of such terms? Shall we go to the professionals who gather statistics on human behavior? Shall we ask the orthodoxies, which are never comfortable and content until they have reduced all accounts of the nature and condition

of man to some systematic, pay-as-you-go compromise? Or shall we go into the streets and ask the fools, the outcasts and charlatans, along with the wise who have never found a place anywhere else? It is better not to ask, better not to refer, when considering questions like this. As authorities go, Bellamy is as good as any other, and better than most, since his life became an arduous application of the moral ideas he found implicit in these views:

In the religion of solidarity is found the only rational philosophy of the moral instincts. Unselfishness, self-sacrifice, is the essence of morality. On the theory of ultimate individualities, unselfishness is madness; but on the theory of the dual life, of which the life of solidarity is abiding and that of the individual transitory, unselfishness is but the sacrifice of the lesser self to the greater self, an eminently rational and philosophical proceeding *per se*, and entirely regardless of ulterior considerations. The moral intuitions which impel to self-sacrifice are the instincts of the life of solidarity asserting themselves against the instincts of the individuality. Hence the majesty beyond appeal in their monitions. As the individuality has its appetites and passions, so the universal life has its passions of self-debasement, its rebellious self-torturing sympathies, its generous longings. The individuality would always sacrifice other individualities to itself, but the soul of solidarity within us, equally indifferent to all individualities, having in view only the harmony of the universal life as its exigencies require, impels now the sacrifice of my individuality, now yours.

Finally, toward the end, there is this:

Above all, disabuse your mind of the notion that this life is essentially incomplete and preliminary in its nature and destined to issue in some final state. For this notion there is no warrant in reason nor in proper interpretation of intuitions. Time is not a vestibule of eternity, but a part of it. We are now living our immortal lives. This present life is its own perfect consummation, its own reason and excuse. The life of infinite range that our intuitions promise us even now opens round about us. The avenues leading to it, the vistas opening upon it, are those universal instincts that continually stir us, and which if followed out would lead us thither. It is our own dull lack of faith that causes us to regard them as of no present but only of future significance, that places

our heaven ever in some dim land of tomorrow, instead of all about us in the eternal present.

The individual dies; the soul never. It is inconceivable how it could taste an immortality more perfect than it now enjoys. Nor can a life of wider scope be imagined than that the soul already takes hold of by its universal instincts, and which by the culture of those instincts is even now, more and infinitely more, realizable by us. . . . What respect can be claimed for aspirations after other forms and higher grades of life by those who are too dull to imagine the present infinite potentialities of their souls? When will men learn to interpret their intuitions of heaven and infinite things in the present, instead of forever in the future?

How will a man know that Bellamy spoke the truth? The answer must be, by the same means that Bellamy knew. Yet did he really know?

Perhaps that is our illness, at root. We are persuaded that the truth about ourselves is a countable matter, and issue cocky challenges to philosophers and sages, making their truth grow ephemeral and fade into misty myth. We want a man to come back "from the dead" to tell us about the immortality of the soul. Which means that we want the most misleading sort of information—hearsay—about the most important matters. But what if Bellamy is right in saying that time is a part of eternity, and that there is no immortality save what we can sense and experience under the limitation of mortality and in the presence of imminent death? For that is what he suggests.

Yet the Bellamys are men who bring great ages to birth. The hidden dimensions of their inner lives give tensile strength and symmetry to their careers as workers in and for the world. This is true of many—true of Tolstoy, true of Gandhi, and of some others, in varying measure. A world that learns hospitality for the thought of such men will be a world capable of reconstruction from within.

## *REVIEW*

### WILD PLANT MENUS

STALKING THE GOOD LIFE, by Euell Gibbons (David McKay, \$5.95 ), is not a new book, but it must be a popular one since it has been through six printings since 1966. The author is an amiable missionary for the delights of wild food plants. He has for years been the contributor of a column to *Organic Gardening*, where some of the material in this book has already appeared.

The mood of this book may be established by telling a little about a field on Mr. Gibbons' place in Pennsylvania which he planted to evergreens some years ago and then left alone, except for manuring. From other trees and plants in the field he gets a considerable harvest of nuts, berries, greens, and grapes. Countless birds, delighting to eye and ear, live there, too. Among the humbler plants he gathers for food are dandelions and burdock. He knows how to prepare dandelion roots for eating as well as the greens, and how to turn the burdock into a highly edible vegetable. His freezer is filled with goodies from this wild garden.

But to others the field seems like so much wasteland. Especially to trained people who know about scientific agriculture, as the following interchange reveals:

The local Soil Conservationist of the Department of Agriculture sometimes looks askance at the management of this wild field. Recently he came to survey the site of a pond we intended to build in its lower corner. As we walked through the young evergreens, he asked if I intended to get the weed trees out of the field. I explained that what he called "weed trees" I called sugar maples, wild cherries, hickories, black walnuts, persimmons, oaks, ashes, and elms, and that they were welcome in the mixed forest we intended to let nature grow for us.

He said, "You can't make money out of growing pines unless you keep these deciduous weed trees out of here."

I removed my hat so this young man could see my wild shock of gray hair and asked him how much

money he thought I would ever make from these tiny pines and spruces.

He very eagerly explained that he had known some tree farmers to get income from pine forests after only thirty-five years, by selling the poles from the trees that had to be cut to thin the forest properly.

I pointed out that another thirty-five years would bring us to the year 2004—just 93 years after the year in which I was born—and that I probably wouldn't need the money where I was likely to be at that time.

He thought this attitude irresponsible and asked, "Don't you want to leave some income for your children?" Then I explained that my two sons were older than he and in thirty-five years they should be living comfortably on old-age pensions.

More seriously, I tried to share my dream for this uncultivated field, telling him how both nature and I had envisioned a mixed forest here, with roots of many kinds holding the soil together and penetrating into the deeper, unexploited strata below to bring up valuable minerals for their own growth, which would eventually be added to the soil. And how mixed evergreen needles and deciduous leaves would form a soft carpet to keep rain from pounding hard on the earth, and would eventually turn into deep, fertile soil, healing the scars of man's misuse of this plot. I also explained that, while this little forest would probably never bring in any cash, it would furnish priceless joy over the years as I walked through it to fish in the pond, or as I looked over it from my upstairs study window.

Furthermore, I said, these so-called "weed trees" would furnish wild fruits and nuts that couldn't be bought in any market, and therefore I could price them to suit myself and run the produce of this spot into thousands of dollars if I wished to, and no one would dispute me, for where else could I get such delicacies at any price? I told him I wanted all these wild-feed plants at hand, to furnish the bread and wine so that every walk through the growing little forest could be turned into an act of worship.

The Government Official looked at me in astonishment and slowly shook his head. He had never heard of such an attitude. To him, free, undisciplined nature was a menace that should be brought under control, an obstacle to be overcome, an enemy that should be conquered.

Euell Gibbons and the others who think as he thinks are very much in the minority, these days,

while persons like the government official, who are conscientious and hardworking, make up the bulk of the population. But the times they are a-changing, and some day the balance will swing in favor of men like Euell Gibbons. Then they won't *have* to be missionaries because people will regard such ideas as obvious, as simple common sense.

It isn't that everyone will join the wilderness cult. Common sense will not oblige everyone to become a nature-boy gourmet. That isn't the point. Mr. Gibbons likes to eat and he tells about his pleasure in eating wild vegetables and fruits so colorfully that his books sell very well indeed. The point is that the essential sanity and balance of the author are also communicated, and may have a lasting effect on many readers.

A book like this is not easy to review, since its content seems mainly made up of recipes of salads and other dishes made from plants gathered in wild places, yet this shows only the "product" side of his life. Euell Gibbons is really a pioneer, a man who stands between two epochs, one characterized by spurious plenty, waste, and exploitation of nature, the other, not yet come, a time in which men will live without perverting nearly all their thoughts with calculations of how they can profit by everything they find within reach.

The most pleasurable part of the book is in its story of human encounters. Once, when the author had been engaged to teach a course in "survival" at one of the Outward Bound Schools, he overheard two students talking about him during the first few days. One asked, "Just who is Euell Gibbons?" The other replied, "Oh, you know. He's the prehistoric cat who thinks all this crazy wild stuff is the main scene."

The course included taking the students out in boats and marooning them for three days on an uninhabited island off the Maine coast, with only a hunting knife and a can for cooking. Before long the students came to regard the crazy wild stuff as pretty wonderful. In fact, they grew so accustomed to surviving alone on wild, deserted

islands that they felt they knew things Euell Gibbons didn't and demanded that he do a three-day survival stint, himself. They had found out that he hadn't ever done a "solo." Well, he had a wonderful time, even on the eight-acre hunk of granite the boys decided would be the place for the experiment. How he managed to eat well makes a fascinating three or four pages. Then:

On my return the boys all gathered in the assembly room to debrief me. After they got my story they went into a huddle and decided that I should receive a barely passing grade. They would have agreed to a higher grade except for one thing: I had been telling them that solo should be a time of serious meditation, deep contemplation, and integrating spiritual experiences, and quite obviously I had thought of very little besides food.

There is a lot of variety in the book. One time Gibbons spent a morning in New York's Central Park, then fixed lunch with what he had collected in the apartment of a reporter who had challenged him to find anything worth nibbling there. He surprised the audience which came to watch this performance by having even a fish course—the catch of a small boy in one of the lakes, who saw him foraging for roots and decided he must be starving—and topping off with steaming sassafras tea. While most of the book is about the eastern woods, Gibbons grew up in the Southwest and he has two chapters on the edible wild plants in that region. One pleasant discovery the author reports is that lots of other trees besides the sugar maple have a sap that can be made into sweet syrup, and he gives full directions for tapping these trees. The book shares in nutritional science, too, with interesting figures on the high vitamin and protein content of a number of common weeds. Finally, the concluding section deals with remedies for pollution and plans for recycling that seem worthy of serious consideration.

## **COMMENTARY**

### **MILLS AT HIS BEST**

BACK in 1956, a MANAS writer spoke of C. Wright Mills (see *Frontiers*) as a college professor who took full advantage of the immunities provided by an academic career to expose hypocrisies of the psycho-social status quo. The occasion was an address by Mills at an Asilomar conference of the Mental Health Society of Northern California. Mills's title was "Work Milieu and Social Structure." He charged that two groups of psychologists, mental hygienists and industrial relations experts, tend to remain wholly uncritical of the social structure while devoting their talents to securing adjustments to existing relationships. "Health" is defined as conformity to these relationships, which embody the values of liberal capitalism and the Protestant ethic. To function smoothly and grow in this scheme, Mills said, is to be mentally in fine shape.

Industrial psychology discusses workers in terms of happiness or unhappiness, good or bad morale, and degrees of efficiency, while managers "are typically referred to as intelligent or unintelligent, rational or irrational, knowledgeable or ignorant." These modes of evaluation indicate the goals sought by industrial psychology. Mills continues:

The problems of "human relations in industry" are set up from the standpoint of The Company and Its Purposes and are seen as primarily due to misunderstanding and lack of open communication. The answer, of "more cooperation, really means obedience accompanied by talk. In one fifteen-year study of human relations in a large industry (executed during the "thirties when union membership increased some 25%) one finds no analysis of unions. Class and power are neglected as facts of industrial life; they are sponged up into status or prestige. This is one of the major ways of psychologizing all problems, for of all dimensions of stratification, status is the most directly relevant psychologically. Yet the neglect of explicit power does not mean that manipulation is neglected; in fact, much of what is called counselling is really manipulation.

Speaking directly to the professionals working in mental health, Mills said:

The tension between understanding and power is of course part of the situation of all intellectuals who would take an active stand in a world run by crackpot realists and subject to blind drift. But this tension can lead beyond pathos: it can become a challenge. There is, understandably nowadays, a tendency to view the structure of our epoch in terms of catastrophe and apocalypse. We live in times and in a nation demanding—according to our vision of man—structural modifications of a revolutionary character, but also in a time when we do not in fact see an adequate way of making these modifications. We do not want to compromise our larger visions nor deceive ourselves about the true limits of our possible action. But what we *have* to do, if we would act at all, is to act *as if* what we *can* do is important, even if we are not always certain that it is. . . .

This may be Mills at his best.

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### THE QUESTION OF LITERACY

IN a magazine which frequently celebrates the excellence of good books, and which, after all, would not even exist if people could not read, it may seem strange to find what can be regarded as an attack on the ideal of literacy. Yet literacy, it must be admitted, is only a tool, and like any other tool can be abused or turned to ruinous purposes. Why should a man write? It is a way of speaking to people who cannot otherwise be reached. Plato, who was a prolific and skillful writer, distrusted the written word and said so. The most important things, he said, should not and cannot be written down. To the inventor of letters, he says in the *Phaedrus*: ". . . you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom, for they will read many things without teaching, and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise but only wiseacres."

Plato was perhaps more entitled to say this than anyone else, since he wrote with consummate art, which probably means that he understood better than most men the limitations of the medium. But here *we* are, in the latter half of the twentieth century, absolutely dependent upon printed words for our very survival, and also, as we so often say, upon literacy for our political freedom. It is true enough that the great ideas of the eighteenth-century revolution were spread by print as well as by other means. So there is not much sense in arguing against literacy, but we do need to understand it as a tool. Moreover, it is one thing to speak of the educational needs of the children who grow up in the environment of North America, and quite another to consider the needs of some other parts of the world.

In a book which should have frequent attention from all those who regard themselves as competent to plan the educational programs of

large numbers of people—and especially if they have never lived among and really shared the life of those people—Ananda K. Coomaraswamy addressed himself to the misuses of the knowledge of letters. The book is *The Bugbear of Literacy* (published in England by Dobson, 1943, and in the United States by John Day as *Am I My Brother's Keeper?*). In the title essay, Coomaraswamy said:

The vast majority of the world's population is still unindustrialized and unlettered, and there are peoples still "unspoiled" (in the interior of Borneo): but the average American who knows of no other way of living than his own, judges that "unlettered" means "uncultured," *as if* this majority consisted only of a depressed class in the context of his own environment. It is because of this, as well as for some meaner reasons, not unrelated to "imperial" interests, that when men propose not merely to exploit but also to educate "the lesser breeds without the (i.e. *their*) law" they inflict upon them profound, and often lethal, injuries. I say "lethal" rather than "fatal" here because it is precisely a destruction of their *memories* that is involved.

For his evidence, Coomaraswamy turns to witnesses who are masters of the tool of literacy:

A "literary" man if there ever was one, the late Professor G. L. Kittredge writes: "It requires a combined effort of the reason and the imagination to conceive a poet as a person who cannot write, singing or reciting his verses to an audience that cannot read. . . . The ability of oral tradition to transmit great masses of verse for hundreds of years is proved and admitted. . . . To this oral literature, as the French call it, education is no friend. When a nation begins to read . . . what was once the possession of the folk as a whole, becomes the heritage of the illiterate only, and soon, unless it is gathered up by the antiquary, vanishes altogether." Mark, too, that this oral literature once belonged "to the whole people . . . the community whose intellectual interests are the same from the top of the social structure to the bottom," while in the reading society it is accessible only to antiquaries, and is no longer bound up with everyday life. A point of further importance is this: that the traditional oral literature interested not only all *classes*, but also all *ages* of the population; while the books that are nowadays written expressly "for children" are such as no mature mind could tolerate; it is now only the comic strips that appeal alike to

children who have been given nothing better and at the same time to "adults" who have never grown up.

Folk music dies out in the same way, and published collections do not really preserve folk culture, since "preservation" of a people's art is a kind of funeral rite, and "preservatives are only necessary when the patient has already died." Coomaraswamy continues:

In other words, "Universal compulsory education, of the type introduced at the end of the last century, has not fulfilled expectations by producing happier and more effective citizens; on the contrary, it has created readers of the yellow press and cinema-goers" (Karl Otten). A master who can himself not only read, but also *write* good classical Latin and Greek, remarks that "there is no doubt of the quantitative increase in literacy of a kind, and amid the general satisfaction that something is being multiplied it escapes inquiry whether the something is profit or deficit." He is discussing only the "worst effects" of enforced literacy, and concludes: "Learning and wisdom have often been divided; perhaps the clearest result of modern literacy has been to maintain and enlarge the gulf."

We ought here to recall Lazlo Moholy-Nagy's observations in *Vision in Motion* on the effect of mass education in the United States, in order to satisfy the need of industry for practical literacy on the part of machine operators and others doing jobs involving printed instructions:

A wholesale literacy seemed at first to open new and happy visions for everyone. But, paradoxically, the mass distribution of schooling accomplished a negative miracle. The speedy dispensation of education for *immediate use* . . . provided the masses with a quick training but threw overboard its purpose, namely, that not knowledge but the power to *acquire* knowledge is the goal of education." (Pestalozzi.) Exactly this was circumvented. The masses received a training by verbalization, emphasizing the process of receiving instead of producing. The goal was not to express oneself, to think independently, and be alert, but to "apply" education for running machines according to instruction.

Well, wasn't that *necessary*? That is the question the needs to be asked, but without so much assurance that we know the answer. The purpose of education is to serve the needs of

human beings, not the requirements of an industrial establishment which is blind to all values but its own narrow aims and has already proved itself the worst possible housekeeper, so far as the earth and its welfare are concerned. There may be a right way for a nation to acquire literacy, but it is plain enough that we have not used it and do not know what it is.

So, naturally enough, when we carry the gospel of education to the under-developed nations, we make all the same mistakes. We have a "Report on Educational Communications in Rural Areas of West and East Africa," prepared by Gail Martin of the Educational Foundations Center, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, which details the futile obsession with "literacy" for African villagers, in work carried on under the supervision of UNESCO mainly by professional educators trained in European and American methodologies. Actual workers in the field have learned that literacy should be only a secondary goal, and then only when found to be a "fundamental step in the improvement of the living conditions of the people." But such people have no voice in policy, since the obsession rules supreme. One of the first effects of conventional literacy is the creation of a new caste of elites. Miss Martin learned from a UNESCO representative in Niger that while there were creditable increases in literacy in that country, year by year, population increased at a more rapid rate, so that today "there are more unschooled and illiterate people in Niger than there were in 1960 when the program began to be accelerated." Formal schooling is in the French language, with emphasis on French culture and history. The report continues:

The representative commented that the effect of formal education on the populace was that any young man or girl who had four years of education (and this was the average) refused ever again to do any work with his hands. He would not return to his village but stayed in the city. . . . The general attitude is that formal education removes one from the common sphere of Africans and makes you more akin to the

Europeans. Europeans who live in Niger of course are never seen to do any manual labor.

Attending a conference on educational television in a city in the Ivory Coast, Miss Martin was made to feel by the language and manner of the proceedings that she "had been mysteriously transported to the Sorbonne or Laval." "I felt," she remarks, "that the educational philosophy outlined would be entirely appropriate to either Quebec or France in the nineteenth century."

Togo, while a tiny country, seemed a microcosm of the problems of the African nations. Miss Martin tells of a conversation with the Director of Primary Education:

He described his own school experience and curriculum in which he learned all the ports, major rivers, major geographical areas, imports, exports, effluents of the Seine, etc., to do with France. And he had never heard of the Volta River in Africa much less of the Zambezi or the Congo. He recalled too that a favorite punishment for speaking one's native language was for the teachers to hang a token of some kind around your neck to point you out as a dunce.

Similar idiocies were common in Ghana, at another level. Speaking of Tema, where heavy industries have been developed, she tells of elaborately designed houses which are hardly used by the Africans, who cook and bathe outside. They raise goats on the town's central "showcase boulevard." They have adapted the entire development to African usage, continuing their own ways and traditions, which is fine, but makes the expensive construction somewhat ridiculous. Meanwhile:

We saw in Tema a heartbreaking illustration of how precious education had become to these people. The education superintendent's office was flooded by people: policemen virtually in tears, and parents begging to know when their children would get a place in school. . . . A desperate longing of these people for education as the magic way to improve their lot in life.

Yet neither in Tema nor in Accra is there any possibility for children to experience their first years of schooling in their native languages.

Because of dialect problems and teacher shortages, all must speak English in school.

The picture is not entirely dark. In Tanzania Nyerere has organized both government and education in terms of Tanzanian traditions, and teachers in the villages instruct both children and adults. The schools must have their own gardens to become self-supporting and the schools are built out of local materials. There are other splendid features of the educational program in Tanzania, and Miss Martin found some bright spots in one or two other African countries, notably resulting from the self-sacrificing efforts of two Catholic priests. Toward the end of her paper, Miss Martin asks:

Is literacy a goal in itself? Is learning to read and write in Swahili (or any other language) in fact the magic key that opens the door to the lore of "civilization" for the people of other countries? Is this a fact or is this a myth we have been cherishing? And if it is a fact, then where are the follow-up printed materials? And where is the change in the style of life that will make reading and a reverence for the book and the privacy that it requires part of an agrarian and communal way of life? . . . At a time when we are realizing the inappropriateness of our traditional methods and subject matters many of the African countries are still struggling to expand that same system which is of necessity even less appropriate to their needs than to ours. A new approach to education, such as that begun by Nyerere in Tanzania, is needed in all of the developing countries as well as the developed ones.

## *FRONTIERS*

### In Honor of C. Wright Mills

THERE are not, as C. P. Snow suggested, "two cultures," but dozens. We are thinking, of course, of the many branches of science, each with its own vocabulary and conceptual structure, and even of the branches of the humanities, as subdivided by the withering influence of scientific scholarship. All honor, then, to scholars who spend their lives trying to overcome the isolation resulting from all this departmentalization and specialization. Even if they do not—cannot—succeed in a single lifetime, they make their mark, and are sometimes recognized by the vast audience of non-specialist readers as worthy of attention.

Some personal recollections of C. Wright Mills by Dan Wakefield in the September *Atlantic* led to these reflections. For Mills was certainly a sociologist who made a heroic effort to practice his discipline as a human being, and if the popularity of his books is any measure, he had at least *some* success in being generally understood. Yet he was forced to devote a great deal of his time to critical analysis of the work of other sociologists. If one goes from Mr. Wakefield's appreciation to, say, Mills's *The Sociological Imagination*, first published by the Oxford University Press in 1959, and later available in an Evergreen paperback, it is possible to find many illustrations of the spirit described in the *Atlantic* article, but to form a really adequate judgment of this book, the reader would have to become a sociologist himself! You also get the impression that to accomplish what he wanted, Mills would have had to give up being a professional scholar—which, indeed, is about what happened with the writing of *Listen Yankee*, which appeared at the end of 1960. Of this book, Wakefield says:

The book was widely read and widely attacked in the American press. Its aim—clearly stated and seldom acknowledged—was to present the viewpoint of the Cuban revolutionary about the revolution, and for all the faults of the frankly polemical pamphlet, it

was the first, and I think last, time that such an attempt was made by a leading American intellectual.

Mills, you could say, was trying to be a Renaissance Man in an age filled with institutional barriers to any such aspiration. He bucked the field, and only his tireless scholarship and his unyielding determination, plus a rare talent for writing which he worked very hard to develop, won him his audience against the grain of the times. His "opinions" may be forgotten, but his resolve to see social science practiced in the service of man—the most important thing about him—may and ought to survive. This intention comes through very clearly in *The Sociological Imagination*. Cervantes once said that the road is better than the inn. The road Mills took was very long and almost impassable, but he kept traveling on it until the end. Wakefield makes this characterization:

Of all the men I have known, Mills was the most individual, the most obstinately unorganizable, the most jealous of his right and need to "go it alone" and to fire at all sides when he felt so moved. I think his deepest, most characteristic outlook—the long-range one that he always returned to after excesses of enthusiasm—was expressed that summer I worked for him. A man who belonged to a small socialist splinter group came to seek Mills's signature on a petition asking that the group be removed from the Attorney General's list of "subversive" organizations. Mills obligingly signed, but then in discussing politics, as was his habit, he challenged all his visitors beliefs and arguments until the poor fellow pushed to the wall, said in frustration, "Just what do you believe in, Mills?" At the moment Mills was tinkering with his motorcycle, and he looked up and said without a moment's hesitation, "German motors." Later when the fellow had left, Mills told me: "It's ridiculous to say those guys are a threat to the government. In the first place, they've only got 150 guys—how could they overthrow anything? Besides, their stand is really anti-Moscow and anti-Washington, and that's where I stand." His real home was outside of any movement or government or intellectual clique, and his favorite political heroes were "The Wobblies" (Industrial Workers of the World), the homegrown American radicals who opposed nearly everything and everyone, and valued

most of all their own independence. Whenever he liked someone, he'd say, "That guy's a real Wobbly."

This is a lighthearted moment, but no one who has read about the Wobblies will fail to understand Mills's enthusiasm.

What did Mills stand for in his serious, critical work? In *The Sociological Imagination*, in a chapter, "The Bureaucratic Ethos," he attacks such technocratic slogans as, "The purpose of social science is the prediction and control of human behavior," which are coined, he says, by those who want social studies to become "real sciences," and who believe they must be "politically neutral and morally irrelevant." Such men, he says, are—

out to do with society what they suppose physicists have done with nature. Their political philosophy is contained in the simple view that if only The Methods of Science, by which man now has come to control the atom, were employed to "control social behavior," the problems of mankind would soon be solved, and peace and plenty assured for all.

This sort of social science habitually ignores the central moral issue of power, becoming a tool of agencies which need professional manipulators. He quotes Robert S. Lynd's review of some "social science" research, titled *The American Soldier*, to illustrate how this works in practice:

These volumes depict science being used with great skill to sort out and to control men for purposes not of their own willing. It is a significant measure of the impotence of liberal democracy that it must increasingly use its social sciences not directly on democracy's own problems, but tangentially and indirectly; it must pick up the crumbs from private business research on such problems as how to gauge audience reaction so as to put together synthetic radio programs and movies, or, as in the present case, from Army research on how to turn frightened draftees into tough soldiers who will fight a war whose purposes they do not understand. With such socially extraneous purposes controlling the use of social science, each advance in its use tends to make it an instrument of mass control, and thereby a further threat to democracy.

This was the sort of "science" Mills worked to put an end to, by embodying in his own efforts a contrasting spirit and objective.