

## ON BEING BORN AGAIN

IN every teacher-learner situation, there comes a moment when the learner recognizes that he must act for himself. The learner's will comes into play. Knowledge and longing have a part in this moment, but they are present as psychic circumstances, human endowments, not critical forces which "cause" the learner to act. *He* is the cause, or no real learning takes place—there is, that is, no human becoming. The teacher who grasps the reality of human growth patiently awaits this moment, which marks the beginning of the process by which a human being sets himself free—becomes, that is, an individual. The teacher may add to the learner's knowledge and try to induce an increase in his longing, using the devices of drama, but the learner must act for himself.

Nothing can change the reality of this axial intention of the will. It can be ignored, covered up by theory which takes no account of egoity ("I-amness"), put out of sight by doctrines of "management" or formulas for collective salvation, but it cannot be eliminated. People's lives can be mutilated by systems which rule by plausible or tyrannical authority, leading, finally, to counter-systems of revolution, but there is no growth of human beings except through the wonder of this moment, and every real teacher knows it.

Religions, philosophies, theories of knowledge, conceptions of scientific truth, social systems, educational methods, revolutionary programs, plans of reform or blueprints for progress, no matter how elaborately dressed up or skillfully defended, if they do not make this moment the starting point and continuing axis—the beginning, the middle, the end—of what they propose, turn out to be anti-human in their effect. There are of course countless ways of saying or implying this, and there are also countless ways of losing track of its critical importance.

There is no way to protect so simple and "fundamental" a truth from distortion and misapplication, save by its constant rediscovery and reaffirmation from moment to moment. The real teacher has found this out from personal experience and from the use of criticism in his own life. He knows that there is no resting on one's laurels in the process of human growth. There may be some rest for the subordinate aspects of a man—rest on the external, passive solidifies which the becoming process throws off as byproducts while a man lives his life—but these resting places are not and should not be mistaken for the meaning of his life, which lies in an eternal becoming.

Well, to keep this idea from having only lofty meta-physical consequences, we need illustrations. What we are after, here, are fleshed-out examples of human life and development based on the moment of action for oneself—extrapolated from it in every direction. This kind of example may offer little prospect of any sort of "finality," since illustrations of independent becoming will embody only the ends that are natural to growth-processes. Ordinary conceptions of finality involve "resting-place" objectives, and may be alien to what is most basic for human beings. In any event, discussion of such objectives is avoided here. Heaven is not yet our destination.

Take, then, for example the life of Ralph Borsodi. Borsodi is now recognized as a distinguished leader of the decentralist movement, a man whose ideas have been widely fruitful in stimulating other people to develop a constructive way of life on the land. For an account of how this influence began, we draw on his book, *Flight from the City* (first published in 1929), which tells what happened after Borsodi made a critical decision. The story begins in New York City:

In 1920 the Borsodi family—my wife, two small sons, and myself—lived in a *rented* home. We *bought* our food and clothing and furnishings from retail stores. We were *dependent* entirely on my income from a none too certain white collar job.

Omitting description of the unloveliness of urban life, we turn to the situation of the Borsodis after they had moved to an old house (no "modern" improvements) a little less than two hours' commuting time from the city, where Borsodi worked:

Before the end of the first year, the year of the depression of 1921 when millions were tramping the streets of our cities looking for work, we began to enjoy the feeling of plenty which the city-dweller never experiences. We cut our hay, gathered our fruit; made gallons and gallons of cider. We had a cow, and produced our own milk and butter, and finally gave her up. By furnishing us twenty quarts of milk a day she threatened to put us in the dairy business. So we changed to a pair of blooded Swiss goats. We equipped a poultry-yard, and had eggs, chickens, and fat roast capons. We ended the year with plenty not only for our own needs but for a generous hospitality to our friends—some of whom were out of work—a hospitality which, unlike city hospitality, did not involve purchasing everything we served our guests.

Well, *Flight from the City* goes on and on, unfolding its excitements—it is really a romance—and Borsodi, being an economist, kept books on the practical side of this sort of life, with very interesting conclusions. Speaking in general, he wrote:

What we have managed to accomplish is the outcome of nothing but a conscious determination to use machinery for the purpose of eliminating drudgery from the home and to produce enough for ourselves—enough of the essentials of living to free us from the thralldom of our factory-dominated civilization.

From this statement—reporting his initial "conscious determination"—Mr. Borsodi's story opens out into the large field of social philosophy. Yet whatever his theoretical writings, and these are extensive, the primary contribution was this first *act on his own*, which created a field in which many other actions became possible. The quality

of the field stems from its beginning—a man dealing with his circumstances by independent resolve. Other people were helped to become active in a similar way—on their own—because of the field created by Borsodi, of which he then wrote with vision:

What are the social, economic, political, and philosophical implications of such a type of living? What would be the consequence of a widespread transference of production from factories to the home?

If enough families were to make their homes economically productive, cash-crop farmers specializing in one crop would have to abandon farming as a business and go back to it as a way of life. The packing houses, mills, and canneries, not to mention the railroads, wholesalers, and retailers, which now distribute agricultural products would find their business confined to the production and distribution of exotic foodstuffs. Food is our most important industry. A war of attrition, such as we have been carrying on all alone, if extended on a large enough scale, would put the food industry out of its misery, for miserable it certainly is, all the way from the farmers who produce the raw materials to the men, women, and children who toil in the canneries, mills, and packing houses, and in addition reduce proportionately the congestion, adulteration, unemployment, and unpleasant odors to all of which the food industry contributes liberally.

If enough families were to make their homes economically productive the textile and clothing industries, with their low wages, seasonal unemployment, cheap and shoddy products would shrink to the production of those fabrics and those garments which it is impractical for the average family to produce for itself.

If enough families were to make their homes economically productive, undesirable and non-essential factories of all sorts would disappear and only those which would be desirable and essential because they would be making tools and machines, electric light bulbs, iron and copper pipe, wire of all kinds, and the myriad of things which can best be made in factories, would remain to furnish employment to those benighted human beings who prefer to work in factories.

Domestic production, if enough people turned to it, would not only annihilate the undesirable and non-essential factory by depriving it of a market for its

products. It would do more. It would release men and women from their present thralldom to the factory and make them masters of machines instead of servants to them; it would end the power of exploiting them which ruthless, acquisitive, and predatory men now possess, it would free them for the conquest of comfort, beauty, and understanding.

It is difficult to resist the siren call to amplify this argument, letting everything else go. For even if it be said that a great many people are not "qualified" to do what Borsodi did, it is certainly true, on the other hand, that a great many people would soon find themselves much more qualified than they think, were they to give it a serious try; and the individual and social benefits Borsodi speaks of do not seem in the least exaggerated. There is the further fact, of intrinsic interest, that working for a program like this one hardly permits fanaticism. No do-it-yourself activity allows much exercise of fanaticism. Fanaticism grows out of untested and untestable beliefs rather than practical work.

However, we are now concerned with Mr. Borsodi as a man who, by thinking and acting for himself, created a field for a whole range of new possibilities. It is the *inventive origin* of his thinking, rather than its fruits, that is important here.

On this basis, we can easily turn to another sort of fertility in thought and action—quite different, but equally valuable. Take the career of Paul Goodman. We are speaking of men who are immediately recognizable as persons who mold their own lives. We are arguing that this sort of life is not merely a "possibility" for all men, but the sole criterion of authentic human growth. Statistical arguments against this view have no importance, since these arguments start out by ignoring the primary evidence from teachers—men who have the most intimate experience with the processes of becoming. No amount of evidence of failure in growth can be allowed to conceal the realities on which growth depends, since this is always the argument of those who want to prescribe for and manage the growth of

other people, and such claims too easily turn into self-fulfilling prophecies.

You could say that paramount in the life of Paul Goodman has been a theory, not about the world, not about what is right or wrong with "society," but of what Paul Goodman ought to do. Intellectual resources about the good and evil in the world undoubtedly gave some shape to the pattern of Goodman's life, but his decisions and choices of direction have been distinctively his own. This leads, appropriately, to quotation from Goodman's book, "*The Society I Live in Is Mine*" (from the Preface):

The society in which I live is mine, open to my voice and action, or I do not live there at all. The government, the school board, the church, the university, the world of publishing and communications, are my agencies as a citizen. To the extent that they are *not* my agencies, at least open to my voice and action, I am entirely in revolutionary opposition to them and I think they should be wiped off the slate.

It is appalling how few people regard themselves as citizens, as society-makers, in this existential sense. Rather, people seem to take society as a pre-established machinery of institutions and authorities, and they take themselves as I don't know what, some kind of individuals "in" society, whatever that means. Such a view is dangerous, because it must result in a *few* people being society-makers and exercising power over the rest. Now even if these few—managers, governors, and so forth—were intelligent or had some other excellence, the situation would be disastrous, since a few do not, in sheer quantity, have enough mind, enough attentiveness and concern to deal with the multifarious problems of society. The result must be, and has been, stupid standardization, stupid neglect, stupid injustice, and a base common denominator of valuation. There is no remedy except large numbers of authentic citizens, alert, concerned, intervening, deciding, on all issues and at all levels.

The foregoing is in explanation of the contents of the book—a collection of letters and speeches by Goodman in application of his principles. The explanation continues:

I am, as is evident in these letters, a community anarchist. I hold, for instance, that sovereign power must be diminished because it is too dangerous to live

with; that people must be free of coercion in order to grow and adventure; that administration should be decentralized as much as possible, in order to multiply sources of initiative and experiment; and that there is a creative and secure-making virtue in face-to-face association in urban and scientific societies. Yet, although an anarchist on principle, I write letters to governors, I serve on a municipal school board, I visit colossal universities, etc. In my opinion there is no inconsistency.

The institutions that we have are ours and anyway they fill up most of our space. In so far as our predecessors worked and fought for them in the interests of freedom—for the Common Law, the vote, civil liberties, the rule of reason academic freedom—we have no right to surrender our inheritance to boors and tyrants. It is entailed to us as citizens. And in so far as these institutions offer means and opportunity for free action I am glad to belong to them or cooperate with them. Naturally, when they become clogs and hindrances, and when their overwhelming drift is in the direction opposite from ours, for instance inevitably toward war, then we cannot cooperate with them or we must actively try to stop them or even to get them out of the way. Generally, as a rule of thumb my experience has taught me that it is wiser not to abstain or quit, but to cooperate according to one's lights and get fired. This has an excellent effect on others who no longer thought that it was possible to be honest.

Here, you might say, is a man doing the obvious things that a great many people have said ought to be done. But Goodman does them, not because of what other people have said, but because of his own discovery of their importance. This makes what he does *different*, more fully human, and extremely educative. Few people have exerted a greater influence on education than Paul Goodman, in recent years. And how many have become more aware of the living field of social relationships in the way Goodman sees it, as the result of his efforts?

People who think and act for themselves are continually creating fields which increase their own options and the potentials of freedom for other people. The illustrations could easily be multiplied. Read for example Scott and Helen Nearing's books—say, *The Maple Sugar Book*, and *Man's Search for the Good Life*—not just for

their content, but for recognition of the fields of free activity they brought into being. Such lives make something out of nothing—that is, they are works of the imagination, showing how a wider, richer existence is *conjured into being*. Stokely Carmichael's essay, "Power and Racism," contributed to the *New York Review of Books* (Sept. 22, 1966), is also an exercise of the imagination, creating or adding to the field ambiguously named Black Power. Yet these words express an intent included by the idea with which we began this discussion: There is no human growth until people think and act for themselves. Carmichael dramatizes it from his own experience:

I remember when I was a boy, I used to go see Tarzan movies on Saturday. White Tarzan used to beat up the black natives. I would sit there yelling, "Kill the beasts, kill the savages, kill 'em!" I was saying: Kill me. It was as if a Jewish boy watched Nazis taking Jews off to concentration camps and cheered them on. Today, I want the chief to beat hell out of Tarzan and send him back to Europe. But it takes time to reject the lies and their shaming effect on black minds. It takes time to reject the most important lie: that black people inherently can't do the same things white people can do, unless white people help them.

The need for psychological equality is the reason why SNCC today believes that blacks must organize the black community. Only black people can convey the revolutionary idea that black people are able to do things themselves.

There are all sorts of versions—and much less obvious ones—of the assumption that some people need or have the right to do the thinking of other people. This is an idea that affects the functioning of practically every institution of modern society, but its debilitating and emasculating influence is seldom plainly identified except in crisis situations such as Stokely Carmichael describes. The basic realization needed is that while we can, do, and must learn from other people, we can and must also act for ourselves. The utter simplicity of this requirement makes it easy to neglect. As Carmichael says: "In the past, white allies have furthered white

supremacy without the whites involved realizing it—or wanting it, I think." And so with us all. It takes meticulous care not to try to act for others, not to think for them. Only people who teach, who discover the dynamics of human growth, become sufficiently convinced of this first principle of both education and life.

For understanding of this necessity to become widespread, we shall have to generate and circulate widely a new conception of human knowledge, and therefore of science, founded on the fact that all knowledge that can be *used* is made up of works of individual imagination. It is created, not "acquired." Knowledge gained in this way cannot be "handed" to other men. The processes of discovery must be pursued by each human being for himself. A man lives a borrowed life, in a field not his own, until he obtains his knowledge in this way.

Self-knowledge could be the distinctive term by which this knowledge is described, until it is generally realized that other kinds of knowledge have very little importance. What sort of education would give assistance to the gaining of self-knowledge? Well, the "fields" now being created by educators deliberately devoted to human becoming would probably make the best possible environment for this education. It is not easy to find treatises on the subject, but a portion of A. H. Maslow's *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences* (Ohio State University Press) will give some idea of what is involved. Dr. Maslow tells of his effort to persuade certain of his subjects that they had the capacity for peak-experiences:

The problem here was not the usual one in teaching. It was not a labelling of something public that both could simultaneously see while the teacher pointed to it and named it. . . . In retrospect, I can see that I gradually began to assume that the non-peaker was a *weak* peaker rather than a person lacking the capacity altogether. I was, in effect, trying to fan his slumbering fire into open flame by my emotionally involved and approving accounts of other people's stronger experiences, as a tuning fork will set off a sympathetic piano wire across the room. In effect, I

proceeded "as if" I was trying to make a non-peaker into a peaker, or, better said, to make the self-styled non-peaker realize that he really was a peaker after all. I couldn't teach him how to have a peak-experience, but I could teach that he had already had it.

Now comes a passage that, by a few substitutions of words, could be turned into a general definition of all true educational situations—which are invariably invitations to becoming, to acting as individuals, to learning to be free:

Whatever sensitizes the non-peaker to his own peaks will thereby make him *fertile ground for the seeds which the great peakers will cast on him*. The great seers, prophets, or peakers may then be used as we now use artists, i.e., as people who are more sensitive, more reactive, who get a profounder, fuller, deeper peak-experience which then they can pass on to other people who are at least peakers enough to be able to be a good audience. Trying to teach the general population how to paint will certainly not make them into great painters, but it can very well make them into a better audience for great artists. Just as it is necessary to be a bit of an artist oneself before one can understand a great artist, so it is apparently necessary to become a small seer oneself before one can understand the great seers.

So, education for self-knowledge means the creation of an expectant atmosphere; it means generation of a warm and encouraging confidence that this knowledge is real and possible in some measure for all. The one thing that a human society cannot afford is the neglect of this atmosphere for any "practical" reason. The one great hope that we shall one day, all of us together, sustain this atmosphere, lies in the fact that individuals are always free, whatever their circumstances, to circumstances, to begin its creation. They cannot be compelled to do it, but neither can they be prevented from doing it. And starting in to do it is like getting born.

## *REVIEW*

### SOME CURRENT HISTORY

AN extract from a forthcoming book (Harper and Row), *The New Europeans*, by Anthony Sampson, printed as an article in the *Los Angeles Times* for Oct. 27, gives a general idea of the extent of student unrest abroad:

By the summer of 1968, after the major revolts in Italy, Germany and France, the trail of trouble had led to nearly every country in Europe: even in Zurich there was a students' strike.

In Belgrade students, inspired by the Paris example, took over a whole suburb, demanding democratization of the Communist Party, and the relief of unemployment. In Madrid, 10,000 students came to a lecture about the French revolt, and raised a red flag outside the school of economics. In Rome 5,000 students protested outside the French embassy, overturning cars and putting up barricades. In Stockholm, 1,500 students fought all night with the police.

The students, Mr. Sampson says, feel more strongly united with students in other countries than by any bond of "nationality." For them, national identity is losing its meaning. "Ignoring boundaries, popping between France and Germany, speaking three languages, assuming a common European consciousness, they might be a living advertisement for the achievement of the earlier generation, and particularly for the Franco-German exchange." One could say that the students are entirely ready for a "United States of Europe," except that they have little interest in "States." They keep in touch from one country to another by direct-dialing and through radio and television, but they are joined by a common spirit rather than any sort of "international conspiracy." As Mr. Sampson puts it:

. . . the international contacts are the result rather than the cause of the real phenomenon: the students in all countries have come to the same general conclusion about industrial society. . . . For those who see the present consensus of technocrats and bankers as the only possible system, and bloody revolution as the horrible alternative, then the students are either silly or dangerous. But the issue

that is emerging may be of a different kind from the issues which dominated the last few decades, between world systems of government. Behind the students' revolts (and other revolts) there is an older issue, which can be described on the one hand as anarchism or on the other as decentralization. Europe is in the process of acquiring a technological system which, however benign, presents a much greater threat to local autonomy than any absolute monarch.

It would not be surprising if Europeans were to assert themselves against this old threat in a new form; it would be much more worrying if they did not.

Hardest of all, perhaps, for older people to understand is the *feeling* of the young toward institutions and attitudes which their parents have lived by. As a veteran reporter and analyst of European affairs, Mr. Sampson has had plenty of opportunity to experience this change of feeling in the young and to recognize its irreversible temper. He describes it well:

Talking to students in Western Europe is like going back stage in a theater. The buildings and institutions—the banks, the government offices, the industrial palaces—which looked so solid and convincing suddenly appear to be just tricks of lighting and facades hung from the roof, with nothing behind them. The furniture is made of paper and the stone walls flap when you touch them.

The student leaders make the point often enough, with their vocabulary of contestation, manipulation, their obsession against the Establishment and Authority, their reiteration of "You're asking the wrong question," "That's not meaningful." But to isolate them from other students is misleading; they are not expressing or whipping-up surprising ideas, but only restating what to other students is self-evident: that the whole world they are being invited to join—of technology, technocracy, political parties and corporations—is completely irrelevant and hostile to their own ambitions and desires.

This sense of irrelevance is really nothing new—it has not been new, that *is*, since a few years after World War II. The bright young men of a generation ago put their feelings of rejection and disgust into novels. Count the books which came out between 1945 and 1955 exposing in

blistering terms sales promotion, public relations, and the advertising business—those shallowly articulate "intellectual" organs of the acquisitive society. These were books about conformism as a system of exploitation, revealing mainly the self-contempt of men who knew better, but who never even thought of trying to "change" their society. Then, a few years later, came books about the double lives of young men who liked the money they could earn in business, but jeered privately at its vulgar credo. *The Way We Live Now*, by Warren Miller, is a brilliant example of the moral disintegrations of this period. The characters in this book knew how to play the business game, but they couldn't help *thinking* about what they were doing. Large, portentous changes in the economy of the United States are summarized by subjective response in these reflections:

Lionel thought that big business, while it is not a child's game, is a game for children. Grown men with matured and searching minds, with a sense of what is important and what is not, could not devote themselves with all their energies to the amassing of monies for someone else. Stewards, they called themselves in the annual report, the stockholders' stewards. There was no real excitement in corporate life. Lionel could understand business being exciting, but it would have to be a small business, small enough so a man could see an immediate response when he tugged a string. There was still something piratical, free-booting, in the idea of a small business, of making money for yourself. But not here. One made no difference. A corporation's personality was a corporate personality and it did not change with one man's coming or going, whatever else a man might like to imagine. But he could see it all going that way; the big ones growing bigger and the small ones disappearing and the medium-sized swallowed up. Even these men, executives, having the power to make small decisions and even to guess wrong at times, were already coming close to the level of the men who worked on a factory production line turning one screw as a metal plate paused briefly before them. The end product was never seen. No pride in labor was possible. Still, he supposed, all this had its benefits too: refrigerators, pressure cookers. He knew that most of what are called the Good Things are not the necessities they are thought to be. The point is, buddies, the point is—something's been lost and the

tray of ice cubes, which still, after all, sticks, hasn't made up for it.

Multiply such broodings by a million or two, at various levels of self-analysis, add new factors of moral sensibility generated in response to war, and you get an idea of what has been going on behind the GNP statistics and other indices of technological progress during recent years. When intelligent men can no longer believe in what they are doing, they may go on doing it, but then something fundamental drops out of their lives—and their sons and daughters, *they* will refuse to do it at all. They have no tolerance for this secret alienation, which they know is contemptible, and demand a change.

Our way of writing current history is all wrong, or we would have realized what has been going on. No man or society can survive without a sense of meaning. We need subjective history, and since we do not have it, some practical equivalent must be deduced from novels. There is for example this dialogue—time, the late 40's—in *Race Rock* (Avon), by Peter Matthiessen, between a bewildered man of twenty-eight and the woman he hopes to marry:

"Are you going to say it's all our parents' fault, George?"

"That's the thing to do these days, isn't it?" . . .

"Look, I'm not teasing you, I just asked a question. I don't see why you have to feel ashamed of yourself when you're being serious. Or aren't you being serious?" . . .

"Of course I am. . . I *do* know I was damn badly prepared for life. This sanctuary we lived in as children, and all the phony build-up to a life that doesn't exist, not any more at least. Cyrus McConnville, the robber baron, and my mother who still thinks she's cultured for the simple reason of her ancestry—what could they teach their children of life? If it hadn't been for the war I'd still be getting toys for Christmas."

"Do you think people like my mother and Sam's father were any better?"

"You know what I mean, Eve. Why be so disagreeable?"

"I do know what you mean, yes, and I'm not being disagreeable. . . . I just don't see how we can blame everything on robber barons and illiterate dowagers."

"Look, you're picking me up on details, you're too damned analytical. All I was trying to say," said George, wishing he had never mentioned the subject, "was that the people who were handed over the nation's heritage or whatever on their graduation days, our generation, anyway, are probably the worst prepared for responsibility of all time. And one good reason is that the parents refused to recognize or understand the changes taking place all over the world, the socialization and all the rest of it which had to come, even in Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean."

"And all I was trying to say, George, was that it does no good to snivel about backward parents. . . . If you don't like the way Cyrus McConnville did things, do something different, but *do* something."

George was embarrassed and slightly irritated. "Relax," he said. "I'm sorry I brought it up. It's just hard to know *what* to do in these mixed-up times, that's all."

"What right have you to be mixed up?" she flared. "Most people can't afford the luxury. What makes you think it's so much harder to live these days than before? And if it is, it's our own fault, nobody else's. It's because we're afraid, all of us, and with so much to be done, we have bad consciences for not doing it."

It is the sons and daughters of men like George—in this country, at least—who are trying to meet this challenge. The way they feel, there's nothing else for them to do.



## COMMENTARY

### MYTH AND SCRIPTURE

IT would be difficult to improve on the explanation of "myth" given by one of Herbert Kohl's children—"they told the story and said things about the mind at the same time." (See "Children . . . and Ourselves.")

The "stories" of the great myths put the realities of the human situation into a form which does not suppress the crucial importance of choice. The myths speak to the human being's sense of freedom, but also take full account of his terrible confinements. They deal in subtle ways with the price exacted of heroic purpose, and tell of the death that must precede rebirth.

Myths embody truths that resist formal definition; there is always more than one way of reading them. When mythic interpretations become the property of a powerful institutional authority which uses them as means of psychological control, men of independent mind arise to contradict the deadly uniformity. How, one of them may ask, can the Tempter in the Garden of Eden be blamed as an enemy of mankind, when the apple offered to Eve gave the knowledge of good and evil? The very essence of being human—the capacity to choose good instead of evil—did not even exist until that fateful gift. So reasoned William Blake, concluding that the war in heaven was externalized symbolism, a story told of the war within the human breast.

There are myths to make vainglorious and triumphant men question themselves, and myths to hearten the downtrodden. There are myths to purify the passions of schism and myths to shatter brittle unities of belief. The myth uses but does not especially honor the world out there. It is the man who reads the myth, who resolves the paradox—who, at some moment of decision, puts an end to its ambiguity—that the myth serves. Mythic symbols, restless of any single dimension of meaning, are tools only for the active imagination. Nature, the origin of all primary

symbols, is a horde of antinomies for man, eternally feuding with the certainties of science. As Harold Goddard puts it in *The Meaning of Shakespeare*:

A symbol is immensely more than a concept, or complex of concepts. It is as much impulse as idea. It is bound up with our fears and hopes, our memories and aspirations. It is generally self-contradictory. Dawn, for example, stands for beginning, youth, hope, but also for the transient, the uncertain, the unrealized. . . . we might pick any of a hundred other ancient symbols at random: light—that illuminates but blinds; night—that brings rest, but brings fear; a road—that penetrates the wilderness but becomes the beaten track, a rainbow—that is a bridge, but a bridge no man may cross; a bridge itself—that connects, but divides. And so on, and so on.

Such contradictions are calculated to drive a rational mind mad. But they are the very stuff of the imagination. The vocabulary of the imagination consists of hundreds, if not thousands, of such self-contradictory images. If a single one of them can have such polar range, what must poetry, that is a web and complex of them have? Not only will the "meaning" of it change, chameleon-like, with the context, vary with the uniqueness of the individual experiencing it—it will awaken echoes in the sensitive mind from the remotest past of the race and open vistas on its future. Such iridescence is not only beyond definition, it is beyond comprehension.

Yet myths are somehow comprehended. We do not come to them wholly uninstructed. They speak to secret longings and resonate with unwritten epics.

It is not that we need no science. We have our plumbing problems, our mechanistic necessities. But science can tell us nothing about man until it rises to mythic ambiguity. And then it is science no longer, but becomes metaphysics.

There can be no science of man without a metaphysical scaffolding. But metaphysics, unlike physical science, is concerned with subjectivity and transcendental reality. You can say to a scientist, or scientist-technician, Hand me an automobile. Never mind the theory, just show me how to run it. And he will do it for you.

But you can't ask a scientist to tell you who you are. He doesn't know. Self-knowledge has to be self-evolved. What is said correctly of self-knowledge is endlessly ambiguous to the objective thinker. It is both eternal truth and original creation. It is coming into being, all the time, in human beings. It is the truth with which a man may burst but cannot say unless he makes up "stories." And with the telling of a story, the ambiguity begins.

Yet there is one further resource of the hungry and inquiring mind. The great scripture is a wonderful combination of metaphysics and myth. It is a treasure-chest of imagery, and also a kind of science of the mind. It includes, that is, both science and works of the imagination. It is filled with myth but is more than myth. It is both didactic and evocative. The testimony of a scripture suggests a secret anthropology, a lost heritage which promises another Golden Age. A scripture, if its symmetry has been preserved, is a science of mythology, a primer of self-discovery. Its only protection against corruption is the level of its discourse—a protection that does not always work. No man will learn from a scripture if he reads it expecting certainty and final meanings. Only he can contribute these.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves NEW YORK PUBLIC SCHOOL

ON his first day teaching the sixth grade in Harlem, Herbert Kohl broke the ice by asking his thirty-six black eleven-, twelve- and thirteen-year-olds: "Do you believe Harlem was here a thousand years ago?"

He tried, that is, to break the ice. It didn't work:

No response. The weight of Harlem and my whiteness and strangeness hung in the air as I droned on, lost, in my righteous monologue. The uproar turned into sullen silence. A slow nervous drumming began at several desks: the atmosphere closed as intelligent faces lost their animation. Yet I didn't understand my mistake, the children's rejection of me and my ideas. Nothing worked. I tried to joke, command, play—the children remained joyless until the bell, then left quietly for lunch.

One of his problems (as he later explains in *36 Children*, New American Library, 1967) was finding out how to get the children to show what they could do. Starting fresh with a class supposed to be "backward," the rejects of a reject school, he won attention and interest by asking what books they wanted to use. They finally decided on fifth-grade readers:

They were ready to fight to read and learn, met my challenge, and kept on challenging me for the rest of the year.

One day during the first week Alice coyly proposed a bet.

"Mr. Kohl, I bet I can read anything on your desk no matter what those cards [student achievement records] of yours say "

Her reading score was 3.4. I accepted and she went through all the books on my desk, including a page of a novel I was reading on the way to school. I was perplexed and delighted.

"How can you do that and still have a three point four reading score?"

"I wouldn't read for those teachers. Listen—"

Alice picked up a book and stumbled through several paragraphs. She paused, stuttered, committed omissions and reversals, *i.e.*, read on a low third-grade level. Then she looked at my astonished face and burst out laughing.

Alice was tough and angry and brilliant. She was hypersensitive and incapable of tolerating insult or prejudice. In her previous years in school she had been alternatively defiant and withdrawn. She was considered a "troublemaker" by some teachers, "disturbed" by others. Yet when offered something substantial, a serious novel, for example, or the opportunity to write honestly, she blossomed.

At the outset, when Mr. Kohl found the children wouldn't come to him on ordinary invitation, he went to them. He began one reading lesson with material on the first Patterson-Liston fight. A book by Patterson, *Victory Over Myself*, was a help, and the teacher also used a *New York Times* analysis of the two fighters' qualities. The percentages of the gate were of interest, and—

The kids wanted to know who made the guarantee to the fighters, whether it was verbal or written, how much the government took. The questions were real and the curiosity genuine. I answered as many as I could without preaching or handing out dictionaries, without pausing for a lesson on percentage or saying, "Don't you wish you could read now?" The children knew what they couldn't do, and were grateful for the fact that one time in school a teacher answered their questions when they needed answering, and didn't make them feel foolish for asking in the first place.

The story of how some teaching really got going comes early in the book:

One day Ralph cursed at Michael and unexpectedly things came together for me. Michael was reading and stumbled several times. Ralph scornfully called out, "What's the matter psyches, going to pieces again?" The class broke up and I jumped on that word "psyches."

"Ralph, what does *psyches* mean?"

An embarrassed silence.

"Do you know how to spell it?"

Alvin volunteered. "S-i-k-e-s."

"Where do you think the word came from? Why did everybody laugh when you said it, Ralph?"

"You know, Mr. Kohl, it means, like crazy or something."

"Why? How do words get to mean what they do?"

Samuel looked up at me and said: "Mr. Kohl, now you're asking questions like Alvin. There aren't any answers, you know that."

"But there are. Sometimes by asking Alvin's kind of questions you discover the most unexpected things. Look."

I wrote *Psyche*, then *Cupid*, on the blackboard.

"That's how *psyche* is spelled. It looks strange in English but the word doesn't come from English. It's Greek. There's a letter in the Greek alphabet that comes out *psi* in English. This is the way *psyche* looks in Greek."

Some of the children spontaneously took out their notebooks and copied the Greek.

"The word *psyche* has a long history. *Psyche* means mind or soul for the Greeks, but it was also the name of a lovely woman who had the misfortune to fall in love with Cupid the son of Venus, the jealous Greek goddess of love. . . .

The children listened, enchanted by the myth, fascinated by the weaving of the meaning of *psyche* into the fabric of the story, and the character, Mind, playing tricks on itself almost destroying its most valuable possessions through its perverse curiosity. Grace said in amazement:

"Mr. Kohl, they told the story and said things about the mind at the same time. What do you call that?"

"*Myth* is what the Greeks called it."

The discussion went on, leading to identification of some of the English words derived from *Cupid* and *Psyche*. The children discovered that words change, and that in time usage establishes new meanings. This was exciting:

Charles jumped out of his desk and spoke for the first time during the year.

"You mean one day the way we talk—you know, with words like *roof* and *dig* and *sound*—may be all right?"

"Uh huh. Language is alive, it's always changing, only sometimes it changes so slowly that we can't tell."

Neomia caught on.

"Mr. Kohl, is that why our reader sounds so old-fashioned?"

And Ralph.

"Mr. Kohl, when I called Michael *psyches*, was I creating something new?"

Then came a plea that was obvious to these bright children:

"Mr. Kohl, can't we study the language we're talking about instead of spelling and grammar? They won't be any good when language changes anyway."

So, from a youngster's use of an epithet grew a program of vocabulary-building. "After a week the children learned the new words, asked to be tested on them, and demanded more."

This book can't really be "reviewed," and shouldn't be. It ought to be read in full. The author, incidentally, is the grandson of Morris Cohen—another distinguished teacher.

## *FRONTIERS*

### Problems without Solutions

TWO letters from correspondents in India have come to MANAS, both filled with sadness at the incompatible allegiances reflected in Indian behavior. One deals with the historic embarrassment of modern India—the problem of Kashmir—an inheritance of partition involving political expediency, communal loyalties, and commitment to democratic procedures. The conflicting allegiances operate at different levels, pitting religious tradition against "rational" considerations, and an injudicious political promise against distrust and patriotic emotion. This correspondent writes:

It used to be said that Kashmir "was on Mr. Nehru's conscience." Just before his death in 1964, it was believed he had decided to take a decision with regard to Kashmir and was planning talks with the Kashmiri leader, Sheik Abdullah. But he died before the talks began. He was the only man who could have taken an unpopular step and still survived, because of his hold on the country. But I do not know whether he would ever have taken such a step. I remember a few things that happened during the last years of Mr. Nehru's life and I can only think—with much sadness—that the obligations of being a prime minister weighed upon him more than the obligation to be right.

I do not know how despairing is a situation in which an entire people—and not just a few individuals—find it impossible to see and do what is right, as seems to be the case with India's stand on Kashmir. Our present rulers seem disinclined to reflect that their Kashmir policy is based upon fear. I remember a great speech that Mr. Nehru delivered in the early 1950's in which he took the United States to task for basing its cold-war strategy on fear. But Indians and their rulers are afraid of the Kashmiris' verdict in a plebiscite and therefore they will not hold a plebiscite.

Those favoring the plebiscite which Mr. Nehru promised—men such as C. Rajagopalachari and Jayaprakash Narayan—have been denounced as "traitors," our correspondent reports. Perhaps India's recent offer of negotiations with Pakistan—on condition that both countries first

sign a "no-war" pact—is a sign of growing maturity, yet the most pertinent observation about all such painful political dilemmas was made by Gandhi long ago (in *Young India*, March 27, 1930): "The purest man entering the system will be affected by it and will be instrumental in propagating evil." This was Gandhi's reason for never accepting political power.

From this point of view, the Kashmir dispute *has* no immediate solution. It is the sort of mess which does not submit to problem-solving techniques, but must be sponged up by more fundamental changes in human attitudes. The world is filled with such problems, which are actually a condition of life for national states. Admission of this would eliminate a great deal of strained special pleading in national affairs and would also be a first step in the direction of replacing national identity with human community.

Our other Indian correspondent writes of the lingering presence of caste consciousness, even among people who believe themselves to be exemplars of Gandhi's principles. He quotes from Gandhi the account of an incident of long ago, at a Congress meeting:

I [Gandhi wrote in his *Autobiography*] was face to face with untouchability. There was no limit to insanitation. Pools of water were everywhere. I pointed it out to the volunteers. They said point-blank, "That is not our work, it is the scavengers' work." I asked for a broom. The man stared at me in wonder. I cleaned the latrine.

After India had attained her independence, friends sought Gandhi out and invited him to come to New Delhi to take part in the Government. "What have I to do with that?" he said. "My work is here, with the people." They had found him in the slums of Calcutta.

Over-simplifying, perhaps, but not without point, you could say that the solution of the Kashmir dispute lies waiting in the slums of Calcutta. What do the mass of people—in India, in the world—care about "national sovereignty"

and political boundaries? The prerogatives of power will not change their lives.

A great deal could be written, by one who knew the details, about the various issues in the controversy over Kashmir. But after the discussion was complete, what practical help would it be? The national being of a modern state hardly has a moral identity. Why, then, set up the problems of politics as the measure of integrity, especially since the real work for human progress lies elsewhere? Not until the labors for true human betterment are accurately defined—as, for example, Gandhi defined them—can we have realistic norms for the measurement of progress.

Arthur Morgan once pointed out how silly it is to expect a Southern sharecropper to concern himself with issues of "civil liberties." Like the Indian farmer, the American sharecropper is haunted by the spectres of hunger and want. So with many of the "problems" which engage the attention of the press and the righteous emotions of politicians. Many—not all—of the political issues of the times look to manipulation of mass opinion to achieve the "correct" solution, when there can, in fact, be no correct solution of anything by manipulated people. Kashmir, in short, is not a test case for India, but only the symptom of a universal ill of nation-states. That ill is preoccupation with the wrong issues and the wrong solutions. To say this is not to advocate that all statesmen pack up their portfolios and go home, although the idea has its fascinations. We know that hardly any of them will do that. But if we could increase the number of people who learn to see the world as Gandhi saw it, and to recognize human need as he recognized it, the tasks of politics would begin to diminish and political problems be sponged away by the gradual spread of moral common sense.