

## ECCENTRIC MEMORIES

NO one knows the population of the twilight world of believers in the impossible, the miraculous, and the "unscientific." All that we can be sure of is that it is very large. In 1919, Charles Fort published his astonishing volume, *The Book of the Damned*. He published other books afterwards, but this book, a compilation of the "damned" facts—facts which have been ignored by the sciences to which they supposedly belong—made his reputation and even led, in later years, to the formation of a Fortean Society, devoted to the impudent tradition of unearthing facts, or presumed facts, which cannot be explained by any familiar theory. Fort's work gave a kind of borderline respectability to skepticism toward scientific "authority."

But at a more popular level, only a thin veneer of security protects many people from the most nightmarish anticipations, and the control of "scientific fact" over the romantic imagination is very largely a window-dressing operation. Most of us don't publish our gullibility, at the same time hoping that it isn't gullibility, but a kind of open-mindedness that refuses to be bound by any conventional "authority." Much fun has been made of the doughty band of Seventh-Day Adventists who sold all their worldly goods and waited on the top of a hill, wrapped in white sheets, for the end of the world that didn't come, but when Orson Welles presented H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* in 1938, as though an invasion from Mars had actually happened, nearly a thousand panic-stricken people phoned the *New York Times* for confirmation and a small group of Princeton scientists ventured out into the Jersey flats to investigate the scene of the catastrophe.

Musing on the vulnerability of the population to such psychological exploitation, Walter Lippmann wrote:

All over the world, but most particularly in the countries where civilization is supposed to be most advanced, there are collected in great cities huge masses of people who have lost their roots in the earth beneath them and their knowledge of the fixed stars in the heavens above them. They are the crowds that drift with all the winds that blow, and are caught up at last in the great hurricanes.

They are the people who eat but no longer know how their food is grown, who work and no longer see what they help to produce, who hear all the latest news and all the latest opinions but have no philosophy by which they can distinguish the true from the false, the credible from the incredible, the good from the bad. Is it so surprising that as civilization has become more streamlined, democracy has become more unworkable?

For these masses without roots, these crowds without convictions, are the spiritual proletariat of the modern age, and the eruption of their volcanic and hysterical energy is the revolution that is shaking the world. They are the chaos in which the new Caesars are born.

Nearly twenty years have passed since Mr. Lippmann wrote these ominous observations, and while the world now seems to be in a period of relative "adjustment"—most of the Caesars have either died or been killed, and the great nations are much more fearful of war than they were in 1938—certain other complications must be added to his judgment. Mr. Lippmann, for example, seems to think that distinguishing between the credible and the incredible presents no difficulties to the thoughtful man. Today, it may be argued, the thoughtful man may be precisely the one who is no longer sure about what is credible and what is incredible.

There are two ways to regard this problem. In a period of relative certainty—as typified by the thorough-going confidence of educated persons in the scientific picture of the world during the first half of this century—there is an unequivocal

yardstick of the credible. The "real" and the "believable" can be looked up in the authoritative encyclopædias of the time, or may be determined by calling on specialists. In such a period, definitions of "fact" are clear, and definitions of "superstition" are equally clear. The line of separation between the two leaves little to argument.

But not all periods of history afford a consensus of certainty concerning what is "real." As a matter of fact, a time of historical transition is marked by notable *absence* of this certainty, and this is true, whether the transition is upward to a new plateau of civilization, or downward to a dark age.

It seems clear enough that the present is a time of growing uncertainties. In physics, biology, medicine, psychology, and the many ramifying fields which grow out of these basic sciences, great question-marks have appeared. We are hardly competent to discuss here the areas of uncertainty in physics, but the freedom with which theoretical physicists offer far-reaching proposals concerning the nature of the universe (see Fred Hoyle's theory concerning the generation of matter, Maurice Goldhaber's idea of an entire, separate universe of "anti-matter") suggests the extraordinary hospitality of physics to new conceptions. It is certain, moreover, that "matter" itself, since being reduced to equations by the progress in physics since 1896, when radioactivity was discovered, is a far less "knowable" affair than it was thought to be in the optimistic days of the nineteenth century.

Biology is locked in a struggle with the mystery of organic form. The specialists in this field are beginning to suspect that they work in the shadow of incommensurable forces. As long ago as 1925, writing in a college text on the chemistry of cells, Albert P. Mathews of the University of Cincinnati said: "The biochemist, looking at his problems, sees that the solution he seeks is not immediately before him in the discovery of the nature of the enzyme action as some have

thought, but must await the development of psychology into a science. . . . We must leave out, because of our ignorance, the psychic side of chemical reactions. Our equations, therefore, will be as incomplete as if energy were omitted. The transformation of matter and energy alone can be considered in this chapter, which becomes hence like *Hamlet* with Hamlet left out. Let us not blind ourselves to this fact." (*General Cytology*, edited by Edmond V. Cowdry, University of Chicago Press, 1924.) This viewpoint became a major thesis in the writings of Edmund W. Sinnott, leading morphologist, who has lately proposed that *mind* be regarded as a fundamental factor in all growth processes. He, too, no doubt, would say that the future of his science awaits the further development of the psychological sciences.

Meanwhile, the most dramatic events in medicine in recent years have been connected with the strange relationships that have become apparent between chemistry and psychology. The *psyche* has in some respects become a kind of clay model of the biochemist, who has learned how to elate it, depress it, and, he hopes, to "normalize" it, by means of the new drugs at his disposal. In any event, there is hardly a single eminent man of medicine who will be found willing to express himself with finality on where the *soma* (body) ends and the *psyche* begins. Gone is the secure materialism of twenty and thirty years ago. The wise man, in medicine at least, is not the one to go to for plain instruction in what is credible and what is incredible. He is too busy broadening the base of his own understanding and cautioning his colleagues to beware of the bland assumption and the big generalization.

Psychology, the most important science in our time, in the face of tremendous problems, has quite naturally split into a number of sects, ranging all the way from old-fashioned mechanism to candid admission of the supernormal, if not the supernatural. And psychology, as though its ordinary scientific problems were not burden enough, has also to encompass the desperate

needs of a mentally ailing and neurotic civilization, bringing its clinical and medical practitioners into the environs of sociology, ethics, and religion. The medical psychologist is obliged to look at the contents of human minds, and he can't help but think about what he finds there. The question he may be expected to ask himself is this: Are the tools of my education and experience adequate to deal with what I find? He, most of all, is likely to become extremely reticent concerning what is credible and what is incredible.

It is fair to say, then, that the scientific mind has, within the last ten or fifteen years, become a mind more open to change than during the earlier years of this century. By the same token, we may say that this mind has become more "scientific," less bound by preconception.

But freedom of mind in science is not without dangers for the lay population. Accustomed to look to authorities for "rulings" on what is possible and what is not, the general reader, the man-in-the-street—not to mention Mr. Lippman's "spiritual proletariat of the modern age"—is sometimes led to suppose that the lessening of dogmatic materialism is the same thing as permission to believe in anything and everything. Just as the preachers, when they heard that electrons moved according to unpredictable rules of their own, announced that morality had been saved and that free-will was now "proved" by scientific discovery, so the eager believers in the wonderful and the strange, when they sensed the decline of skepticism, began to think that a mere wish could be father to tomorrow's "fact."

This, in general, is the context in which to examine the extraordinary appeal of the Doubleday book, *The Search for Bridey Murphy*, which sold hundreds of thousands of copies in less than a year, and then, with no more vitality than a "wonder drug," was suddenly forgotten. As interesting comment on the Bridey Murphy craze, we have a letter from a Los Angeles reader who took note of the fact that in this city the craze reached a fever pitch, with newspaper serials

reporting day-to-day "regression" experiments, and television programs offering the "former-life" recollections of persons sitting in trance before the camera. The importance of this letter is that it contains a kind of criticism of the Bridey Murphy episode which our scientists, with all their caution, are unable to offer. Our correspondent writes:

The story of Bridey Murphy leads nowhere and proves nothing—least of all the highly ethical principle of reincarnation symbolically expressed in the different phases of the Buddhist faith, which theory, in more than one way, detached from its symbolic meaning, does not contradict several findings of modern psychology. The more rigid teachings of Christianity and the still more rigid Judaism can still and are trying to grope their way to an ethical solution that will enable them to absorb the discoveries of modern science and psychology. Already, in the nineteenth century, Ralph Waldo Emerson had constructed a bridge over which Christian thought might have found its way to a spiritual conception of human evolution.

Let us see whether there are any ethical implications in the story of Bridey Murphy. Where does it show any possibility of a spiritual evolution for human kind? Did these presumptuous experiments really reveal something about the fate of mankind? If they had, there would have been confusion, indeed!

The very core of what takes place in hypnotism has not been scrutinized and penetrated. How it works and what it seems to do have been the chief concern of those who practice hypnotism. There are a few rules governing the practice, but these limitations hardly provide the protection necessary against the dangers involved. Hypnotism belongs in the sphere of medical science. It should be limited to strictly laboratory research. If discoveries such as the Bridey Murphy case purports to reveal should then be made, there would be some hope of careful study of the unbelievably complicated functions of the subconscious mind.

It seems to me that these hypnotic trances, in which the subconscious mind speaks with the voice of other persons, resemble very closely the séances in which the spirits of the departed are supposed to speak. In fact, I think the Spiritualists have far more right than others to claim that the Bridey Murphy story is a proof of *their* theory. According to the teachings of reincarnation, Providence makes you work toward perfection through some obscure

repetition of life. Where would that tendency be found, if the soul could receive shrewd advice through the findings of the hypnotist?

Someone has already mentioned in connection with the Bridey Murphy case the mystery of the wonder child—a child who can compose music and play difficult sonatas at the age of six—something inexplicable in terms of our present knowledge of the brain and the functions of the nervous system. Where does this capacity come from? No one, as yet, has mentioned the poetically creative writer, more specifically the novelist. I do not mean the modern "businessman" writer who learns the techniques of writing and then sits down at the typewriter, outlines and later from his outlines completes a story. I mean the great novelists of the past (and possibly some today) such as Dumas pere, Victor Hugo, Balzac, Thomas Mann, and Mor Jokay. All this work of their so-called "imagination"—where does it come from? Whence that ease which flows like water and creates the thousands and thousands of sparklingly vital characters and their remarkable fates?

There might be a psycho-mental sea spread all about the universe, from which humans absorb by means of some kind of antenna. What is obtained depends upon the individual's receptive capacity. Hypnotism, perhaps, affects the reception, as doubtless other influences affect it in other ways. It is found that under hypnosis, several parts of the subject's brain become numb, one part, being under the hypnotist's influence, evidently becoming more alert and open to some kind of "band" of reception. Some things which are reported may be naturally explained by simple suggestion on the part of the hypnotist, but when the latter has no knowledge of the material produced, the theory of the antenna might apply.

Interesting—some readers may say—but entirely speculative. The point, however, is that speculations of this sort may have unique value when the area investigated has been almost totally neglected by science. There is the further possibility, moreover, of a law of indeterminacy in the study of human beings, similar to Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy in physics. You can't look at an electron without moving it with the light you use to see it. Hence you can never tell "where" it is. And when you try to "look" at a human being under hypnosis, maybe you can see only the uncreative aspect of that human being;

you may be able to question his gross *psyche*, but never the soul, which cannot be subjected to constraint. On this view, constrained "proofs" of immortality or reincarnation become almost ridiculous!

But there is at least some scientific literature on experiments of the Bridey Murphy variety. Possibly psychologists critical of Mr. Bernstein have cited Flounoy before, but the following paragraph from Henri Ellenberger's article, "The Unconscious Before Freud," which appeared in the Menninger Clinic *Bulletin* for January, 1957, should be of general interest:

Theodore Flounoy, professor of experimental psychology in Geneva, studied for five years (1895-1899) a famous medium of that town, Elise Muller, better known as Helene Smith. During her trances, the medium gave lively accounts of her previous lives as a Hindu princess in the 17th century and as queen Marie-Antoinette, and about her trips to the planet Mars. She went so far as to speak "Martian." These allegations were considered by the Geneva spiritualists as wonderful revelations, by the skeptics as a fake. In a study which is a model of scientific accuracy, Flounoy demonstrated that the medium's revelations were "romances of the subliminal imagination," based on forgotten memories, and expressing wish fulfillments. The Martian language was found by Flounoy to be structurally identical to French. A linguist, Victor Henry, demonstrated that the Martian vocabulary derived mostly from the Hungarian, the mother language of the medium's father. She did not understand Hungarian, but apparently had heard her father speak it, when she was a child. Flounoy published the findings of his research in *From India to the Planet Mars*, in 1900. The same year Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* appeared and inaugurated a new era in our knowledge of the unconscious.

It is well enough to say that the careful Flounoy was able to show that the claim of memory of past lives was delusive, but what about the amazing capacity of this woman to invent a new language with French grammar and a Hungarian vocabulary, and to do it in an apparently "unconscious" state? To this may be added an aspect of the spiritualist hypothesis: that in the case of some kind of thought-transference

from the psychic residues of the dead, it may be possible for the medium or sensitive to remember *other peoples'* memories, incorporating their inaccuracies and faulty recollections in the report. Conceivably, under hypnosis, the subject may pick up such vagrant impressions and repeat them as his own, without any personal awareness of the transaction. The desire of the operator to mine the past for "evidential" material may be all that is necessary to cause the entranced person to gather outside lines of recollection in this way.

One fact which the frenzied interest in "Briley" has obscured is the rather extensive literature of psychic memories of past lives. A recent instance of this literature is provided by Joan Grant in her autobiography, *Far Memory*, published last year by Harper's. This is the sprightly story of an English girl who informs the reader in an author's note that her seven historical novels, previously published, were all biographies of her own previous lives or incarnations. Miss Grant's present book is distinguished by its lack of hocus-pocus and by a rollicking and slightly Rabelaisian sense of humor. She makes no pretense to being an especially "spiritual" individual, nor is she especially concerned with "proving" anything to her readers. Nevertheless this book affords a far less pompous approach to the puzzle of "psychic" recall of former births than the strained efforts of Mr. Bernstein to batter down the walls which separate one life from another. An added attraction of Miss Grant's book is her account of her psychometric perception—the ability to bring into focus, from concentration on some physical object, the panoramic history of those connected with its past.

The thing that grows on the reader, from such books, is the wholly natural character of these strange memories, for those who have them, and that, on the other hand, they are by no means "infallible"—no more, that is, than memory of an ordinary sort. From the viewpoint of the problem of Briley Murphy, the psychometric aspect of

Miss Grant's adventures in reconstructing the past may have a special pertinence. Some physical focus like an old scarab from an Egyptian tomb served to start the flow of vivid impressions. This, it may be, is considerably different from the direct recollection of a past life, supposing that memory of this sort is possible. For the sensitive, the scarab sets in motion a network of *psychic* associations, just as, in the case of ordinary memory, one association leads to another, until an entire web of recollections has been produced. To recall a past incarnation with some measure of philosophic proportion—which would be to enjoy a spiritual perspective on the past—surely involves much more than the talents of a clairvoyant, and would be as different as night from day from the leads dredged up from the subconscious of a hypnotic subject.

Let us have one more curiosity of the annals of extraordinary remembering. In an essay in his volume, *Science and Culture*, Thomas Huxley describes the case of a sergeant of the French army who suffered a battle wound which fractured his left parietal bone. He recovered to normality, except that, for some fifteen to thirty hours, at intervals of fifteen to thirty days, he had no contact with the external world except through the sense of touch. Apparently, by means of the sense of touch, he reconstructed subjectively what seemed to him the conditions of normal life. The following incident is reported by Huxley:

Sitting at a table, in one of his abnormal states, he took up a pen, felt for paper and ink, and began to write a letter to his general, in which he recommended himself for a medal, on account of his good conduct and courage. It occurred to Dr. Mesnet to ascertain experimentally how far vision was concerned in this act of writing. He therefore interposed a screen between the man's eyes and his hands; under these circumstances he went on writing for a short time, but the words became illegible, and he finally stopped, without manifesting any discontent. On the withdrawal of the screen he began to write again where he had left off. The substitution of water for ink in the inkstand had a similar result. He stopped, looked at his pen, wiped it on his coat,

dipped it in water, and began again, with the same effect.

On one occasion, he began to write upon the topmost often superimposed sheets of paper. After he had written a line or two, this sheet was suddenly drawn away. There was a slight expression of surprise, but he continued his letter on the second sheet exactly as if it had been the first. This operation was repeated five times, so that the fifth sheet contained nothing but the writer's signature at the bottom of the page. Nevertheless, when the signature was finished, his eyes turned to the top of the blank sheet, and he went through the form of reading over what he had written, a movement of lips accompanying each word; moreover, with his pen, he put in such corrections as were needed, in that part of the blank page which corresponded with the position of the words which required correction, in the sheets which had been taken away. If the five sheets had been transparent, therefore, they would, when superimposed, have formed a properly written and corrected letter.

Well, was this memory, or was it "sight"? Obviously, the sergeant thought it was sight, but the observers, seeing nothing themselves, might feel obliged to call it memory. But if it was sight, where did he see his writing? On what invisible substance were the letters formed which he saw and even "corrected"? And if the abnormal man leaves a mark on this substance which he can see, is there any reason to assume that the normal man leaves no such mark, even though he cannot see it?

These are questions bearing on the mystery of memory, whether common and familiar, or extraordinary and rare.

## REVIEW

### DWIGHT MACDONALD REMINISCES

ADMIRERS of Dwight Macdonald—author of *The Root Is Man*—will be especially interested in Part I of a series currently running in the British monthly, *Encounter*, for here Macdonald reviews the intersections of his life with politics from boyhood on, under the title "Politics Past." Before supplying the numerous and interesting details which bear on his "early career," Mr. Macdonald arrays the differences between the "young intellectuals" of his youth and those of the present:

Over here, wrote Emerson to Carlyle apropos the America of the 1830's, everyone you meet has a project for universal reform in his pocket. So did everyone that someone like Emerson might have met in the America of a century later (but our scripts were all Marxian). An interest in avantgarde politics was expected of every proper intellectual. Those few who were "unpolitical" were *déclassé*, accused of Escapism, Living in an Ivory Tower, etc. We felt, as did the Auden-Spender-Strachey-Orwell London of the thirties, that political interest, nay commitment, was an essential part of the equipment of The Compleat Thinker.

Things have changed. We are less interested today in radical politics—that is, parties, programmes, ideologies that assume a radical (in the sense of going to the roots) reconstruction of the old order. Indeed, one might almost say we aren't interested at all, and that this kind of politics no longer attracts intellectuals (who, since the time of Babeuf and Saint-Just, have normally been the most energetic propounders of radical ideas as well as the most faithful audience for them). The apathy and, not to put too fine a point on it, ignorance of the present younger generation about these matters is striking, and a little depressing, to one who like myself was young in the thirties.

There are indications, as yet faint, that the post-war political *stasis* between the Western democracies and the Soviet world may be breaking up. Suez and Hungary are symptomatic—few events in years have aroused such strong emotions, because they are shocking, bewildering, suggestive of hitherto unsuspected flaws in our understanding of world politics. So perhaps this is a good time to look again

at the forgotten experience of radical politics in the thirties and forties, if only because it is dangerous to forget the past.

A footnote to this portion of "Politics Past" is instructive. Last spring, teaching a course at Northwestern University on the literary-political "Left" of the thirties and forties, Macdonald was more than a little surprised to discover that, of the forty-odd students who signed up, not one was a Marxist. A few leaned toward anarcho-pacifism, but the rest were all Republicans or Democrats! Macdonald wryly comments: "I don't quarrel with the abandonment of Marxism—I've given it up myself—and I think anarchism makes more sense today than any other radical philosophy; it's all those Republicans and Democrats that worry me. Similarly, last month I talked on the same subject before an undergraduate club at Cambridge; although they, too, seemed alert and intelligent, I might have been telling them about the myths and customs of the Trobriand Islanders."

Dwight Macdonald is known as a man who changes his mind. He evolved from a somewhat critical Communist sympathizer into an ardent anti-Stalinist, became a Trotskyite, then forsook Trotskyism for anarcho-pacifism—and then turned away from at least fifty per cent of the formal commitments which identify most pacifists. As Macdonald puts it when discussing his political transformations: "Some have seen these as indicating an open mind, others as evidence of levity." We, however, should say—presumptuous though such a judgment may sound—that he has been much more ethically consistent than the diehards belonging to any of the aforementioned groups. In the first issue of *Politics*, his own journal, begun in February, 1944, Macdonald defined the policies of the paper by assuming that both readers of and contributors to *Politics* would be "critical of existing institutions and feel the need for radical change." As the sort of radical who is more concerned with being faithful to himself than with commitments to former alliances—Macdonald has shifted his opinions and evolved toward new views on how

"radical change" may be accomplished. (It might be truer to say that Macdonald wore out the tendency to wonder how to straighten the world up for everyone, coming to believe that the most he could accomplish toward changing political and social conditions was in straightening his own lines of thinking. As a result, *Politics*, during its few years of publication, made its mark as one of the most vital critical magazines ever produced.)

In the second installment of "Politics Past" (in the April *Encounter*) is a paragraph which should be of some consolation to supporters of MANAS:

While I was editing *Politics*, I often felt isolated, comparing my few thousand readers with the millions and millions of non-readers—such is the power of the modern obsession with quantity, also of Marxism with its sentimentalisation of "the masses." But in the last eight years, I have run across so many nostalgic old readers in so many unexpected quarters that I have the impression I'm better known for *Politics* than for my articles in *The New Yorker*, whose circulation is roughly seventy times greater. This is curious but should not be surprising. A "little magazine" is often more intensively read (and circulated) than the big commercial magazines, being a more individual expression and so appealing with special force to other individuals of like minds.

By the fall of 1947, about four years after *Politics* began, Macdonald had run out of energy for "a one-man magazine." In the meantime, however, he had acquired a stable circulation of five thousand, and there was no doubt that nearly every copy of *Politics* was read by more than one person, if not by several. On nearly every university campus at least one professor saw copies occasionally or subscribed, so that the total influence of Macdonald's pen, because of the germinal qualities of his ideas and the incisiveness of his expression, has been remarkably potent. Since the *Politics* days he has been able to relax a bit on *The New Yorker* and recoup his finances; and his present engagement with *Encounter* affords a fresh avenue of expression.

Before closing, and by way of displaying the ingrained temperament of a writer we admire, we submit an autobiographical flash-back to his

college days at "Yale and after." The annoying trouble-maker and rolling stone has since made a lot of constructive trouble and bounced a good number of stones into better position as he went by. Recalling his Yale days, he writes of his native inclinations:

I managed to get into trouble with the Dean by writing an editorial asking the venerable Professor William Lyon Phelps, a celebrated women's-club literary populariser of his day, who had undertaken a new course in Shakespeare, if he honestly thought he was competent to give it, with the President by writing him a man-to-man letter about the unreasonableness, injustice, and absurdity of compulsory chapel (he felt, among other things, that it was disrespectful to have used both sides of the paper); and with my fellow-students by trying to organise a "Hats Off!" campaign, a revolt of the lower classes—freshmen, sophomores, and juniors—against the exclusive privilege of the seniors not to wear a hat on the campus. When I graduated in 1928, I became a member, at \$30 a week, of the Executive Training Squad at Macy's, the New York department-store. My plan was to make a lot of money and retire to write literary criticism. But I was appalled by the ferocity of inter-executive competition, I disliked the few big-shots I met (and doubtless *vice versa*), and I soon realised not only that I was without business talent but also that even a modest degree of success was possible only if one took merchandising far more seriously than I was able to. After six months I was graduated from the Training Squad and offered a job at the necktie counter, salary \$30 a week. I resigned and after a depressing hiatus of a month or two, for I had no income, I got a writing job, through a Yale classmate, on Henry Luce's embryonic *Fortune*.

## COMMENTARY "A NEW POLITICAL VOCABULARY"

WE devote this week's editorial space to one of the "transformations" of Dwight Macdonald's opinions—the one which changed him from a Marxist to . . . what he is today.

In *The Root Is Man*, he wrote:

In "The Future of Democratic Values" (*Partisan Review*, July, August, 1943), I argued that Marxism, as the heir of 18th-century liberalism, was the only reliable guide to a democratic future; the experience of editing [*Politics*] however, and consequently being forced to follow the tragic events of the last two years {1944-45} in some detail, has slowly changed my mind. The difficulties lie much deeper, I now think, than is assumed by Progressives, and the crisis is much more serious.

To clarify these difficulties, Macdonald proposed a new political vocabulary. His paragraphs on this subject, it seems to us, are the heart of his book, and represent some of the most lucid thinking of our time. In this new vocabulary—

By "Progressive" would be understood those who see the Present as an episode on the road to a better Future, those who think more in terms of historical process than of moral values; those who believe that the main trouble with the world is partly lack of scientific knowledge and partly the failure to apply to human affairs such knowledge as we do have. This definition, I think, covers those who, above all, regard the increase of man's mastery over nature as good in itself and see its use for bad ends, as atomic bombs, as a perversion. This definition, I think, covers fairly well the great bulk of what is still called the Left, from the Communists ("Stalinists") through the reformist groups like our own New Dealers, the British Laborites, and the European Socialists, to small revolutionary groups like the Trotskyists.

"Radical" would apply to the as yet few individuals—mostly anarchists, conscientious objectors, and renegade Marxists like myself—who reject the concept of Progress, who judge things by their present meaning and effect, who think the ability of science to guide us in human affairs has been overrated and who therefore redress the balance by emphasizing the ethical aspect of politics. They,

or rather we, . . . feel that the firmest ground from which to struggle for that human liberation which was the goal of the old Left is the ground not of History but of those non-historical values (truth, justice, love, etc.) which Marx has made unfashionable among socialists.

The Progressive makes History the center of his ideology. The Radical puts Man there. . . . The Radical . . . is more sensitive to the dual nature of man; he sees evil as well as good at the base of human nature, he is sceptical about the ability of science to explain things beyond a certain point; he is aware of the tragic element in man's fate not only today but in any conceivable kind of society. The Progressive thinks in collective terms (the interests of Society or the Working-class); the Radical stresses the individual conscience and sensibility. The Progressive starts off from what actually is happening; the Radical starts off from what he wants to happen. The former must have the feeling that History is "on his side." The latter goes along the road pointed out by his own individual conscience; if History is going his way, too, he is pleased, but he is quite stubborn about following "what ought to be" rather than "what is."

# CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

## PACIFISM AND EDUCATION

As we have before remarked, the pacifist point of view in regard to various phases of political and cultural life is likely to be worthy of consideration. Whether or not one regards himself as a "pacifist," or finds the conscientious objectors' rejection of armed service unfitting, or even incomprehensible, the pacifist perspective is so radically different from ordinary attitudes toward national affairs that one can at least appreciate the unusual implications of the pacifist position. This, of course, is an "ideas-in-contrast" approach, and it is in this light that a discussion of pacifism may be valuable to both pacifist and non-pacifist readers.

An occasion for such discussion is made by an article entitled, "Pacifism For Children," appearing in the April *Fellowship*, publication of the Christian pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation. In this brief essay, the writer, Harold Loukes, takes up many of the matters one would expect him to discuss—what parental attitude a pacifist may adopt in regard to physical retaliation, playing soldier or with toy guns, the avid reading of crime comics, etc. But Mr. Loukes makes it plain that the trend in pacifist circles is away from attempts to "condition" children to submissive acceptance of familiar "non-violent" standards, and this because, as Loukes expresses it, to expect too much from any human being results in the lessening rather than the strengthening of confidence. Mr. Loukes writes:

Many impulses are natural to children which would quite rightly be rejected in an adult—greed and self-centeredness, fear and dependence, and passionate waves of anger. We know we want our children to "grow out of" all this. If we try to hurry them up, to make them grow up before their time, we may succeed—if we are firm enough—but at the cost of making them feel guilty and ashamed of themselves, uncertain and insecure, and, in the end, doubtful about their acceptance in our hearts. If we try to impose a moral standard that does not chime

with their deepest feelings, before the age when they can begin to reason or generalize about human relationships, we shall divide them in two: their love and dependence on us working one way, their spontaneous impulses another. If, in addition, they find that our moral standard is not accepted by other children or other parents, so that they feel themselves strangers among their own generation, the conflict will go deeper still.

In other words, the most important dimension of pacifist thought has much less to do with the "position" that one may take with regard to war or physical conflict than with the desirability of growing naturally into certain areas of sensitivity. What Mr. Loukes says in regard to pacifist "conditioning" expresses the only philosophy which can overcome the psychological results of authoritarianism. *Everyone* needs time to grow in his own way. This does not mean that there are no directions in which growth is desirable, as opposed to directions which are degrading or destructive, but it does mean that too much rigidity, too much firmness or insistence, dries up the wellsprings of spontaneous choice, and whenever a child—or adult—becomes negatively oriented, he will think, say, and experience negatively in many ways. So hard it is to limit our pushing and pressing to ourselves, we may need all the self-discipline we can muster to do it.

Another phase of this subject is brought up by an article, also relating to pacifism, in *Redbook* for April. Writing about "A Man Who Refused to Kill," Kirtley Baskette tells the life story of a successful young actor who lived through several degrees of public alienation because he is a conscientious objector. The young actor's name, one coming into increasing prominence, is Don Murray, and Mr. Baskette connects his integrity as a man with his integrity as a motion picture actor. For Don Murray is one who discovered for himself that, as he says, "there is no freedom in irresponsibility." Murray amplifies:

At first there seems to be, but you soon become a slave to your own whims. The more freedom we would have, the more responsible must be our behavior. The only true security comes from ideals.

If everything else goes, you still have those to make life worth while. I think my point of view is as selfish as any other. But it is a question of which self you want to serve. Fortunately, I've learned that you serve your best self by serving others.

Returning to the *Fellowship* article, we arrive at the consideration that while you can expect the best of anyone, each individual must be allowed a natural variability in development. We cannot, certainly, "teach" anyone else that "you serve your best self by serving others." We are most helpful when we respect the potential of individual integrity in even the most wayward of our children—or friends. There is, of course, with parents and children, a series of growth stages which must be passed through, and we feel that Mr. Loukes expresses this excellently when he reminds his readers that true education means relinquishing particular expectations, despite the fact that we inevitably long for a "guarantee that our children will grow up as we want them to. . . . There is no such guarantee; and if there were, it would be a pity." He continues:

What we can be sure of is that if we love them aright, they will as small children breathe, as it were, through our breath: as the embryo lives in the bloodstream of the mother, so do our children live in the mental and spiritual life that we live in. This happens whether we like it or not, whether we instruct them or not: the ideals by which we sincerely live are their ideals for a time, without their knowing why. One day the cord must be cut: but we can be certain that the life they live on their own will always be affected by the life they shared with us. It is a sobering thought, that our children are thus deeply marked by our deficiencies, but it is a comforting thought that they are equally deeply and silently marked by our faith.

There are reasons why so many of the youth of the world are more "deeply marked" by the opinions and values of outsiders than by those of their own families, and Mr. Loukes has already partially explained this. Parents too easily become formally protective; they can hardly resist the desire to see patterns of behavior develop in their children and try to force things. A good friend, or an interested teacher, however, may not be so

much wrapped up in "moulding" people, but will rather express his educative enthusiasm in general. If friend or student is stimulated, he will be glad, but he is not weighed down with that concern about "failure" which haunts so many parents—and is itself a cause of much more serious failure.

Another fact to be noted is that while both standards of conduct and formulations of value may be adopted by youths from their parents to serve as temporary sign-posts, it is really the quality or attitude of mind in the parent or teacher which has the lasting effect. Not what one does or says, but the manner in which he does it, is the educational influence. So we should say that the pacifist emphasis that each must find his way in his own time is a good one. For the man who truly believes this, and who practices something beyond "tolerance" in his dealings either with children or society, may be a more valuable citizen than any of those who has all the "correct" opinions.

## FRONTIERS

### Reflections on Utopia

MOST of the Utopias you read about assume a grand harmony as the ideal of social relationships. Two sentences quoted from David Riesman make us wonder if this is not the fatal defect of practically all utopian thinking. These sentences, repeated by Marie Jahoda in her paper, "Toward a Social Psychology of Mental Health," contained in the volume, *Mental Health and Mental Disorder* (Norton, 1955), are as follows:

The "nerve of failure" is the courage to face aloneness and the possibility of defeat in one's personal life or one's work without being morally destroyed. It is, in a large sense simply the nerve to be oneself when that self is not approved by the dominant ethics of a society.

This idea, presented by Riesman in *Commentary* for November, 1948, in an article, "A Philosophy for 'Minority' Living," may be the key to the break-down of countless well-intentioned social plans and programs. Quite possibly, a uniform ethics—in the sense Riesman uses the word—is both unnatural and unworkable for human societies. It is conceivable that the ideal social order would be a community which recognizes the necessity for conflict of a certain sort, within individuals as well as among them, and which regards the "conflict-situation," not as evidence of weakness or failure, but as representing conformity with nature.

Not that conflict is a great and beautiful thing. The point is that human beings are very different in many respects, and different especially in their need for institutional support in their ethical conceptions and patterns of human relations. Emotionally careless people, for example, require a kind of "supervision" over their emotional lives—the supervision, that is, which is involved in marriage laws relating to property and responsibility for the care of children. But for individuals who do not need such supervision, the marriage laws may turn out to be needless

frustrations and a moral sham, so far as genuinely ethical interpersonal relations are concerned.

Institutions of social control of necessity deal with behavior, while ethics is fundamentally concerned with motives. Institutions can take only the slightest cognizance of motives, since the judgment of motives would give the institutions an inquisitorial authority over wholly private questions. Thus the variable applicability of the rules of institutions creates an unending series of "conflict situations."

Another example: Modern society has certain laws concerning the education of the young. To protect children from the neglect of ignorant or indifferent parents, there is a law which compels the attendance of children at a public school. Without compulsory education, it is assumed that hosts of illiterate and irresponsible children would roam the country. But the parents who want to give their children a better-than public school education—who want to educate their children themselves—are stopped from doing so if they do not have a piece of paper which says that they are legally qualified teachers. Thus the institutional needs of the majority work an obvious injustice and hardship on the distinguished or more mature minority. Such illustrations could be multiplied many times.

A practical utopian program, therefore, would have to start out with recognition of the serious drawbacks of *all* institutional arrangements. A "good" social order, by no stretch of the imagination, can be a social order which exacts heavy penalties from the self-ordering few.

Marie Jahoda's article, "Toward a Social Psychology of Mental Health," spreads this problem over a broad canvas of individual-and-society relationships. What, for example, is mental health? Dr. Jahoda lists five criteria of mental health, not for adoption, but for critical examination. The five are: "The absence of mental disease, normality of behavior, adjustment

to environment, unity of personality, and correct perception of reality."

The thing to be noted, at the outset, about these five criteria, is that they are all of a sort which many people think can be decided by "vote." That is, they depend very largely on the social consensus of opinion. Poets, artists, and geniuses are commonly called "crazy" by their contemporaries. The disciplined self-absorption of the Buddhist mystic has been clinically defined by Western psychologists as "an artificial schizophrenia of the catatonic type," concerning which judgment Dr. Jahoda comments that "the Buddhist can control the onset and end of his 'symptoms,' a feat which the schizophrenic person in our culture, cannot, of course, perform." She adds: "The example indicates that the similarity in symptoms must not be mistaken for an identical disturbance of functions." Further: "It also illustrates—and this is important here—that identical observable symptoms are regarded in one culture as achievement, while in another they are regarded as a severe debility."

The question of "normality of behavior," again, is largely a matter of conventions. Dr. Jahoda's important comment on this indication of mental health is this: *"The criteria for mental health must be such that they do not automatically exclude everything but the average."*

"Adjustment to environment" may be equally misleading. Dr. Jahoda cites a small community which was wholly without employment opportunities for the young. She tells of a boy who rebelled by committing minor thefts, and who gained training as an electrician in the reformatory to which he was sent by the juvenile court. Most of the other children passively accepted the social conditions of the village, and of them it might be said that their "adjustment" was almost certainly detrimental to their mental health.

"Unity of personality" suggests a person "who acts according to a consistent inner regulation and is relatively free from conflicts

among the three constituent parts of personality: id, ego, and superego—in other words, an integrated personality." Disregarding the Freudian categories, the value of unity might be questioned if it means that an inner striving with oneself is to be taken as a symptom of mental illness. What of Tolstoy's tortured struggles, what of the uneasiness of every man whose stature entitles him to some phase of the Promethean agony? And Dr. Jahoda remarks suggestively: "It is perhaps not quite superfluous to add that this [a man's 'integrated personality'] does not imply freedom from conflicts with his environment."

Except in an obvious, factual meaning, the fifth criterion, "correct perception of reality," is the most equivocal of all. We have no doubt that in some ultimate sense, recognition of "reality" is indeed the mark of the sane man, but the identification of reality has been the unrealized project of countless philosophers since the beginning of history.

There is of course the "correct perception" which tells us that windmills are not monsters come to devour us, but in matters which have a clear bearing on our mental atmosphere, a great gulf may divide the opinions of men commonly admitted to be sane—the late Senator McCarthy for one, and Justice William O. Douglas for another.

Dr. Jahoda sets more problems than she solves, but in this case the creation of healthy confusion is far more useful than deceiving simplicity. She obtains, in abstract terms, a working definition of mental health which is probably the best that can be had, given our present state of knowledge. Meanwhile, articles of this sort show how little we know about what we are pleased to call "the good life," and how far we are from a social philosophy which has the wisdom to shun the deadly "norms" of either mental health, or righteousness, or the good of man.