

THE NEW POLITICAL ANALYSIS

WHEN Dr. R. M. Hutchins remarked in the *Saturday Evening Post*, several years ago, that Communism ought to be studied in the schools, if only in order to give the students opportunity to develop good reasons for *not* becoming communists, there were, we have no doubt, a number of *Post* subscribers who read the passage with uneasiness and who felt that something deep down was probably wrong with Dr. Hutchins, or he wouldn't have said a thing like that. A publication with an enormous circulation like the *Post's* is bound to include among its readers people who deliberately and righteously ignore the Bad Things, just as they embrace the Good Things without question. They *know* which things are Good and which are Bad, so why think about them? A person who Thinks about things must have Doubts about them, and a Doubter is a person you can't depend upon to bring up our children with the Right Ideas.

Being, we trust, a patient man, Dr. Hutchins has probably often tried to explain to such critics that a person who just knows what is good and what is bad without thinking it over is very nearly a perfect communist, already, without even trying to be one, or knowing that he is one. Such a person, that is, is quite capable of following a Party Line without asking any questions; and this, the liberals tell us, is what is really wrong with being a communist.

There is almost the same fear, in some circles, of a serious study of the processes of democracy. To *study* democracy, of course, means to "criticize" it—to be as interested in its actual or apparent weaknesses as in its more obvious virtues and advantages. It might be said that this kind of study of democracy is even more important than a critical study of communism, for if we do not understand the weaknesses of democracy, we may some day be led to suppose

them worse than they are—that they are fundamental rather than superficial—and think it no great loss when democracy fails altogether.

To understand democracy means, first of all, to acknowledge the assumptions it makes. Democracy obviously assumes that a sufficient majority of human beings are capable of making intelligent decisions as to how they shall be governed. A less explicit assumption is that these decisions are best brought into preliminary focus by the public-spirited leadership of unusual individuals and small groups. While nearly every form of government is either guided or affected by the thinking of exceptional or powerful individuals, a government can be called "democratic" only when the majority has the right, the legal power, that is, either to accept or to reject what is proposed by individuals and groups. The majority may do this through its representatives, or directly, as in pure democracy. So long as the majority has this voice in shaping the affairs of the country, democracy is a functioning reality.

What is perhaps more important than anything else about democracy is its metaphysical foundations. Any system of human relations, such as government, is expressive of *some* theory of the nature of man. Hobbes, for example, in drawing up plans for an authoritarian State, made quite plain his low opinion of the human species. Most people, he felt, need the threat of a Big Stick to make them behave decently. Rousseau, on the other hand, claimed that man is naturally good, but that the social institutions of society have corrupted him. One could say that Hobbes overestimated the weaknesses and "evil" in human nature, while Rousseau placed too much confidence in the spontaneous goodness of the "natural man."

Democracy, as representing a view of human nature, is clearly more Rousseauist than Hobbean, so that a critical evaluation of democratic experience will concern itself with the various inadequacies of the postulated "goodness" of man.

Any such consideration will involve at least three levels of analysis. There is, first, the postulate of "goodness" itself. What, exactly, is it? In the jargon of modern journalism, this "goodness" is sometimes spoken of as the unwillingness "to push other people around." It amounts, in other words, to a basic recognition of the dignity of man—the right of each individual to be regarded as an end in himself, and not as merely a means to the ends of someone else who happens to have more power. The postulate, then, is that this attitude is intrinsic and spontaneously active in human beings. It is what we begin with in attempting to build or evolve the good society.

Deists and pantheists justify the postulate metaphysically by saying that the human soul or essence is a self-existent reality from which this attitude arises naturally. The advocates of theistic religion say that the idea of the dignity of man is derived from the Creator—every human being is "precious in the sight of God"—thus making the validity of democratic principles dependent upon the Christian revelation. But whether a "derived" dignity is as durable as an *independent* dignity is a question that ought not to be ignored. The final answer to the problem of the relationship between Church and State obviously rests with this question, as does, also, the issue of the rights of minority groups and individual dissenters of every sort, whether religious or political. A dignity which is based upon religious revelation can hardly belong to atheists in the same way that it belongs to believers. For if atheists should triumph, they would destroy the dignity of everyone by denying the existence of its source—namely, God. This is the logic of the Holy Inquisition, and it is difficult to see how the believers in a human dignity derived from God can

resist it. Toleration, then, as a political principle, has unmistakable limits for the political community which takes its assumptions from a revealed, theistic religion.

The second level of analysis has to do with cultural habits, customs, and traditional ideas—all the approved forms of human behavior which are supposed to embody and apply the metaphysical or theological postulates of democracy. (The third level, we should probably say here, in advance, will have to do with the precise legal or theoretical definition of the system of government, as distinguished from actual practice.) The cultural attitudes of a society may or may not seem to be directly connected with its metaphysical assumptions. When the assumptions are dogmas, and not really "metaphysical" in a philosophical sense, the cultural pattern may exhibit many overt contradictions of the postulates on which the society is assumed to be based. The founding of Christianity, for example, as a dogmatic religion, while supposed to be the greatest moral revolution of all time, exercised relatively small influence upon the customs of the ancient pagan world. As a matter of fact, those "heathen" customs were preponderantly absorbed by the growing Christian culture, rather than rejected or significantly revised. The idea of the Dignity of Man was a Renaissance conception, and an idea spread by the French Revolution—by atheists and materialists, in the latter case—and not a peculiarly "Christian" idea, culturally speaking, at all. Such books as Westermarck's *Christianity and Morals* and Lecky's studies of the evolution of moral ideas in European civilization are illuminating on this subject.

It seems no arbitrary claim to say that, as a dominant force in the shaping of cultural relationships, the idea of the dignity of man was not really established in Western political philosophy until the end of the eighteenth century, and that this took place more or less as a result of the movement which historians call the Enlightenment—which was away from rather than

toward a religious interpretation of human relations. Further, there being little practical conflict between the social implications of humanitarian atheism and a pantheistic outlook, an undercurrent of the pantheistic conception of the dignity of man flowed naturally through the movements of political reform during the revolutionary epoch, emerging, for example, in the phrase, "the laws of nature and of nature's God," in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America.

As a matter of fact, when we recall that the Founding Fathers, besides being social philosophers, were also political leaders, having to keep in mind the exigencies of popular support, it seems evident that they regarded the Dignity of Man as not "derived" at all, but as something which they felt, as human beings, within themselves. They needed no "revelation" to instruct them in the worth of the individual man. On the contrary, both Jefferson and Paine were feared by the orthodox, because of their heretical opinions, and Washington never had the reputation of being a "religious" man. Although, except for Paine, the Founding Fathers did not openly or aggressively challenge the prevailing religious conceptions, they did what they could to establish *freedom* of religion, which for practical purposes amounted to the elevation of the authority of reason over that of revelation.

There is something about the human mind which forever presses on to finalities. The idea of the right of individuals and of minority groups to seek out their own finalities is an essential part of democratic political philosophy. The latter *must* declare that the determination of the non-material values in human life is not a political problem to be settled by majority vote. On the other hand, the judgment that a political society ought to leave these decisions to individuals is itself declarative of a non-material value, so that in asserting the right to freedom of religion, freedom of thought, freedom of expression, democracy becomes itself

a broad, philosophical religion which proposes that these rights are ultimate goods in human life.

The Constitution of the United States, we think, is a work of virtual genius in forging these philosophical tensions into a workable charter for the self-government of human beings.

The life of democracy, then, depends entirely upon maintaining the balance of these tensions. To try to make a political finality of some version of religious truth—even a version so broad as simple theism, involving the conception of a loving father who gave us our souls and endowed us with dignity—would itself destroy the idea of the dignity of man as an independent reality. On the other hand, if the members of a democracy allow the vitality of the idea of human dignity to die out among them, they will soon submit to political corruptions which make respect for individuals a merely nominal affair.

How valuable are reflections of this sort—not *these* reflections, but this sort of attention to the roots of our common social life? If we go back into the last century, to the ideas of several great European thinkers, we may find extraordinary prophecies concerning the future of the democratic or democratic-tending societies of that day. If we read Heine, Dostoevsky, Amiel, and Nietzsche, for example, we shall find that they saw how the excellences of human life were being lost, not through democracy, but through the degradation of its meaning. Dostoevsky, for example, wrote in *Notes from Undergronnd*:

You Gentlemen have taken your whole register of human advantages from the averages of statistical figures and politico-economic formulas. . . . Shower upon man every earthly blessing, drown him in a sea of happiness, so that nothing but bubbles of bliss can be seen on the surface; give him *economic prosperity* such that he should have nothing else to do but sleep, eat cakes, and busy himself with the continuation of his species; and even then, out of sheer ingratitude, sheer spite, man would play you some nasty trick. He would even risk his cakes and would desire the most fatal rubbish, the most *uneconomical* absurdity, simply to introduce into all this positive good sense his final fantastic element. . . simply to prove to

himself—as though that were necessary—that men are still men and not the keys of a piano. . . . The whole work of man really seems to consist in nothing but proving to himself every minute that he is a man and not a piano key.

This was Dostoevsky's way of defending the assumption of the worth of the individual, of trying to show that it is a spontaneous reality in human life; that while the quality of independence may be thwarted, it bursts out in unexpected ways—unattractive and harsh ways, at times—but it nevertheless comes out.

And now, Amiel, in 1852, on the problems of a democratic society:

Every despotism has a specially keen and hostile instinct for whatever keeps up human dignity, and independence. And it is curious to see scientific and realist teaching used everywhere as a means of stifling all freedom of investigation as addressed to moral questions under a dead weight of facts. Materialism is the auxiliary doctrine of every tyranny, whether of the one or of the masses. To crush what is spiritual, moral, human so to speak, in man, by specializing him: to form mere wheels of the great social machine, instead of perfect individuals; to make society and not conscience the center of life to enslave the soul to things, to de-personalize man, this is the dominant drift of our epoch. Everywhere you may see a tendency to substitute the laws of dead matter (number, mass) for the laws of the moral nature (persuasion, adhesion, faith); equality, the principle of mediocrity, becoming a dogma; unity aimed at through uniformity; numbers doing duty for argument; negative liberty, which has no law *in itself*, and recognizes no limit except in force, everywhere taking the place of positive liberty, which means action guided by an inner law and curbed by a moral authority. Socialism *versus* individualism: this is how Vinet put the dilemma. I should say rather that it is only the eternal antagonism between letter and spirit, between form and matter, between the outward and the inward, appearance and reality, which is always present in every conception and in all ideas.

Materialism coarsens and petrifies everything; makes everything vulgar and every truth false. And there is a religious and political materialism which spoils all that it touches, liberty, equality, individuality. So that there are two ways of understanding democracy.

What is threatened today is moral liberty, conscience, respect for the soul, the very nobility of man. To defend the soul, its interests, its rights, its dignity, is the most pressing duty for whoever sees the danger. What the writer, the teacher, the pastor, the philosopher, has to do, is to defend humanity in man. Man! the true man, the ideal man! . . . The test of every religious, political, or educational system is the man which it forms. If a system injures the intelligence it is bad. If it injures the character it is vicious. If it injures the conscience it is criminal.

Those who doubt Amiel's capacities as a prophet should read his *Journal*, available in several editions, where there are many passages such as this one (written in 1871): "I suspect that the communism of the *Internationale* is merely the pioneer of Russian nihilism, which will be the common grave of the old races. . . . If so, the salvation of humanity will depend upon individualism of the brutal American sort." Amiel's prescription for successful democracy seems the highest social wisdom:

Surely the remedy consists in insisting everywhere upon the truth which democracy systematically forgets, . . . on the inequalities of talent, of virtue, and merit, and on the respect due to age, to capacity, to services rendered. Juvenile arrogance and jealous ingratitude must be resisted *all the more strenuously because social forms are in their favor*; and when the institutions of a country lay stress only on the rights of the individual, it is the business of the citizen to lay all the more stress on duty. There must be constant effort to correct the prevailing tendency of things.

Today, the new political analysis which attempts to "correct the prevailing tendency of things" often makes a great deal of the foundation of democracy upon moral assumptions. Too often, the analysts wish us to believe that the true moral assumptions of democracy lie with the known and familiar forms of organized religion. Even so sophisticated a sociologist as Pitirim Sorokin seems to think that the Middle Ages formed a "spiritual" epoch in European history. There is a tendency to identify democracy with Christianity and free institutions with religious institutions. Peter Viereck, in his informing volume, *Conservatism Revisited*, suggests that the

Church—any established church—is the conservator of the values of civilization. But because our Western civilization threw over the ideas of spiritual values at the same time that it rejected the monstrous institutional authority of organized religion does *not* mean that organized religion possessed true spiritual values. It seems much more likely that spiritual values had suffered ultimate distortion in the custody of monks and priests, and that a return to religious organizations in quest of them would be a supreme folly.

As said before, human beings want finalities, and it is well that we do—otherwise, no one would ever go searching for the Golden Fleece, or slay the dragon to reach the Nibelungen hoard. We would know little or nothing about the atoms and the stars, and no one of us would ever have searched out the North and South Poles. Gautama Buddha would not have sat under the Bo Tree until illumination came to him; Jesus would never have sought Gethsemane and Calvary, and Socrates would have kept a still tongue in his head and gone about his business.

But the longing for the wrong kind of finalities may lead us into the worst sort of mischief. We want a system that will guarantee us an effortless and riskless salvation. We want freedom without daring, the pearl without its price. And we are willing to write long and sometimes plausible books to convince ourselves that these things can be had. There are machines and systems that can be devised to do all sorts of things for us—everything, in fact, but think for us. But there is no final system that will make us free, or teach us the truth. The free men and the tellers of truth have always been the breakers of systems. We find this hard to remember.

Letter from **ENGLAND**

THE days seem long past when civilization and culture were thought to be synonymous. Two world wars have fully revealed the growing dichotomy. It is not surprising that historians should be trying to discover the essential elements in social developments, and that essayists are found delving into the foundations of culture. There appears to be much learning, but little light, in these vigorous exercises on the plateau of contemporary thought. Two facts, however, slowly emerge. Civilization has not much to do with anything that can be characterized as true progress, while culture clearly is a heritage of intellectual and moral discipline, and both embody a process which seems to ensure that advance towards absolute evil will be arrested by changes of a sudden and perhaps cataclysmic nature.

In England, cultural analysis has had attention recently from the poet and dramatist, T. S. Eliot, in his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. One critic, recalling the bishop who said: "When I speak of religion, I mean Christianity, and when I say Christianity, I mean the doctrines of the Church of England as by law established," finds a pious High Church mood obtruding in Eliot's essay. The Western cultural tradition, Eliot says, has been Latin, "and Latin means Rome," *i.e.*, the Church of Rome. He ignores the fact that the West, including the Church, got most of its tradition from the Republic and Empire of Rome, and from the cultural tributaries that filled the river of their life. "Culture may be described," he says, "as that which makes life worth living." And he identifies this nationally (as part of English culture) with all the characteristic activities and interests of the people, such as Derby Day, the Twelfth of August (grouse shooting), and the music of Elgar. He believes that "the primary vehicle for the transmission of culture is the family," as a communist might say "is the proletariat."

All this seems to be far removed from the vision of the supreme good which Plato thought should inspire the life of culture, so that a man could be equal to all emergencies, and, having one virtue, would possess all. If we are to learn where we are,

and why we are there, and what are likely to be the full consequences of our careless haste, we need to ensure that our values bear an universal validity. Perversely, however, the God of the nation-State now dominates, and men everywhere are being persuaded to exchange liberty for an illusory material security. It is this general deception on the subject of "enlightened self-interest" which has forged the instrument of mass direction, wielded so potently by mass leaders and seducers. The power was well known to the Vatican when it founded the *Congregatio de propaganda fide* in 1662; but Goebbels gave it new meaning when he developed the Nazi programme by taking from the United States the technique of exciting "reportage," and from Russia the commandeering of masses into party and leader demonstrations. The result of these perversions is the rise of a new type, the uncritical recipient of orders.

This is not only a political development. The God of State is the cultural child of the mating of theological Christianity with scientific materialism. Not many writers realize their responsibility for the deepening confusion of the public mind in this and other respects. For instance, the "alien consciousness" which Mr. Aldous Huxley bewails in his imaginary picture of human society after a supposed third world war (*Ape and Essence*), must inevitably be related to the complete subjectivism of his earlier works, in which ethical judgments have as little validity as (to use Mr. Huxley's own illustration of this earlier period) a taste or distaste for lobsters. It is refreshing to turn from these perplexities to the simple utterance of a great Englishman, Thomas à Kempis, who, in the fifteenth century, wrote in his *Imitation of Christ*: "All men desire peace, but very few desire those things which make for peace." Until they do, we may not hope for a cultured civilization. After all, mass production, mass consumption, and mass direction, are verily three in one!

ENGLISH CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW

REBIRTH IN ASIA

"ASIA is conscious of herself, and the Asiatic Century has begun." With these words, Robert Payne ends his volume, *The Revolt of Asia* (John Day, 1947). By themselves, they may seem like words made to do duty beyond the capacity of useful generalization, for how can the thousand million souls of Asia—in varying stages of "backwardness," as we say—be spoken of as a unity that has achieved self-consciousness and will eventually seize the initiative in historical causation?

The best recommendation we can make of this book is that Mr. Payne thoroughly justifies his use of big generalization—his summing up has a profound and varied meaning behind it. Something majestic and awe-inspiring is happening in Asia, and this "something," we find, can be described in the terms of the Western cultural tradition of human idealism and aspiration. A great oceanic swell of moral determination is rising in the East. On the surface, we may see the choppy waves of ideological contention, the crosscurrents of borrowed vocabularies and half-understood slogans. We may read the short-term "interpretations" of political commentators in the press and suppose that events in the East reflect only the devious modes of partisan *Realpolitik*; but if we do this, we shall be wrong. If we do this, we shall mistake sophistication for understanding, mere literacy for education, and the happenstance of imperialist supremacy for a "law of nature." And we shall find ourselves repeating, some day, the petulant complaints of the thin-blooded aristocrats of the time of Louis XVI, who could not understand why the angry torrent of revolution was sweeping away not only their lives, but the very pattern of their existence. What had they done to deserve all this?

Actually, the astonishing thing about the revolt of Asia is its moderation, as compared with

eighteenth-century France. The Asiatic revolution has a humane temper. Speaking of the several revolutionary governments of Asia, Payne says:

Those who offer dignity, food, and stable government will always succeed; those who offer violence and instability and refuse to take into account the traditional graces of the Asiatic civilizations will fail. The splendors of the Madjapahit empire [ancient Indonesian State] may be forgotten or buried in mangrove swamps, but no Russian *diktat* on religion or customary rule can succeed in the face of the extraordinary belief of the Asiatics in the value of their traditional customs. Adat [the law of custom] remains, more powerful than nationalism or the urge toward independence. There are gods and laws that must not be defiled, the tragic graces of the East remain to temper all special pleading. To an extent unbelievable in the West the scholars, the priests, and the wise still rule. Character counts more than native cunning; the grapevines speak louder than published words. . . .

It would be the greatest tragedy to assume that the revolution of Asia is led by freebooters or storm troopers, or to believe that because the revolutionaries demand their independence, they are necessarily extremists. What is true of Washington cannot be untrue of Shjarir, Soekarno, Nehru, Ho Chi-minh, or even (in as far as his agrarian revolt represents the will of the Chinese peasants) Mao Tse-tung. Of all men from the West who are revered in Asia today the name of Washington is uppermost.

Is Mr. Payne "objective"? He has, we think, the kind of objectivity that is most needed by Westerners, today—the objectivity of a man who loves the East while knowing it at its worst as well as its best.

This extraordinary book could not have been written without the intense preparation represented by an earlier volume, *Forever China*, telling the story of the author's life—and China's life during the years of war when the heart of China was ringed by cordons of Japanese steel. Mr. Payne was within the cordon, a teacher in the wartime universities of Chungking and Kunming. There he learned to feel and think as Asiatics think and feel, and the positive values of that experience now emerge in his study of the revolutionary movements of Asia.

Great leadership in any human movement always fixes the eyes of hope upon a high horizon. While drawing upon the immediate capacities of the revolutionary rank and file, it seeks a larger transaction than the winning of the skirmish of the day. It was this sort of leadership which Payne found beckoning on the Asiatic revolution to its destiny. Soetan Shjarir, of Indonesia, to choose one of an illustrious company, addressed his countrymen:

Because ultimately all nations must form one humanity embracing the whole world, becoming one race—the whole human race living in one society based on justice and truth—we must no longer be ruled by the narrow prejudice that divides human beings into different strata according to the color of their skins, or their differing traditions and inheritances. In the end these narrow feelings must cease to influence our lives. Once free of these bonds forged in a raw period of our evolution, we shall know that there is a vast difference between loving the land of our birth and hating foreigners. . . .

Here is no incendiary whipping up the fury of "ignorant natives," but a social reformer and educator who stands with the great of this world. No reader of Shjarir's book, *Out of Exile*, the story of his eight years in the custody of the Dutch as a "dangerous revolutionary," can fail to recognize that, today, the East is rich with spokesmen for world idealism—men with the patience of philosophers and the ardor of patriots. Mr. Payne's volume is important because it affords to Western readers an introduction to contemporary Asiatic greatness in individual human terms.

It is possible that phases of the Asiatic revolution are imperfectly represented by Mr. Payne; not being experts, we wouldn't know. We feel, for one thing, that he has not grasped the significance of the part played by Gandhi in the liberation of India. But what of that? We doubt that Mr. Payne is interested in making up people's minds for them on the particulars of the Asiatic ferment. Rather, he wants his readers to feel in their hearts something of what he has felt while living in the Orient, meeting the great men of

China, India, Indonesia, Korea, Burma and Malaya, sensing the import of the vast upheaval of ideas and feelings that is now taking place. He has thrown away his hemispheric provincialism, and he invites us to do the same.

He might, perhaps, have chosen a better title. Upton Close published in 1927 a journalistic volume called *The Revolt of Asia* in some measure concerned with the forces Mr. Payne writes about, but without either the insight or the sympathy the latter brings to the subject. Mr. Payne's book is really a study of the *rebirth* of Asia, of which the "revolt" against imperialism is no more than a single aspect—and a superficial one, perhaps, at that.

COMMENTARY AFTERTHOUGHTS

THERE were many, we suppose, who encountered the late celebration of Christmas in a skeptical but hopeful mood. The hope would naturally arise from an appreciative sense of the meaning of the Christ idea—its undertone of regeneration for the natural world of living things, of the seed swelling beneath the snow; and its overtone of human rebirth, of inner, psychological awakening, which Christmas ought to mean to us, if it means anything at all.

But it was the skepticism, more than anything else, which prevented appearance, here, of a Christmas editorial in anticipation of this conjunction of inner and outer cycles of Nature, for expression of such ideals must flow freely from the heart.

What sort of skepticism? The skepticism which perforce arises toward any festival which has come to mean unvarying drudgery, neurotic strain, unspeakable pretense, insistent psychological compulsions and even terrible disaster to a growing portion of the population. To seek overtly the mystic secret of Christmas seems almost an enforcement of this terrible routine, whether we will or no.

One naturally refrains from speaking in this way *before* the Christmas Season. What a man seeks from traditional Holy Days is his own inviolable right, and what he finds may be good—better, perhaps, than anything skepticism can contribute. But a reflective hour or two, afterward, can do no harm. It may even explain a little the thwartings of the heart that all of us feel these days, at various levels of our being.

Most obvious among the compulsions of Christmas is the sense of *commercial necessity* to wish one's customers a "Merry Christmas." No doubt a genuine well-wishing can go with a Christmas card sent out by a business; but no doubt, as well, that a prudent recognition of what

is now the greatest commercial event of the year is the primary motive of the business Christmas card.

Does it matter? It doesn't matter at all, unless you happen to think that there is something uniquely debasing in using the most sacred idea of the only religion the West knows for what it may be worth in financial return. The confusion of the religious and the acquisitive instincts is generally an accepted confusion in the West. It allows us to pay a salary to "men of God," in proportion to their showmanship on behalf of the Deity, while we look with ill-concealed disfavor at other cultures which have made the beggar's bowl a symbol of a life of consecration to things of the spirit.

This, of course, is the basic moral disaster which has overtaken Christmas. Its reflection in "practical" affairs comes home most effectively to department store clerks, mail-carriers and postal workers, policemen and hospital orderlies and internes who do the "dirty work" of cleaning up during and after the drunken jubilee.

Then there is the nervous sense of indebtedness in millions of modest homes. The feeling of *having* to give presents and to send cards often turns the initial feeling of generosity into a ruthless system of barter for social acceptance. One gives lest one be shut out of the hearts—is it their hearts, really?—of one's friends and relatives.

These are only a few of the facets of the Christmas "spirit" in the form that haunts the twentieth century. Would it not be a more fitting recognition of the symbol birth-time of the Christ to pass the season in perfect silence? If Christmas is really an inward thing, this would be a way to make it so. What other defense have the things of the heart against profanation?

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

A LETTER from a reader supplies us with an interesting proposal—that all parents should attend parents' training classes which are made a part of our compulsory education system. Our contributor is aware that personal compulsion is always to be regretted, "but," she says, "even as a liberal, I can see no other way out." Among the reasons which seem to her to make this "drastic" step necessary is the probability that many well-to-do parents would be even harder to attract to parent-training classes than persons of modest means. The latter cannot escape the necessity for living with their children from day to day, while the former may afford governesses and nurses, and are often little concerned with the immediacy of child-parent problems.

Two favorable things might be said of the proposal. First, we may recall that the man who proved that he had the strongest of faith in man's capacity to resist coercion—Gandhi—nevertheless favored what he called "Compulsory Education" in India. Probably Gandhi felt that some Governmental authority would have to be exercised just to get enough Indian village children *inside* of school, so that they could learn whether or not they really wanted to come regularly. This could be accomplished by compulsory attendance for only a comparatively short period—a requirement that might also be applied to parents' classes such as those proposed by our correspondent. A three months' session, for instance, might be made mandatory in the same way that a course in American history is required for those who are to receive a High School diploma. After the three months' period, advanced study and discussion groups could be offered on a voluntary basis.

A second suggestive comparison with this proposal is found in the writings of the prolific Elbert Hubbard, who advanced the opinion that it should be made extremely easy for people to

secure legal divorce, but extremely difficult for them to qualify for legal marriage. Mr. Hubbard was, of course, arguing that while it is impossible to compel people to be "compatible," certain minimum conditions may be required of those who undertake to bring children into the world. There are already a few technical requirements for obtaining a marriage license, and it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that to these might some day be added the requirement of a course in the psychology of home-education for prospective parents.

One good reason for giving serious attention to such speculations lies in the fact that parents are seldom acquainted with more than one type of "psychology" in respect to the raising of children. Most parents unconsciously absorb their attitudes toward the young from their own family or Natural environment. They seldom *think* very much about the widely differing approaches and attitudes maintained by parents with different backgrounds, *and no parent can be a wholly satisfactory educator in the home unless he or she does a good deal of evaluative and revaluative thinking.* While we would naturally oppose teaching standardized doctrine in any compulsory classes in child-upbringing, it might be possible to prepare a helpful resume of the many different systems of thought on the subject.

Take the matter of discipline. Parents often inherit a conviction that physical disciplinary action is appropriate and beneficial, and to be preferred over some complicated system of induced "mental suffering" which the child may not be able to understand. Colonel Ford-Thompson, for instance, whose work in Madras was described last week, advances persuasive reasons for upholding this view. But psychologists of the opposite school of thought also do a good job of arguing.

Many child psychologists feel that children should not be taught reading at a very early age, and others feel that reading—even when only a portion of the words and phrases used is

understood by the child—is an excellent focus for developing curiosity and imagination. Some believe in making an effort toward complete democracy in the home at all times, and some believe that if this is attempted while the children are too young, the result will be more confusing than helpful.

A request to leading educators for proposals of a curriculum for a parents' course in child-upbringing would probably precipitate some very interesting debates, extremely useful to both teachers and parents, even if no workable course appeared as a result.

If legislation such as our correspondent recommends were ever actually passed, it would obviously be on the basis of a series of compromises between the opposing schools of thought, and could hardly lead to indoctrination in any specific dogmas. But those who attended such a course, in proportion to their intellectual capacities, could at least become aware of the magnitude of the issues involved. Whatever their opinions, they would be forced to give them *conscious examination*, and to decide what needed to be said and done to those views.

Of course, we cannot pass over the fact that anything labelled "compulsory" has serious drawbacks. But for those who grant that there is need for compulsions in some relationships between the State and the Individual, it must also be granted that the nature of what the individual is "compelled" to do may make a great difference. It seems to us, for instance, that it would be much less dangerous to compel parents to attend a reading and discussion course on "child-guidance" than it would be to have a compulsory military training law for young men. The former would require only that the mind be focussed upon a broad category of problems for a given length of time, and would not dictate the conclusions to be drawn. But military conscription dictates one of the most rigid of all conclusions—that the taking of human life in warfare must be accepted by the

individual as a necessity whenever he receives orders to take aim and fire.

If there are to be any "compulsions" in our society, let us aim them at the elimination of sectarianism and prejudice by requiring comparative study of family customs, religious beliefs and educational theories.

FRONTIERS

A Question About "The Soul"

THERE are some subjects of human inquiry—perhaps they are the most important ones of all—which it seems almost futile to discuss in words, yet to which all serious thought attracts us. Perhaps only the problems which are capable of being dealt with in the terms of objective measurement—such as the best way to build a house—are suitable subjects for "argument," while matters which have to do with one's inward perceptions ought never to be debated for any reason. In any event, such matters can hardly be considered except upon a common ground of admitted moral or "spiritual" reality.

These observations are prompted by a letter from a reader who refers to a recent use in *MANAS* of the expression, "awakened soul," and asks how the soul may be "awakened." Short of the mystical treatises of East and West, and the Platonic and Neoplatonic literature, we know of no useful discussion of this subject—nor would we read with interest any writer who claimed to be able to "explain" to anyone else how the soul may be "awakened." Plato himself, in his seventh epistle, declares that nothing is to be gained from writing on subjects of this sort. He said to his correspondent:

One statement at any rate I can make in regard to all who have written or who may write with a claim to knowledge of the subjects to which I devote myself,—no matter how they pretend to have acquired it, whether from my instruction or from others or by their own discovery. Such writers can in my opinion have no real acquaintance with the subject. I certainly have composed no work in regard to it, nor shall I ever do so in future; for there is no way of putting it in words like other studies. Acquaintance with it must come rather after a long period of attendance on instruction in the subject itself and of close companionship, when, suddenly, like a blaze kindled by a leaping spark, it is generated in the soul and at once becomes self-sustaining.

And this, it seems to us, is Plato's circumlocutious way of saying that in order to awaken the soul, you have to awaken the soul.

Simply to discuss a question of this sort "knowingly" can easily become a piece of impertinence to the reader. And to ask about the soul, as though it were some commodity which may be easily described, is to create conditions which make fruitful consideration of the subject almost an impossibility. It is one of the misfortunes of our civilization that we habitually suppose that anything which is "real" is capable of simple definition, whereas no one, so far as we know, has been able to formulate a completely adequate verbal communication about the nature of the soul, except by reverting to the metaphysical vocabulary of some system of transcendental philosophy—and this, after all, is not the language of the market place, in which we like our definitions to be phrased. If we possessed a common metaphysical vocabulary, then questions about the soul might be discussed in some sort of intellectual counterpoint, but, lacking the vocabulary, it often seems better to say nothing at all.

The same difficulties afflict all mature critics of modern materialism, who are bound to say that materialists are somehow deaf to the voice of the spirit. This accusation has the form, if not the substance, of arrogance. One writer, Lawrence Hyde, has put the situation into a few, well-chosen words:

Any criticism which takes the form of charging people with deficiencies in perception is at best a delicate business. And this is particularly true in the present instance [the criticism of scientific materialism]. For by their repudiation of spiritual values our modern sociologists have placed anyone who attempts to contest their findings in an embarrassing position. Such a person is obliged either to accept their conclusions in silence—which is what most people who are at all sensitive are inclined to do—or, if he purposes to be aggressive, to counter them by pointing to considerations which are of such a nature that in the ordinary course of events they should never have to be referred to at all in such a

direct way. By this I mean that he is driven back on appeal to principles which should properly be expressed only by the creation of works of art or in the conduct of a life, and not exposed in this manner in their nudity. The normal and most effective method of opposing error in this field is that of simply affirming the truth without entering into argument with its detractors; the attitude adopted by the spiritual philosopher should in ordinary circumstances be that of Spinoza, who announced that "it was contrary to his habits to seek out the errors into which others had fallen."

Unfortunately, however, the situation with which we have to deal is of an exceptional nature. The minds of educated men and women today are being bewildered to a painful degree by a mass of conclusions, speculations, and theories which have their source in a distorted conception of the nature of human beings and their relationships. . . . It is necessary that the attack on superior values which is implicit in such thinking should be met at every point, that the nature of the issues involved should be exhibited in the clearest possible way, that the principles which are at stake should be defined with the maximum degree of precision. The process entails an insistence on all sorts of points which should never have to be underscored in this harsh uncompromising manner.

Needless to say, Mr. Hyde never becomes "harsh and uncompromising" in his rather remarkable book, *The Learned Knife*, in which he explores what seem to him—and to us—the unjustified assumptions of the current employment of scientific method. This passage, moreover, should afford a sort of solace for the self-consciousness and feeling of strenuousness which often overtake those who, in an age of cynicism and defeatism, are attempting to arouse an interest in philosophical idealism.

What, then, of awakening the soul? Perhaps, if the idea of "having" a soul were replaced by the idea of being one, this question might be more approachable. . . .