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INQUIRY CONCERNING MYSTICISM

[A letter from Wendal Bull, of Burnsville, North Carolina, begins this inquiry, which we hope may be continued by other readers. The editorial comments which follow are intended to offer brief and tentative development of a few of the lines of thought suggested by Mr. Bull.—Editors.]

TO the Editors: Can "intelligent idealism" possibly prevail over the forces of destruction which have gained such momentum in our time? In recent months I have visited intelligent idealists in seven of our United States. With few exceptions I have come away from these visits with a feeling that there is an important factor missing, either in these fine people themselves or in the accepted concepts of "intelligent idealism" or in both. Upon reflection I have come to suspect that the principles "that may be capable of supporting intelligent idealism under the conditions of life in the twentieth century," as phrased in the MANAS statement of purpose, may not be principles stripped bare of emotional significance.

The intelligent idealists I meet seem to lack fervency, ardor and devoutness about their ideals. Has there been an over-emphasis on "objectivity" in our culture? Strictly unemotional analysis and rational thinking are undoubtedly of supreme worth in their place. Idealism without objectivity is doomed to failure. But idealism which is of the head, only, and not of the heart, too, seems to me equally doomed.

Principles that will sustain idealism are in a sense invisible food that will nourish the life of our souls. Can it be that modern rational thinking has led to the devitalization of this kind of food as well as of the food for our tables? Perhaps we have gone too far in purifying our principles according to rational standards (the metaphysical foundations of which we often ignore). Perhaps the dynamics of idealism vanishes under the scrutiny of critical analysis.

There may be those who regard idealism as a valuable end in itself. In such cases, all considerations of the vitality of ideals, the dynamics of idealism and the fervor of idealists must appear merely academic. My feeling, as already implied, is that idealism is a means for the accomplishment of worth-while human purposes. On this view, an ideal is of little merit until someone commits himself to try to give it expression in his living. Ideals can live and permeate a culture only in so far as men exert themselves on their behalf. I presently incline to the opinion that without the emotional respondency implicit in commitment, and without the emotional impulse to exercise oneself as indicated by one's commitments, idealism remains barren, intelligence is frustrated, and the union of the two, "intelligent idealism," will eventually dissolve without issue.

The problem, then, as I see it, is how to mold fervor, which is subjective, and rationality, which is objective, into a pair of working team-mates. To this end one of the first tasks may be to restore to fervor its proper honor. To do this it is necessary to recognize that the fearful little ego has virtually monopolized man's enthusiasms for a long time. Indeed it is the employment of fervor predominantly in egotistical purposes which has brought it into dispute. On the other hand, it would be hard to name a person of notable achievement who was not also a person of intense feeling and devotion. Throughout the annals of history, the men and women we most admire are those who were passionately committed to a noble ideal.

Nobility, to be sure, shares as little favor in the most influential circles of modern culture as fervency. Each of these terms, like "salvation," . . . "embodies a meaning buried but . . . far from dead," as you stated in the lead article in MANAS for February 6. It is not my intention to exhume the meanings of any of these terms. Instead, since I feel that in their best meanings all three—nobility, fervency and salvation—stem from the same general source, I wish merely to make one or two observations about that source and man's relation to it.

To name the primary source of these human conditions is to use yet a fourth term which "embodies a meaning buried but. . . far from dead." The meaning of genuine mystical experience is probably as alive today as it ever was. At the same time the interpretation of its meaning and the employment of its power are today probably as liable to distortions by the little ego as they were in previous ages. Mystical experience stands discredited as a source of any kind of knowledge. The interpretations of its findings have failed to pass the tests of validity in which modern men have faith. But we do not throw out sensory experience as a source of knowledge when its findings are contradicted by scientific tests. We acknowledge that all knowing of the physical world is a process of correcting and re-correcting our interpretations of our perceptions. The time may come when men will acknowledge that their knowing of the moral world is likewise a process of correcting and re-correcting interpretations of mystical experiences.

At this point I would raise the question of whether mystical experiences should be called experiences at all. Suppose we had an interplanetary visitor who had no knowledge of sleep. In trying to explain what sleep is, should we say it is an experience earth-men have every night? Or would it be more accurate and less misleading to say that sleep is an interlude during which we are incapable of experiences? In a somewhat analogous way, extra-normal consciousness embraces one in an interlude during which experiences, in any usual sense of the word, do not occur. Only if the person addressed has been warned that the mystical interlude is not a phenomenon, and that no phenomena appear in it, can it be other than misleading to call it an experience. In it one is "transported" or "translated" to a "higher" kind of consciousness wherein he has been shorn of objectivity (which is a kind of alienation); and shorn of his point of view and frame of reference (which is a kind of partiality or provincialism), and of all the premises and assumptions one requires in order to observe in any usual sense of the word. At the same time one is alerted to apprehensions of aspects of Reality which are otherwise totally beyond imagination.

What I have chosen to call the mystical interlude is often referred to as "revelation." Martin Buber offers a corrected interpretation of its meaning. He says it "does not come to man in order that he may concern himself with God, but in order that he may confirm that there is meaning in the world. All revelation is summons and sending." (*I and Thou,* p. 115.)

I find no necessity for regarding the mystical interlude as supernatural or divine. Man may be such a creature that, under certain circumstances, Life manifests through him transcendently. Transcendent interludes may be as proper to him, given the attitudes and instincts civilized man has lost, as the blooming of fruit trees. However, when such interludes are interpreted in ways which beget no passion for noble purposes on Earth, their potential is lost.

WENDALL BULL

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Mysticism is seen by Mr. Bull as a possible source of renewal for the noble emotions. It is certain that mystical perception, whatever it may be or signify, is the very opposite of what we call science, since science seeks conditions of maximum objectivity, while mysticism, almost by definition, seeks absolute or maximum subjectivity.

To what shall we assign the decline of interest in mystical experience, or inspiration, if not to the prestige of the scientific method, with its logical credo of objectivity? If we wish to connect the decline of enthusiasm, or fervor, with the rise of science, we may quote once more Dr. Edwin Grant Conklin's 1937 address as retiring president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science:

> In spite of a few notable exceptions, it must be confessed that scientists did not win the freedom which they have generally enjoyed, and they have not been conspicuous in defending this freedom when it has been threatened. Perhaps they have lacked that confidence in absolute truth and that emotional

> exaltation that have led martyrs and heroes to welcome persecution and death in defense of their faith. . . .
>
> The scientist realizes that his knowledge is relative and not absolute, he conceives it possible that he may be mistaken and he is willing to wait in confidence that ultimately truth will prevail. . . .

This is not to make of science a whipping boy, nor to claim that scientists are guilty of depriving their contemporaries of inward inspiration. The point, here, is that science graphically illustrates the mood of our time, and so far as the mood has value, science is certainly its best and most constructive representative.

The thing that needs consideration, now, is the fact that science is not, and never was, concerned with ultimate truth, but only with the relative reality of material existence. Dr. Conklin may call the scientists to account for their timidity or caution in respect to ultimate issues, but an impartial witness may reply that ultimate issues are not the real business of the scientist, nor are they the business of *any* class of specialists or profession. Ultimate issues are the business of *men*.

It is as benighted, today, to ask direction of a modern scientist on matters of ultimate concern as it was, a thousand years ago, to consult an astrologer for help in one's personal decisions.

Whom, then, should a man consult? This, really, is the question on which Mr. Bull invites reflection.

We have one account of Consultation in Plato's trilogy, the *Apology,* the *Crito,* and the *Phaedo.* The stature of Socrates grows from the vision of his inner life. Socrates had the "fervor" Mr. Bull finds so lacking in modern times. Gandhi had it, also. But neither, although both had enthusiasm, could be called "enthusiasts." They were men in whom emotion found measure, whose inspired action was formed by discipline.

We know little, of course, of the secret sources of inspiration in the lives of the great. The best men never tell their love, the wisest practice their religion in silence. Probably the purest treatises on mysticism are those of the Hindu tradition—Patanjali's *Yoga Aphorisms* on the discipline of the mind, and Shankaracharya's *Crest-Jewel of Wisdom* on the opening to the Self. That is, there is little or nothing of anthropomorphic imagery and symbolism in these works. Yet Westerners may find them alien, almost incomprehensible. But Westerners are likely to have difficulty with any language of abstraction, and the vocabulary of mysticism, unless filled with religious personification, is bound to be that.

Except for a classic or two—the *Imitation of Christ*, some of Meister Eckhart, and Jacob Boehme—Western mysticism holds interest only for the few who are working their way through the cluttered passage-ways of Medieval Christianity. It would be better, perhaps, to go back to Plotinus for the originals of most of Christian mysticism, for here, at least, one finds a Greek clarity of concept, in meanings which are obscure enough of themselves, without being wedded to a purely historical religion.

The difficulty with mysticism is that, to be real, it must take leave of all tradition. The mystic, if he be genuine, creates his own vocabulary. His knowledge is inalienable, his voice entirely his. He is the founder of religion—his own. For this reason, the expression, "mystical tradition," is virtually a contradiction in terms. We might say that the mystic's tradition is that he must free himself of tradition, and make all things new.

Occasionally one finds traces of mystical vision in literature. Richard Byrd's book, *Alone,* about his ordeal at the South Pole, has in it passages of extraordinary power. For a few minutes, Byrd *knew* his confraternity with the rest of life with planets and stars. When Henry George sat on a horse in San Francisco and looked at the ravages of the great earthquake, he felt a compassion for human suffering that never passed away. Similar feelings must have pervaded Edward Bellamy when, as a youth of twenty-four, he wrote his *Religion of Solidarity,* an expression of faith which guided his entire future life.

Such experiences—Mr. Bull says they ought not to be called "experiences," and he may be right—are without ordinary rational explanation. Whitman said that he "invited his soul," and he surely knew more of how to entice this guest than other men. There are dozens of metaphysical systems in which precise definition of this "union" is offered, but the living reality of it—that is something else.

The pity of it is that mysticism is easily killed by "systems." An emotional euphoria is too easily substituted for what some have called the sight of the soul. Ritual and ceremony are the philosophically poor man's—the conformist's—compromise settlement; they give the feeling without the light. Yet the feeling is not really the same; it only fills the being; it does not lead him on.

Mystical experience and science were said to be opposites, yet they are in no sense opposed. Probably the greatest scientific discoveries were born in a moment of mystical insight. A law of nature, on these terms, is the expression of a divine proportion. It is intuited before it is rationalized or "proved."

When you allow validity to mystical experience, what else do you allow?

First of all, there is the postulate of an inner unity, through which the individual in some sense merges with a larger self. The mystic, then, acquires a larger organism of perceptive power and faculties. He feels his brotherhood with other men as a tangible continuity of his own being. He loves without expectation. This feeling, once gained, leaves him helpless to do other than act as a brother. He can no more harm another man than he can mutilate himself. Only in madness will he do either. So is born the fervor of inner certainty. And so are causes less than the brotherhood of man made small and irrelevant.

Since the mystic is a brother to all men, without distinction, he knows the secrets of the evil as well as of the good. He knows them from within. Out of this brotherhood, or feeling of radical unity, comes the knowledge of the sage, the patient compassion of the non-excluding self.

To give allegiance to the idea of mysticism is thus a declaration of faith about the nature of things. Since the mystic's perceptions are in terms of consciousness, to grant them validity is to grant, also, the continuity of consciousness as far, at least, as those perceptions reach. And since those perceptions disclose a sense of order and meaning, it is to be concluded that the human being may recognize himself to be a microcosmic instance of the macrocosmic whole, reflecting in himself a knowledge of and a participation in the workings of that whole. This makes of both world and universe a kind of organism, outwardly connected by the laws of nature, and inwardly connected by the consciousness which becomes intuitive awareness during the mystic's hours of communion.

But how shall the deliveries of mystical perception be "verified"? Manifestly, they are not the same with every man who experiences them, or else by now a great consensus would have been established, with careful codification of the knowledge so obtained for all to read. That there is a "family resemblance" which gives loose unity to the mystical teachings of people of all races and times is true enough, but there are also critical differences. There are mystics who claim, for example, to "see God," and others who say that this is both ridiculous and impossible—that God, on any philosophic view, is bare subjectivity, and cannot be an object of perception.

It is pertinent to repeat here a sentence of Mr. Bull's: "The time may come when men will acknowledge that their knowing of the moral world is likewise a process of correcting and re-correcting interpretations of mystical experiences."

What, then, is the canon of criticism and evaluation? How determine the validity of mystical or intuitive receptions? Metaphysics, it seems to us, provides the critical apparatus for review of such material. As illustrations of the rigor of metaphysical analysis, two books suggest themselves: John McTaggart's *Some Dogmas of Religion* (London: Edward Arnold, 1906), and W. Macneile Dixon's *The Human Situation* (Longman's' 1937), Others have found help in R. G. Collingwood's *Metaphysics*, but this is a book on which we are unable to make first-hand report, as yet.

Metaphysical discipline in thought is a virtual necessity if mysticism is to have any protection at all from the specious and sentimental relativism which leads men to suppose that the mere presence of an emotionally-felt attitude is all that is needed to give it validity. "I *know* that my Redeemer liveth," the earnest believer in a literal version of Christianity may exclaim, and this conviction may work wonders in his personal life; yet this is a claim which has extremely limited value to others. The conviction of universal value is the conviction which is without the coloring of a separate historical tradition. The man who believes that there are many Messiahs cannot possibly share the intensity of the Christian's faith in a single Saviour. Religious emotion, without the purifying and universalizing influence of metaphysics, results in sectarianism and the glorification of *differences.*

In another vocabulary of analysis, it may be said that metaphysics guards against the delusions of "psychic" experience, as distinguished from mystical experience. Mystical insight, we may stipulate, is unsectarian and free, while psychic experience is likely to be highly personal, particularist, and to partake of the character of an hallucination.

The history of religions is filled with the claims and exploits of the psychically inspired. Quite conceivably, psychic inspiration may begin with an authentic mystical experience, but because of the uncritical character of the feelings, no distinction is made between the truly mystical and the extravagances of the psychic imagination. Hence the multiplicity of cults, and hence, also, the "sincerity" of many of the founders of small religious groups which are held together by the intense enthusiasm of those to whom some gripping emotional experience has come.

Obviously, sincerity, while important, is not the criterion of religious or philosophic truth. It may measure only the power of a delusion. If we are to take mystical inquiry seriously, some provision must be made for distinguishing it from gross religious emotionalism and from unregulated enthusiasm which ranges all the way to unmistakable insanity.

A further consequence of taking mysticism seriously should also be recognized. If the account of nature and man which mysticism implies has the possibility of being true, then, by a parity of reasoning, the account of nature and of man given by the popularizers of the scientific materialism of a generation ago has an equal possibility of having been a dreadful intellectual infection—a kind of wilful blindness and ignoring of the profoundest realities of human life. For those who find their intellectual and moral security in the conventional scientific view of the world, the threat of this possibility may be intolerable.

It was the hope of the scientifically minded that through plodding but reliable experiment and research, a picture of the world and natural forces would be built up which would eventually end all uncertainty. We would *know,* and knowing, would enjoy the full security of our knowledge. To question the foundations of that security is an act of either great courage or great folly and desperation. Yet this questioning flows inevitably from the sort of serious inquiry which Mr. Bull has begun.

REVIEW

NEGRO-AMERICAN TRAGEDY

CALEB, MY SON, distinguished first novel by Lucy Daniels (J. B. Lippincott, 1956), may lay claim tc be a tragedy in the classical sense. In 125 gently written pages, Miss Daniels, herself a Southerner, raises all the issues that work for good or evil in race relations, finding them in the activities of a single family. The head of the household, an industrious Negro who had earned, at least, the paternalistic respect of the white community, has fathered a son who feels a crusading rebellion against "third-class citizenship." And as the youth, Caleb, unable to restrain his bitterness at injustice, assumes the leadership of a group to influence desegregation, he plunges both his family and the community into physical danger. The climax requires the heart-broken father to kill Caleb, the most promising of his children, in order to save the family from destruction.

To feel one's way to understanding how a kindly, well-intentioned man can extinguish a loved son, it is necessary to read the book in its entirety. Miss Daniels has demonstrated, with great delicacy and perceptiveness, why the Negroes of today's South are so often torn like Prometheus. The older generation, often having laboriously erected a fairly harmonious and constructive foundation of family life, stands at a crossroads. To join their sons and daughters who regard themselves as involved in a "war" between the races, means to forsake a place in the community which affords some measure of happiness and satisfaction—and so the older heads of families are patient to a fault, while the younger rebels are often careless of the welfare of their homes and families.

Between Caleb and Asa, the father, there were almost nightly quarrels. Asa was a chauffeur and handyman for a wealthy, bountiful, Southern family. "Helping" the Negroes—Asa's old car had been given to him by his employer—was regarded as much a natural obligation as the attending of church on Sundays. And were not "their" Negroes able to support a good house, a thriving family, and educate children and grandchildren far beyond the expectations of their immediate forebears? But education brought new ambitions to the young. They wanted an end to acceptance as servants. Miss Daniels describes the conflict in the minds of Asa and Caleb:

> Every day—indeed, every hour of every day—he thought about Caleb. It got so that every time Asa said, "yes, sir," or "yes, ma'm," he could feel the sneering eyes on the back of his neck. When Miss 'Liz'beth let him go home early, he heard the surly, angry voice mock, "Natcherly, Mistah Charles gotta be good t'his slaves."
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> Those things brought back the quarrels—almost nightly now,—and that hurt. For, Caleb, as the oldest boy, had always been the one Asa wanted most to follow in his footsteps. Not be a chauffeur; he would like more for him than that. That was work of the past now, a kind which, in the next generation, might not even be considered honorable. No, that wasn't what Asa meant. He meant a man who went to church every Sunday; who married and raised himself a good healthy family; who made a comfortable home for that family. A man who knew his place in the world and maintained it without overstepping its limits. It looked now as if Caleb were the farthest of any of them from fulfilling that dream. And this above everything else was a bitter, unrelenting disappointment for Asa to accept.
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> Caleb, himself, never stopped to think what Asa's plans for him might have been. He knew, of course; down in the depths of his soul he knew without even being conscious of it. He never allowed himself to be conscious of things like that.
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> He did love his parents, too—though he never let himself admit that either. He loved them and, despite himself, he respected them. But at the same time he regarded them—especially his father—with pity. Was it not pitiful to be barely able to read, to be forced to dress up like a trained monkey every day, to have to bow and scrape to another man just to keep your family in food and clothes? And what seemed even more tragic to Caleb was the fact that Asa didn't see his own plight; that he did not seek to remedy it, nor even allow others to. He called it the will of God and said it was the colored man's duty to accept without questioning.

So Caleb worked in the railroad yards, disdaining pleasanter employment as gardener or chauffeur, and began to emerge as a leader of embattled youth. Responding to the appreciation of his less dynamic contemporaries—and the adulation of rebelliously minded families—he began to threaten the reputation of his hard-working brother and sister:

> Caleb was spending almost all his time across town in the "rough section." He had—it is true—aroused a good number of supporters in that neighborhood, but he really went there because that was where all his old friends from the railroad yards lived. They had quit the same day as he, and now they, too, devoted most of their time to the cause.
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> They were not, however, the ardent believers Caleb was. They felt no strong sense of injustice, or sought to right any great wrong. They followed Caleb solely for the thrills they hoped to get and for the approval of their neighborhood. And they were heartily approved of. Though Caleb's family did not, all the other boys' families knew what they were about and were very proud. The five of them met at one house one day and at another the next to talk and plot and plan. Their mothers fed them well and were especially pleased to have Caleb because they knew he was the leader.
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> There were very few like Hiram Jones' mother, who closed her doors to them. A hard-working widow who took in washing, she declared that white folks had always been plenty kind to her and that anybody fool enough to get entangled in such matters deserved whatever punishment came his way. She also called them a bunch of loafers who should think of a safer excuse for laying off work.

Then there was Saul, the youngest boy, who reverenced the courage of his older brother in defying white supremacy:

> Saul listened in awe from his corner, unable, in the darkness, to see his brother, but knowing even so that teeth were clinched, the muscles in his neck tight and bulging, the black fire burning in his eyes. At twelve, Saul could not really appreciate the reasons for this. He admired it, he admired Caleb's strong, careless important way of talking. But at the same time he found the whole thing frightening. His mother had taught him from birth not to bother with white children. White and black were two separate things like day and night like earth and sky, like turnip greens and ice cream. God made it that way, and that was how it was meant to be. Besides, it had always seemed to Saul that God knew best. Therefore, when the one he admired most in the whole world said the exact opposite, he found it difficult to choose between the two.
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> It might have been easier had he been able to see Caleb's dissatisfaction not only with the world but with himself as well. Even Caleb wondered sometimes how he had grown into the man he was.

Finally, Caleb walks the last forbidden step, taking up with a white girl he personally disliked in order to assert his complete independence of Southern mores. When the girl's brother is killed in a knife fight, the whole community chooses Caleb as the logical assailant, though no witnesses were present. And then—simply because of rumor, suspicion and fear—the whole family suffers. Caleb has finally beaten a path away from the family door; his independence has no supports. Of the two, Asa is the wiser, and in the end, the most courageous. But it is Caleb the reader loves and agonizes with—Caleb, who, if he could manage to be born again in perhaps only a few short years, would be able to find himself in a life largely beyond "racial" boundaries.

Of *Caleb, My Son* Mrs. Roosevelt has predicted that "in the world this book will have a real impact," adding her hope that "the reviews will point out how valuable it may be in opening the eyes of the South to have it written by a Southerner." Miss Daniels explains her own feeling with simplicity:

> I wrote it neither as support nor criticism of any cause, but as the story of human people caught in a heart-rending struggle.

As must often be observed, more enlightenment may come from a work of art than from crusading. For the latter, there are now and will always be necessary times and places, but art, forever and everywhere, deepens our conception of that common human heritage which shines even in tragedy, regardless of historical epoch or circumstances.

COMMENTARY
ON MEETING DEATH

IN recent years, several books dealing with the death of a loved one have appeared. John Gunther's story of how he endured the loss of his son is a recent volume, and now, Lael Tucker Wertenbaker, the widow of Charles Wertenbaker, novelist and journalist, tells how her husband chose to die in *Death of a Man.* We have not read the Wertenbaker book, but a *Look* (March 19) article with the same title is apparently a condensation of the same material.

These books seem somehow out of proportion. They are, it may be said, brave attempts to meet death with what calm and courage are possible, yet it is difficult to escape the impression that the mood of desperation which pervades them somehow subtracts from death the dignity which it ought to have. This is especially the case with *Death of a Man.*

Time finds considerable fault with Mrs. Wertenbaker's account of the four months between the time her husband learned he had an incurable cancer and the end of the ordeal. But the *Time* comment seems entirely based on conventional morality. Wertenbaker, his widow explains, felt that it was a matter of principle to die as he chose—since die he must—and he planned carefully how he would spend his last days. The book does not make pleasant reading. (At the end, tortured by pain, Wertenbaker opens his veins with a razor blade.) We would probably have left it unmentioned, save for the fact that it illustrates, again, the terrible dread of death noted in this week's Frontiers, and for the reason that the book is devoted to the idea of meeting death with what is thought to be great deliberation and such freedom as was permitted by a wasting disease.

Time complains that Mr. Wertenbaker paid no attention to his obligation to "God." We would suggest, rather, that there was another sort of neglect—a failure to meet death on its own terms, as a part of life. Death, again, is seen as a malign intrusion, and the days before it comes are turned into a kind of pseudo-Epicurean "production," in vain denial of the approaching event. The elaborate preparations make the whole affair seem almost garish, and painful for the reader to contemplate.

If death has an eloquence, its meaning ought not to be shut out of the consciousness by these artificial means. It should not be treated as though it had no part in rational existence—as a dark, merciless incomprehensibility.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

QUAKER EDUCATION

A BRIEF article by Reginald Reynolds in the (Bombay) Aryan Path serves as reminder that far too little notice has been taken here of the educational activities of the American Friends Service Committee. Long a leading literary figure in English pacifist circles, and an observer of various educational enterprises attempted by British pacifists, Mr. Reynolds now feels that the American Quakers have outstripped all their predecessors, both in breadth of vision and large-scale success. From nursery school to college, quiet, hard-working "Friends" offer to the youth of America means for building a truly constructive life. Their approach is remarkably non-sectarian, and their educational goal is so far from one of "religious conditioning" that those who spend time in the Quaker atmosphere are much more likely than most youths to become ethically self-reliant—or in Riesman's terms—"autonomous." To quote Mr. Reynolds:

> The A.F.S.C. does not confine its work to Quakers and Quakerism. It uses people of all denominations or none. It works among non-Quakers principally, and has a relationship with non-pacifists unparalleled by any other pacifist organization that I know of. Its objectives are broadly Christian, pacifist and humanitarian, ranging from the work of relief and rehabilitation to social, political and spiritual education.

In visiting AFSC summer camps in the United States, and after comparing them with various Socialist and Pacifist summer schools in Britain, Reynolds praises the nonsectarian atmosphere encountered in America, remarking that "it was not until I went to America this summer that I was able to participate in a whole programme of this kind in which for months I was able to meet people of very different opinions from my own on the basis of a common search for truth." Since pacifism is an essential part of the Quaker tradition, non-partisanship can best be tested when "Friends" have an opportunity to propagandize but, even here, the trend is very much in the other direction. Those who run the various summer institutions and work-camps seem to have gravitated toward a truly philosophical viewpoint: that unless a human being is allowed to make up his own mind—*really* allowed—he doesn't have the sort of conviction which he most needs. Even at the Summer Institutes, usually conducted at Quaker residential colleges, Reynolds reports, "there is, to begin with (and to end with for that matter), absolutely no effort in the Institutes to 'plug' pacifism." Mr. Reynolds continues:

> The basic assumption is simply that everyone wants to know truth from falsehood and to have some clue to right action in personal and social decisions. The "faculty" members or "resource people" are there to help this search by supplying information, stimulating discussion and encouraging the participants to look at human problems not merely as intellectual laboratory experiments but as things demanding a sensitive and imaginative perception. The A.F.S.C. has confidence in truth. It does not, in my observation, even seek to obtain an all-pacifist "faculty" for any of its Institutes. Indeed, even so, the chief cause of alarm at faculty meetings always seemed to be the speed at which young people—many if not most of them—confronted for the first time with a challenge to conventional assumptions, were reaching radical conclusions. We were so anxious that they should not too lightly accept new ideas (including pacifism itself) that more than once an extremely able performance as a "Devil's Advocate" was given by one of the "resource people," in order to give these young revolutionaries something solid for their new teeth. The result of this tactic was the immediate development of the young people and of their arguments. Some of them, defending what was to them a new position, said things which will remain in my memory for the freshness of perception that they conveyed.

Of general interest to teachers and educators is Reynold's summary of Quaker devotion to the Socratic method. When such warm topics as Socialism and Communism enter into the work of a class or a research team, it is the task of the Research Director to stimulate open discussion—and to puncture shallow definitions. Since along with their pacifism the Quakers have a deserved reputation for patience, they seldom make the mistake of trying to hurry up the educational process. To quote Reynolds again by way of illustration:

> Under wise direction I have participated at sessions when the whole faculty sat in silence, just listening while boys and girls wrestled with problems. One learned that way—at least I did—to have much more confidence in the belief that truth is great and will prevail. I remember one such occasion when the Dean of the Faculty who had himself insisted on this procedure sat on the grass beside me, tearing it up by the handful in impotent impatience because the kids seemed to be heading into an intellectual blind alley. We looked at each other, almost holding our breath, and once there was a muttered exchange—we both knew the very word they needed, but neither of us could speak! And then . . . a boy of nineteen said it, and he said it with more beauty and more force than either of us could have given to it.

Agencies of the American Friends Service Committee have long been an effective force in breaking down racial intolerance, but the Quakers take this problem as they find it, rather than "organizing" directly to meet it. Making every effort to encourage Negroes and other "racial" minorities to attend their work-camps, they find it unnecessary to propagandize the idea of boycotting facilities which Negroes are prevented from using. In one summer camp, the young people themselves decided that, though no Negroes were among them, they should at all times and in all cases "act as though there were." This, we submit, is training in genuine "Americanism," and it is quite possible that the sons and daughters of many MANAS readers who are neither pacifists nor Quakers would receive life-long benefits from association with Quaker groups. Even in the nursery schools, often maintained on a bare subsistence basis, the youngest of children begin to absorb something of tolerance, respect for individual conscience, etc. And the summer work-camps afford for boys and girls alike one of the rare opportunities of our day—of doing useful manual labor in spontaneous fraternity. In conclusion we quote from Reynolds' summary of the educational experiences now provided by the AFSC:

> What we should call a Summer School is called an "Institute" by the American Friends Service Committee. Most Institutes last a week and I noted four distinct types: (1) The type intended for adults of all ages; (2) the "Family Institute," to which whole families are invited to come, provision being made for the entertainment and even for the education—according to their capacity—of the children; (3) the Institute for college students; and (4) the Institute for "teenagers." The first type is possible on a non-residential basis and can be held in a city, attended by people unable to attend a residential school. This appears to be the only advantage of the non-residential type, which loses much by the absence of a full and complete social life. The second third and fourth types were, in my experience, always held at some conference centre—perhaps a camp away in the country—or at a residential college or university.
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> Other activities of the A.F.S.C. include seminars (one, at which I was present for a week, lasted for a month altogether) and work camps for "teenagers" and older people. The two "teenage" work camps where I spent some time each lasted six weeks. None of the activities I have listed so far are unknown in other countries, though the kind of people they attracted and the way the essential task was tackled gave me cause for much reflection. There were, however, other forms of activity which have, so far as I am aware, no counterpart in any other country. Among these were projects which enabled college students to do valuable voluntary work in public institutions, living a communal group life and sharing their ideas and problems. There was a similar form of project for students spending the long vacation in individual jobs. It is valuable for them to learn something of other people's work and their lives, but there is nothing new in the idea of manual (and even "menial") work for American students in vacation time. What is new here is the fact that the A.F.S.C. establishes centres where these student-workers live and are able, under the guidance of a good Warden, to get something more than dollars out of the experience—an inter-racial community life and some organized talks and discussions.

FRONTIERS

Penny Dreadfuls and a Life Hereafter

OLD AGE, Oliver Wendell Holmes noted, knows those it visits at least five years before they acknowledge any familiarity with its presence. Of all the changes to which a man is subject, only death appears to be sudden. A man is breathing, and then, in an instant, the breathing stops. Birth, too, is a sudden affair, but it is a question whether birth will be admitted to be a mere "change." Change in what? Birth, so far as we can see—which is not very far—is rather a beginning. For a moment or so, those wide blue eyes, so large, in so big a head, so tenuously attached to a tiny body—for a moment, those eyes open, and you see in them only pools of silence. Thus birth, we imagine, is not a change but a beginning.

Death, however, comes at the end of a life. It is something which awaits in the future, and so we think of it as an impending "change." One might ask with as much reason as before, "Change in *what.?"* The question is not so foolish as it sounds.

Stoics and Taoists would have little sympathy for the modern view of death, which is little more than the suffering of a terror. For the ancients, death was no more than a part of life. For us, death is an ugly secret, an obscene intrusion. Books intended to fascinate with chill dread borrow their capital from death. What worse threat can an author haunt his readers with?

And if a writer wishes to create the illusion of daring to penetrate the supreme mystery, he makes his protagonist challenge death. Tense and stern, the hero approaches death as Achilles stalked Paris, or as Tarquin crept toward the door of Lucrece, as though knowledge of immortality were to be gained by a kind of rape of nature.

Why so little kindliness toward death? This angry mood of conquest bespeaks a bad conscience. We are on such bad terms with life, that we suppose death cannot be courted as a friend. We seek knowledge of another life as the young rabbi in *The Dybuk* sought his love—if not by fair means, by foul. If he could not win her, he would obsess her.

These reflections grow from reading a current "mystery" concerned with the dark horror encountered by a scientist who, driven by despairing longing for his dead wife, builds a machine that is supposed to open a portal to the other world. The story is gruesome enough, and well enough told. But how shallow it might prove for one who knew more about death than the libraries of modern psychic research disclose! This scientist, an "electrophysicist," is presented as a Superman of research. Impatient of fallible mediums, he decides to construct apparatus that will duplicate the magnetic conditions of the séance. So, with robots fashioned of wire, he devises a "circle" of mechanical sitters. When he turns on the juice, all hell breaks loose. Some kind of devouring vacuum is produced, and with full current, in the last act, the practically mad inventor is sucked into the maw of the "black node" which hangs above the table around which his robots sit.

But the really horrifying thing about this talc which we may be taking too seriously—is the implicit assumption that this is the way the best minds of our time, the scientists, would approach the mystery of death, if driven by strong personal motive to attack the problem. Spiritualism, whose methods the scientists adopt, is not a movement against Materialism, but a vulgar acceptance of its worst implications. If this reading of how scientists behave when moved by the itch of curiosity to look into immortality were wholly a figment of the science-fiction vogue, it could be ignored, but an all too similar mood of exhumation afflicts much of the dignified literature of psychic research. We do not mean the "seance-machine," of course, but the whole conception of boring a hole in the infinite, with mediums, machines, or anything else.

What is it that a man looks for, when he looks for evidences of immortality? Is eternal life something that Nature delivers to every man when he dies—a sort of involuntary benefit, like a chemical reaction? There may be an involuntary kind of immortality, comparable to the indestructibility of matter. But the thing that is precious in human life is not the involuntary gifts of nature. Life is precious, not for itself, but for the opportunities it provides. Some lives are complete ciphers. Others make greatness out of very little. What comes with the body, it could be argued, goes with the body. Only qualities which do not depend upon the body, even though our perception of them seems to depend upon their association with physical existence, can survive the body, according to this view. This would make immortality a somewhat conditional affair. Perhaps there are two kinds of immortality—both the involuntary kind and the kind that would grow out of transcendent achievement of some sort.

All living things enjoy an organic type of immortality. Plants live on in their seeds. Long before the plant dies, renewal of its life is organically assured in the seed of a future plant. This is the immortality of the germ plasm, wonderful enough in nature, but hardly inspiring as containing promise for human beings. Human immortality, to be appropriate, would have to be a continuation of *human* identity. If there is only a physical identity, then the continuity is limited to the means available for physical perpetuation. But humans have various kinds of identity. Most obviously, they have a being beyond their physical identity. The account of a man is not a recital of his measurements. That will do for prize fighters and show girls, but not for the immortals, if any there be. There are intellectual identities, artistic identities, and what, for lack of a better term, we may call spiritual identities. What happens to these? Are they less real than the physical identity? The works of the mind, of the feelings, and of the spirit are the means by which we remember great human beings. Are these without the germ of continuity? Are the greatest and most awe-inspiring realities in experience less viable than bodies—has nature, that is, been less inventive with these qualities than she has been to perpetuate physical existence by means of the plasm of physical life?

The thought, here, is that we carry our immortality—what we have of it—around with us, while in life. The study of immortality, then, is the study of those things which have their life from a source different from the body, for since they do not come from the body, there is no need to assume that they will die with the body. This is the old, Platonic idea—that one becomes god-like by participating in the concerns of the gods; that one becomes immortal by engagement with qualities which cannot die.

It is only a theory, of course. What we suggest is that it is a theory which takes a reasonable account of the facts of human existence, in connection with the hope of survival. On this basis, we propose that this theory has far more of a scientific ground than the pretentious proceedings of conventional psychic researchers, who look for a "higher mechanism" of survival, when what is worth looking for is neither material nor mechanical at all.