

## THE MEASURE OF PROGRESS

BENEDICT SPINOZA, a man who tried to write with Cartesian precision, although to other ends, concluded that in his time (the seventeenth century) the catchall explanation of "the will of God" had become "the asylum of ignorance." Piety was armor against searching questions.

There are times, today, when the word "spiritual" seems to serve the same insulating purpose. Not Spirit, but the adjective "spiritual" has become a semi-secular equivalent of all that we long for, value, and hope by some unknown alchemy to achieve. Quite possibly, we need words that can serve in this way—words difficult of definition yet having a certain utility maintained by the care with which we limit their use. But when such words are made the levers in every sort of glamorous undertaking—as for example when we are told that intoxicants, physical or metaphysical, can lead us past earthly barriers to a high spiritual condition—then the term becomes no more than verbal genuflection. Spiritual is too important a word to be spoiled for intelligent discourse. Spirit is too valuable a noun to suffer even implied association with counterfeiting or ignorant pretensions.

Let us attempt to save both words. Resorting to common sense instead of etymology, we might propose that Spirit gains meaning in the rational order of things from its partner or opposite—Matter. It is one of the poles of experience. Spirit, then, let us say—defusing the term of theological connotations—has to do with awareness. Consciousness is spirit. What relates to wider consciousness or awareness is spiritual. Spirit refers to subjectivity, matter to objectivity. Spirit and the spiritual unite within a common purview; matter divides and separates by reason of differences and limits. Yet the concept of degree applies in both cases, since there is a sense in which spirit has no presence except in relation to

some form of matter, and matter has no objectivity save as shaped and animated by the intelligence and awareness which comes from spirit.

This spirit-matter duality applies to everything which comes within the range of our experience. *Pure* spirit as an abstraction does not "exist"—that is, it does not "stand out" from the opaque depths of a dimensionless reality which allows no perception, no definition, therefore no "being." Pure matter, we could say, would be the absolute opacity of pure spirit. Extremes meet and embrace in the universe of non-being. This union is "logical," but hardly thinkable, and we must let it go at that.

But within our experience there is endless variety in the relationships between spirit and matter, between consciousness and form. Some things seem more matter than consciousness—a rock, for example. Other things are balances of consciousness and matter—they don't become what they are meant to become without the continual exercise of individual intelligence. Ortega (in *Man and Crisis*) gave this account of the human situation:

. . . man is a most strange entity, who, in order to be what he is, needs first to find out what he is, needs, whether he will or no, to ask what are the things around him and what there in the midst of them, is he. For it is this which really differentiates man from a stone, and not that man has understanding but the stone lacks it. We can imagine a very intelligent stone, but the inner being of the stone is given it already made, once and for all, and it is required to make no decision on the subject, it has no need, in order to go on being a stone, to pose and pose again the problem of self asking itself "What must I do now?" or, which is the same thing, "What must I be?" Tossed in the air, without need to ask itself anything, and therefore without having to exercise its understanding, the stone which we are imagining will fall toward the center of the earth. . . .

The essence of man, on the other hand, lies in the fact that he has no choice but to force himself to know, to build a science, good or bad, in order to resolve the problem of his own being and toward this end the problem of what are the things among which he must inexorably have that being. This—that he needs to know, that whether he likes it or not, he needs to work to the best of his intellectual means—is undoubtedly what constitutes the human condition.

Man, every man, must at every moment be deciding for the next moment what he is going to do what he is going to be. This decision only he can make, it is not transferable no one can substitute for me in the task of deciding for myself, in deciding on my life. When I put myself into another's hands, it is I who have decided and who go on deciding that he will direct me, thus I do not transfer the decision itself, but merely its mechanism. In place of deriving the norm of my conduct out of that mechanism which is my own intelligence, I take advantage of the mechanism of another's intelligence.

Ortega is helpful for understanding the degrees of spiritual presence, or consciousness:

I take note of a stone and manage not to trip against it or else I make use of it by sitting down on it. But the stone takes no note of me. Also I take my neighbor into account as I do the stone; but unlike the stone, my neighbor also takes me into account. Not only does he exist for me, but I exist for him. This is a most peculiar coexistence because it is mutual: when I see a stone, I see only a stone—but when I see my neighbor, another man, I not only see him, but also I see that he sees me—that is to say, in another man I always meet myself and myself is reflected in him. I am here and you are there. As the here and the there express spatial proximity, as they are together, we can say that as you are there and I am here, we are together. But we could say the same thing about this table and those benches, this table also is here and those benches are there—they also are together.

But the strange thing in our relationship, the thing which does not happen to the table and the benches or to both of them together, is that though I am here, I perceive without ceasing to be here that I am also there, in you; I note, in short, that I exist for you; and vice versa: you, motionless over there, are at the same time here, in me, you exist for me. This is obviously a form of being together in a much more essential sense and one very different from that of one bench being next to another. To the degree that I

know that I am in you, my being, my presence, my existing, is fused with yours; and in that exact degree I feel that I do not stand alone, that within myself I am not alone, but that I am with you, that I have my being with you; in short, that I am accompanied or am in a society—my living is a living with. . . . I accompany you, I live with you or in a social relationship with you to the degree that I am you. On the contrary to the degree that I am not you, that you do not exist for me nor for any other fellow man, to that degree you are alone, you are in solitude, and not in a social relationship or a companionship.

Here Ortega is discussing the difference between the ways in which spirit and matter impinge upon our awareness. Material distinctions are spatial—or reflect other attributes of form—while spiritual distinctions are concerned with degrees of common selfhood or community of being. Spiritual distinctions are in consciousness, material distinctions in form.

Probably we could say that material conditions impose limits on consciousness—limits that can sometimes be partly overcome by a more piercing awareness; and that spiritual presence gives matter its shape and degree, under the conditions of material properties and spatial extension. The rock, after all, is not without consciousness of a sort. It is warmed when a person sits on it, and may be altered by more powerful manipulations, responding according to laws which are well known to physicists and chemists.

A human being, then, is a focus of consciousness in which that consciousness is sometimes awake to its own consciousness, and capable, therefore, of such reflections as Ortega makes about the human condition. The idea of Spirit and the spiritual is therefore possible for human beings.

In his account of the conscious relations between individuals, Ortega describes the root reality from which we obtain our ethical ideas. For through this awareness of others we experience love, a longing for unity, for the abolition of barriers. From the same capacity we

also experience the desire for separateness, for isolation and individual distinction—but these do not last, although they seem continually renewed. It is the play between these two tendencies or tropisms in consciousness that supplies the content of ethics and produces the conflicts in society. The question of whether or not these tensions—these contradictions in "human nature"—have a meaning; of whether something good or desirable should or may result from their presence in human beings, or if they are simply to be accepted as given, like the facts of geology, or changes in the weather—this is a question that lies at the root of the inquiry into value, or what is Good. We have the makings of an answer in individual if not in cosmic or universal terms. Those who are able to resolve the tensions in human nature are called wise and good, and if the production of sages is a value in the universe, this may be reason enough for enduring and eventually understanding the eternal war (also, in some sense, a lovers' quarrel) between spirit and matter which takes place in the human heart.

Yet of all men—whether they be sages or moral primitives—it may be said that they are continually confronted by the decision-making that Ortega described: "every man must at every moment be deciding for the next moment what he is going to do, what he is going to be." This we have in common; this, we may think, is prime evidence of the spirit in man—the dimly, partially, or wholly awakened spirit in man.

There are great differences in the way the basic question is asked. "What must I do," a great many wonder, "in order to avoid pain and enjoy pleasure?") For answer they make a few rough and ready rules, and live by them until they find reason to look for deeper principles. There are schools of psychology and sociology which declare that there are no rules but these, supplying statistical evidence for their claim. It is true enough that the adherents of this system of response are very numerous.

But quite plainly, another, higher level of decision and action exists. The believers in the ultimate authority of constitutions, of social contracts, ask: "What should *we* do, in view of our common interests and our competitive differences?" These people formulate laws. They sometimes claim to be scientists, astute observers of human nature—which, they argue, is not about to change. They speak of the greatest good of the greatest number, the admirable qualities of impersonal statute, and the need of all individuals both to conform to and help maintain a social system which dilutes and orders the conflicts among humans. A constitution attenuates—it does not eliminate—the antisocial tendencies of human beings. It manages, in an ad hoc manner, the status quo. Yet it has also a mild educational influence, since from constitutions men learn to think about ruling principles, and to choose among them.

Finally, there is a third level—one could call it the spiritual level—at which the question becomes: What does spiritual intelligence—informed love—direct in these circumstances? Not personal interest, not the coarse legality devised to cope with disorder and crime, but the wise and right thing to do in this particular relationship, which may never be exactly duplicated?

In this analysis we have been using the three levels of moral thinking described by Lawrence Kohlberg in his report of a twelve-year study of seventy-five boys. (See *Handbook of Socialism Theory*, Goslin, Rand McNally, 1969.) All individuals go through these stages, although not all, of course, reach the top level. First there is what Kohlberg calls the *preconventional* level, characteristic of most children from four to ten (and of a great many adults, it may be added). Here the choice in behavior depends on physical consequences—punishment, reward, or exchange of favors—or on "the physical power of those who enunciate the rules and labels of good and bad." The second level is familiar to us as the

prevailing political philosophy of our time. At the third or *postconventional* level, Dr. Kohlberg says, there is "a thrust toward autonomous moral principles which have validity and application apart from authority of the group of persons who hold them and apart from the individual's identification with those persons or groups."

Commenting on the passage through these stages—which he regards as an ascent—Dr. Kohlberg says:

In a general and culturally universal sense, these steps lead toward an increased morality of value judgment, where morality is considered as a form of judging. . . . Each step of development then is a better cognitive organization than the one before it, one which takes account of everything present in the previous stage, but making new distinctions and organizing them into a more comprehensive or more equilibrated structure. The fact that this is the case has been demonstrated by a series of studies indicating that children and adolescents comprehend all stages up to their own, but not more than one stage beyond their own. And importantly, *they prefer this next stage.*

He adds this observation:

In the preconventional and conventional levels, moral content or value is largely accidental or culture-bound. But in the higher postconventional levels, Socrates, Lincoln, Thoreau and Martin Luther King tend to speak without confusion of tongues, as it were. This is because the ideal principles of any social structure are basically alike, if only because there simply aren't that many principles which are articulate, comprehensive and integrated enough to be satisfying to the human intellect. And most of these principles have gone by the name of justice. . . .

In our studies we have found that youths who understand justice act more justly, and the man who understands justice helps to create a moral climate which goes far beyond his immediate and personal acts. The universal society is the beneficiary.

In the foregoing, where Dr. Kohlberg speaks of moral value being "accidental or culture-bound," we could also say that it is "matter-bound." And the postconventional values are consciousness-informed or spiritual. Here the unities of principle prevail. But these unities are

not external to the human being. They are in him; they find expression through him; by reason of his widening awareness he becomes a universal man.

Up to this point we have avoided the religious aspect of the meaning of Spirit and the spiritual. Unfortunately, mention of religion or the religious often leads to intellectual short-circuits of meaning. Because there are some things one *can't* think about, even though we feel they are real, there is the tendency to resort to indiscriminated assertion on all difficult or obscure matters. As Spinoza said, "The will of God is the asylum of ignorance." Similarly, a spendthrift indulgence in use of the word "spiritual" joins extravagance with fuzziness, disdaining critical questioning as vulgar or profane doubt.

Yet there are undoubtedly abstract terms which have their legitimate season of honorific meaning. The season may be short, since over-use leads speedily to devaluation. Some words, notably the word "God," are probably beyond reclamation. Safer and longer-lived, because of their lack of pretentious associations, are simple pronouns such as "That"—as in "That thou art"—used by Hindu thinkers, or the unostentatious *Tao* of Lao tse.

It seems likely that no final definition of Spirit will ever be provided, since Spirit is by definition beyond definition. What is said about spirit today may need to be abandoned tomorrow, even though there is intangible gain in the process. We can of course make an exchange with another indefinable reality: we can say that Spirit is the universal Self; or, as we suggested earlier, that it is a name for consciousness—or rather, that pure Spirit is unmodified consciousness, which amounts to declaring that it is nothing (no "thing") at all.

There is a passage in the thirteenth chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita* which seems unusually felicitous in avoiding the misuse of language in relation to the spiritual. It says (with some omissions):

True wisdom of a spiritual kind is freedom from self-esteem, hypocrisy, and injury to others; it is patience, sincerity, respect for spiritual instructors, purity, firmness, self-restraint, dispassion for objects of sense, freedom from pride, and a meditation upon birth, death, decay, sickness, and error. . . . it is a resolute continuance in the study of Adhyatma, the Superior spirit, and a meditation on the end of the acquirement of a knowledge of truth,—this is called wisdom or spiritual knowledge; its opposite is ignorance.

I will now tell thee what is the object of wisdom, from knowing which a man enjoys immortality; it is that which has no beginning, even the supreme Brahma, and of which it cannot be said that it is either Being or Non-Being. . . . Although undivided it appeareth as divided among creatures, and while it sustains existing things, it is also to be known as their destroyer and creator. It is the light of all lights, and is declared to be beyond all darkness; and it is wisdom itself, the object of wisdom, and that which is to be obtained by wisdom; in the hearts of all it ever presideth.

There is one puzzling thing that Dr. Kohlberg's study helps us with: why it should be that wise men, sages—and doubtless saviors—are so difficult to recognize when they emerge or come among us. He found that people are able to comprehend all stages of moral (spiritual) development up to their own, *but not more than one stage beyond their own*. It seems likely, moreover, that the understanding of even the next stage will be imperfect, producing serious misconceptions which become blinders to understanding. For example, we want people to obey the law and abide by the constitution, but the controls we devise—laws and punishment—have the effect of producing contempt for law and indifference to the constitution. We would like people to act on principle, but we pass laws which penalize those who do—conscientious objectors, for example—and condemn as anarchists and subverters of the public weal individuals who, like Thoreau, are more responsive to some inward monitor than to the conventional consensus. The hypocrisy of many of those in authority may be the most subversive influence of all.

But this leaves us with one enduring and difficult question: What explains the great differences among human beings in this wide-ranging scale of moral or spiritual development? It is embarrassing even to ask the question, by reason of its anti-democratic implications. It seems to follow that admitting the existence of superior men and women is the same as claiming for them both authority and privilege. This *is* a problem, unless we are willing to redefine excellence—unless we are ready to accept the Gandhian idea that human excellence will always reject the claim to authority and instead of seeking privilege, identify with the people who most need help. And it is still a philosophic problem, unless we are able to consider seriously a view of human evolution in which the self-caused movement toward excellence—or spiritual enlightenment—is the fundamental criterion of human growth.

## *REVIEW*

### "A STUDY OF HISTORY"

THE reading of the late Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History* (ten volumes, millions of words) is not a project many undertake, and while Kenneth Winetrou's *Arnold Toynbee* (Twayne, 1975, \$7.95) is intended to encourage people to experience "genuine rewards and pleasures" in the pages of the unabridged work, it may be suspected that most of Mr. Winetrou's readers will decide to avoid it. This author gave thirty hours a week for several months to *A Study of History*, and while his report is illuminating, we learn more about Toynbee than about history. But this, of course, is the author's purpose.

The question however, remains: Will we know more about "history" if we spend hundreds of hours with Toynbee?

But this question is unsatisfactory. Toynbee obviously knew a lot of history—more, it may be, than any of his contemporaries. Reading him is, Mr. Winetrou says, "an exercise in frustration: the voluminousness, the erudition, and the grand generalities are overwhelming." Moreover, "He will toy with an incident or a place that is seemingly known only to Toynbee. He will play games with civilizations and religions in a manner at times suggestive of the cavalier treatment of a political candidate toward his opponent." What does it mean to know more about history?

For a long time it has been taken for granted that knowing about history means knowing what happened in the past. Recently, however, there has been a change in mood in respect to such questions. We find ourselves more interested in knowing what, underneath historical events, was really happening—and what is *now* happening—in human life. Knowing a lot of "history" may not reveal this at all. Prof. Toynbee has some conclusions about what is really happening, but it may not be necessary or important to read his complete work in order to consider these conclusions. That, at any rate, is the impression

we have from Mr. Winetrou. In a chapter summarizing Toynbee's conception of historical change he gives the eminent historian's view of the present:

We find ourselves living in a Westernized world. There are no barbarians who threaten us from beyond some frontier. The Russian and Chinese Communists seem as committed to Western materialism as any cartel of international bankers. India seems to be moving in the same direction. Encounters between civilizations which would produce an intelligentsia are becoming increasingly improbable. "The virtual elimination of external challenges from the human environment . . . has been one of the remarkable features of our Western history," says Toynbee. . . .

In a Westernized technicalized ecumenical world, what must one do to be saved? Where are we to turn for the transfiguring power? How does one withdraw in a world where every rock has its flag, where every beach and every mountain is a resort area? Perhaps we are already beyond salvation. . . . Technology holds forth even less hope than education. Toynbee asks whether mankind, when it succumbed to the enchantment of technology, sentenced itself to live in a "Brave New World" the rest of its days. He suggests that the guests at Circe's banquet may find themselves penned in her sty. Yet Toynbee finds hope in what he calls "this angelically or demonically spiritual strain" in human nature. This spiritual dimension may keep men from becoming the complete prisoners of technology's sty. . . .

Having told his story in this manner, is it any wonder that Toynbee would turn to religion? Where else could he turn if this is his conclusion: "The meaning behind the facts of History to which the poetry in the facts is leading us is a revelation of God and a hope of communion with Him"?

Thus Toynbee had written in 1954, In 1966 he wrote: "In this coming age of mechanization, atomic power, affluence, and leisure, religion will surely come into its own as the one boundless field for freedom and for creativity that is open for the unlimited aspirations of human nature." This, he says, would be a hard saying for modern Western man, and it might prove to be even harder for the non-Western intelligentsia who are trying so diligently to emulate Western man. Man has been concentrating on mastering nonhuman nature. He had allowed his "gift for spiritual contemplation to

grow rusty through disuse. It will be painful and terrifying for him to reverse the modern tide of Western life and to look inward again." In 1970 Toynbee declared that men "have made the tragic mistake of seeking an antidote to the failure of rationality by cultivating irrationality for its own sake. . . . What they ought to have done was not to have jettisoned rationality but dedicated themselves to love."

In 1954, it is God; in 1966, it is turning inward; in 1970, it is love, with rationality unjettisoned. It seems to me that it would be scarcely fair to comment on the seeming inconsistencies of these varied exhortations coming from the pen of a self-proclaimed agnostic.

Well, these inconsistencies, seeming or actual, make generalizations about Toynbee difficult. He *tells* you what he is about, but this doesn't seem to help, or not enough. General ideas seem of little help in an account of Toynbee's work. You have the feeling that he wanted to be a great theorist of historiography, but that the way he went at things prevented it. He doesn't seem able or ready to tell his readers what is really going on, in some larger sense, in human affairs, and then to relate particular events to that activity. He jumps to a theological reading of history—"History, to him, is the movement from God as a source to God as a goal"—but the relevance of all else to this central movement does not become plain. He uses a personal pronoun in speaking of God yet elsewhere speaks of an "Absolute Reality" which is "a mystery of which no more than a fraction has ever been penetrated by—or been revealed to—any human mind." A clue to our difficulties may lie in a comment by Christopher Dawson, quoted by Mr. Winetroun, to the effect that in the middle of his work Toynbee went from a "relativist phenomenology of equivalent cultures" to a "unitary philosophy of history" reminiscent of the idealist philosophers of the nineteenth century—Hegel, no doubt, being the ideal example.

In short, Toynbee starts out as a scholarly empiricist, gathers his evidence, proposes from numerous examples how civilizations are born, how they develop, and how they disintegrate.

Then, in his seventh volume, he announces that "civilization" is not the right unit for examination—that religion is the core of the matter. This may have been a good decision, but Toynbee's application of it seems to have made uncomfortable practically everyone who has thought about such matters; somehow, he doesn't get under the psychological skin of historical process. Mr. Winetroun has an interesting comment on Toynbee's discussion of war—which he regards as the number one problem:

Toynbee's peace lesson seems to read as follows: national sovereignty must go, technology and democracy must evolve toward a universal world state, and, sooner or later, a world union must do something about man's breeding habits. The emphasis is political organization rather than an appeal to an inner moral conversion to peace, or a moral equivalent to war.

Toynbee does not discuss the issue of war in religious terms; instead, he becomes a good secularist. Virtually all problems turn out to be religious problems for Toynbee but his exhortations for peace are not those either of the pulpit or of a sacred book.

There seems, in short, a lack of inwardness in the study of human motivation which weakens Toynbee's grasp of the *Zeitgeist* of the age, to which he nevertheless responds by turning to religion as the key to the meaning of history. The "return to the One" may be what is really going on, but what this now implies in terms of historical process—which is the area of his investigation—remains opaque. He speaks for example of Buddha, Jesus, and Francis of Assisi as the right spiritual guides for mankind, but does not emphasize following their counsels when it comes to putting an end to war.

Perhaps we can say that Toynbee lived during a difficult interim period in modern thought. He began as a practitioner of the empirical approach of the social scientist, yet could not abide its moral fruitlessness and so leaped to a "spiritual" interpretation of history, but without developing the essential tools for grappling with the psychomoral changes involved. A greater feeling of satisfaction, of orientation, may come from

reading such philosophic social historians as Erich Kahler, students of myth and religion such as Mercea Eliade. There is a wholeness, an assimilability about the work of these scholars that seems hard to find in Toynbee, despite the magnitude of his work and the erudition of his scholarship.

How then should we regard Toynbee? As a man, perhaps, of extraordinary ability in some directions, with some noticeable limitations in others, who responded to the deep urgings of the time as best he could. In his *Shapes of Philosophical History* (Stanford University Press, 1965), Frank Manuel remarks in his last chapter that when he looked for whatever agreement might exist among the four groups of philosophical historians he had been considering—

much to my amazement I have found that beneath the surface there is a consensus, albeit an uneasy one, among a substantial body of twentieth-century writers who have examined the historical process in its totality and have ventured to predict its future. They are agreed that the next step either must or is likely to entail a spiritualization of mankind and a movement away from the present absorption of power and instinctual existence. Toynbee uses the term "etherialisation"; in Teilhard de Chardin's private language it is hominisation; the Christian theologians speak in more traditional terms of a recrudescence of religious faith, and Karl Jaspers of a second axial period of spirituality like the age of the prophets, of Buddha, and of Confucius. *Consensus populi* was long ago discarded as a criterion of truth; the consensus of philosophers of history may be an even more dubious witness, but there it stands.

Obviously, we need more carefully devised intellectual and psychological tools for understanding and evaluating such matters.

**COMMENTARY**  
**TOYNBEE IN RETROSPECT**

THE death of Arnold Toynbee, after this week's Review was set in type, led us to recollect the many times, through the years, we have quoted the eminent historian to what seemed morally educational effect in relation to current events. While the comment of the reviewer respecting Toynbee's historiographic approach merits consideration—earlier reviews in MANAS make similar suggestion—this criticism of theory, based more on Kenneth Winetroun's report than on Toynbee himself, needs to be supplemented by notice of the historian's influence at another level.

During the long term of years in which Toynbee was hailed as a "Christian" historian, he was foremost among those who challenged the parochialism and claims to exclusive truth of orthodox Christian belief. He pointed out that Western conquest, arrogance, and self-righteousness were the cause of the truculence of Communist China; he stressed and showed from history that violence was no solution for social or international problems, and indicated that "a literal world state," should it be possible to establish one, could not be based on the repressive policies of now-existing states. He said in 1962: "When the use of physical force as an instrument of social change is abandoned, the spiritual force, which Gandhi released in India with such potent effect, will continue to do its transforming work." Toynbee counseled Christians "to recognize that, in some measure, all the higher religions are also revelations of what is true and right," and he pointed to the parallel between the self-sacrifice of Jesus and the rejection of Nirvana by the Bodhisattva, "in order to show the way of salvation to his fellow beings by helping them along the path on which he himself is refraining, out of love and compassion, from taking the last step."

A review of Toynbee's work during the past fifteen years—especially of articles and statements

quoted from his works in the press—shows that his influence has been strongly toward universalism in religion and right action in conduct—right action being defined as conformity to the universal "spiritual presence behind the phenomena." And he unfailingly called the West to account for its responsibility for the present condition of the world (see his article in *Harper's* for March, 1953). In short, whatever his theoretical weaknesses, Toynbee's utterly sincere moral voice, combined with the wide authority earned by his historical knowledge, gave him an audience far larger than that of any other modern scholar, and made him a corresponding influence for good.

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### TEACHING LITERATURE

MUCH is said, these days, about the importance of reducing the areas of activity and decision to a *human* scale, as the means of regaining control over our lives. The common sense of this recommendation is obvious. The dignity—which is more important than the survival—of human existence depends upon its achievement.

How does this idea apply in education? What, for example, is the "human scale" in relation to the study of literature?

There are at least two answers to this question. First, literature opens to the student the experience of the riches of the human mind. Second, it informs him—or ought to inform him—of the means of improving his own powers of expression. It seems just to say that the teaching of literature, whatever else it may accomplish, will serve these ends, or it is a failure at achieving a human scale in education.

We have been reading some more in *A History of English Literature* by Lafcadio Hearn—the three-year course given by Hearn to students in the Imperial University of Tokyo between 1896 and 1903. Hearn spoke slowly, teaching twelve hours a week—five hours of readings from English poets and writers, four hours lecturing on miscellaneous subjects in literature, and three hours on its history. The students carefully wrote down what he said, and this book, published in Japan by the Hokuseido Press, was the result. While there have been five editions, the last in 1941, the book will probably be hard to find, but since it seems such a good illustration of how literature ought to be taught, its scarcity is something to be remedied by attention to its value.

Why is this a good book on literature? First of all, Hearn is both a practicing artist and a natural teacher. This means that his own knowledge of literature has a human scale. The

artist must have some sort of human wholeness and command over his own powers. A teacher is one who, somehow or other, understands the growth processes which lead to psychological and moral autonomy—which means both self-reliance and freedom. These are primary values of life on a human scale.

What makes Hearn so valuable? He has a way of talking about the treasures of literature and illustrating them that makes what he says easy to remember. And you remember because of the excellences he shows in literature, not because of any tricks of presentation. True enough, it all comes to the reader through the mind of Lafcadio Hearn. But he is himself a fine illustration of a mind rich in the meanings and values of literature, able to use in exquisite ways what he has learned from them. The reader is in no danger of becoming another Hearn; Hearn is a focus for selected experience; one who learns from his example will make his own focus. We'll all do this anyway; Hearn shows how to do it well.

Hearn has some limitations; he doesn't seem to understand Whitman at all; the philosophic genius of Pico apparently escapes him; but he is nonetheless a giant in comprehensive appreciation of literature. Like Harold Goddard, he draws you into the experience of literature; he leads you there, and gives you confidence in your capacity for judgment and your ability to read intelligently and perhaps to write. (Actually, Hearn's book, *Talks to Writers* [Dodd Mead, 1927], may be about the best book on writing that anyone has done.)

Hearn writes from what would now be called a "moral" point of view. Critics of today may call him ingenuous. He values excellences of character—kindness, courage, honesty. But he is far too fine an artist to write moralistically. We hardly need say that these virtues are indeed the humanizing qualities, and that the teacher who neglects them is seriously defective in discrimination. They are defining characteristics of the human scale.

This is what Hearn tells his students concerning Shakespeare:

The most necessary thing for you to do first is to read the plays for the mere pleasure of reading and learning to love them. . . . Beginning to read Shakespeare, do *not* study. That is the wrong way to begin. Do not try to understand everything at first—don't trouble yourselves about the difficulties, but pass them off. Skip everything that you cannot quickly understand; and you will still be able to follow the action of the play and to get a correct general idea of its intention. Then the charm will take hold of you and when the charm comes you will want to know more. After you have read all Shakespeare without grammars or dictionaries, without trying to understand details at all, then you will have become prepared to make a study of those plays which most interest you, and have most pleased the world for such a long time.

Hearn transmits best of all his own delight, his savoring of great literature. He shows the depth of the experience that is possible in reading.

I must try to tell you in the shortest way possible, how Shakespeare is great, why he is great, and what are those particular qualities of mind and heart by which he surpasses all mortal men.

The first distinction to be noticed between the work of Shakespeare and all other dramatical work is *life*. In Shakespeare the characters *live* with an intensity far surpassing that of any other figures in any other drama. We see them, feel them, hear them—love them or hate them—laugh at them or weep with them,—just as if they were real people. Real people they are: there is no question about that. The second thing to notice as a distinction between Shakespeare's characters and all the other dramatists' characters is that they are intensely *individual*. Not only are they alive, they are individually alive, personally alive. That is to say, they are not types. No type-character can be completely alive. To the same degree that a picture or a statue represents a type, it represents a general, not a special, personality. We have every reason to like a good type drawn, to admire the picture that cleverly presents us with the figures of peasants or soldiers or officials, or priests, which we can all understand. But still, do not forget that no type picture can be really alive. It is very much like somebody whom you know; but it is different—not quite the same. If it were quite the same you would not laugh at it, it would almost frighten you—you would be too much astonished at

this realization of your memory you would be afraid that the thing was going to speak and walk—to take individual animation. Now all Shakespeare's figures are not type, but startling realities of this very kind and there are several hundreds of them.

You see what this sort of writing makes you do: you agree, or you question; you have to decide whether he is right. To do this you examine your own experience. Your mind cannot help but become engaged, and you learn from engagement.

This is teaching on a human scale. First you soak up the material, then, when you are familiar with it, you begin to assimilate it, taste it, discover what it means and why you think well or ill of it.

Hearn also says:

Another illustration of Shakespeare's versatility may be seen in the very least of his characters,—the clowns, ruffians, servants, watchmen, who figure in the play. Such characters being very subordinate, and appearing on the stage, for the most part only at a brief interval, one might expect that Shakespeare will here be content with mere types. But not at all. The least of these figures is just as distinctly alive as any of the superior personages. There are even figures who come on the stage for a moment only, speak only a few words and disappear—yet these are as original as the great characters of Shakespeare's tragedies. How do we know it? Does it not seem nonsensical to say that a personage whom we see for a moment only, and whose voice we can hear only like the voice of somebody passing on the street, can be made to appear to us a completely finished dramatic character?

The explanation is this: Shakespeare can make any character reveal itself *by the utterance of a single phrase*.

Hearn then invites the students to recollect how, in life, a telltale remark by an acquaintance seems to define an attitude, a nature, a character. "Now one of the reasons why no man can fully understand Shakespeare before becoming old is that nearly all Shakespeare's sentences are of this sort—everything said by his personages is a revelation of character." Agreeing or disagreeing with Hearn, one learns from or because of him. The learning is inevitable.

## *FRONTIERS* Man and Nature

A READER recently returned from a stay in England comments on the review of John Seymour's *The Fat of the Land* (Sept. 3 issue): "The English countryside is still delightful, but giving way to great, sweeping prairie-type views supplanting the lovely hedgerows and ancient clumps of trees that please the human eye—and the birds."

This observation reminded us of a few pages in *Wake Robin* by John Burroughs (1899), devoted to the kind of relationship that is good for both birds and man. The eastern bluebirds, he notes, find refuge on the margins of rural houses and out-buildings in severe weather. When threatened by cold they overcome their fear of humans, and Burroughs concludes that the fear is an acquired, not a natural trait. He gives a number of illustrations of birds which are completely tame—until taught otherwise—then says:

Yet, notwithstanding the birds have come to look upon man as their natural enemy, there can be little doubt that civilization is on the whole favorable to their increase and perpetuity, especially to the smaller species. With man come flies and moths, and insects of all kinds in greater abundance; new plants and weeds are introduced, and, with the clearing up of the country, are sowed broadcast over the land.

The larks and snow-buntings that come to us from the North, subsist almost entirely upon the seeds of grasses and plants; and how many of our more common and abundant species are field-birds, and entire strangers to deep forests?

In Europe some birds have become almost domesticated, like the house-sparrow, and in our own country the cliff-swallow seems to have entirely abandoned ledges and shelving rocks, as a place to nest, for the eaves and projections of farms and other out-buildings.

The "civilization" Burroughs wrote about in 1892 was often favorable to birds. He describes at length the birds found in the environs of the White House, in Washington, D.C., and speaks of

the general hospitality to bluebirds of farming country:

The bluebird usually builds its nest in a hole in a stump or stub, or in an old cavity excavated by a woodpecker, when such can be had; but its first impulse seems to be to start in the world in much more style. and the happy pair make a great show of house-hunting about the farm-buildings, now half persuaded to appropriate a dove-cot, then discussing in a lively manner a last year's swallow's nest, or proclaiming with much flourish and flutter that they have taken the wren's house, or the tenement of the purple martin; till finally nature becomes too urgent, when all this pretty make-believe ceases, and most of them settle back upon the old family stumps and knot-holes in remote fields, and go to work in earnest.

Such surroundings doubtless still exist, but they may soon be as rare as Burroughs' sort of leisurely prose and his happy mood in describing our "environment." How long will it be before it is natural to write that sort of prose again?

Among contemporaries, we can think of no one but René Dubos who cherishes this ideal, in contrast with the angry devotees of uninhabited wilderness. Dr. Dubos wrote in *Smithsonian* for December, 1972:

Much of the Earth's surface used to be covered by forests and marshes. This seemingly endless green mantle had an overpowering grandeur which can still be experienced in the tropical jungle. But it masked some of the earth's most interesting aspects.

Almost everywhere farmland, pastures, gardens and parks have been created by profoundly transforming the natural environments. Wilderness has thus been replaced by manmade ecosystems which have become so familiar that they are commonly assumed to be of natural origin. In fact, it is Man who has created most of the "nature" celebrated by artists and poets. . . .

Man's influence on European landscapes has been exerted for so long that it has created a second nature, not always readily differentiated from primeval nature. Like the rest of northern Europe, the Ile-de-France region where I grew up was almost completely wooded at the beginning of the Christian era. . . . Most of the primeval forest, however, was cleared during the early Middle Ages to create farmland, villages, urban settlements and industries.

The region now has such a rich agriculture that it has been called the granary of France. . . .

Ever since the primeval forest was first cleared by Neolithic settlers the Ile-de-France has been acquiring a humanized quality which transcends its natural endowments. To this day the land has remained fertile, even though it has been in continuous use for more than 2,000 years. Far from being exhausted by intensive agriculture, it still supports a great diversity of human settlements.

What I have just stated about the Ile-de-France is applicable to many other parts of the world. The prodigious labors of settlers and farmers have generated an astonishing diversity of ecosystems which appear natural even though they are of human origin. The "enclosures" of East Anglia, the *bocages* of French Normandy and Brittany are essentially man-made but their hedges and ditches harbor an immense variety of trees, shrubs and grasses, of insects, fish, rodents and song-birds.

The humanly-devised landscape which is charming to the eye, aesthetically satisfying and appealing to lovers of nature, turns out to be the sort of landscape which both conservationists and decentralists approve—making a veritable community of all the orders of life.

Called for is a philosophic basis for the relationships of man to the land, involving the assumption that the balances in human life—showing fitness of motives and goals—are at the root of the balance we seek in our relationships with nature. Then, at different stages of cultural development, the balances between man and nature may change—the ecological whole may be fully as adaptable to useful change as the human organism has proved itself to be—with only new harmonies as a result.