

DEATH AND REBIRTH

IT is difficult for most people to be intelligent about death for the reason that death is commonly regarded as the end of intelligence. This is true not only of materialism, but applies also to those who accept some theological version of immortality. An intelligent view of death will have to involve some means of fitting the idea of death into a rational scheme, and theological teachings about what happens after death are seldom rational in their appeal. Usually, they suggest an abrupt stoppage of the relationships that a rational man can work with and understand. There is nothing rational about the enjoyment of passive bliss throughout eternity. The human, the rational, intelligence finds joy and fulfillment in work and struggle and achievement, and a rational theory of immortality, therefore, ought to include the same order of experience that the present life affords, whether here, again, on earth, or on some subtler terrain of metaphysical existence. But to conceive this with the vividness necessary to intense personal conviction requires a strenuous act of the imagination—the sort of thinking, perhaps, that Socrates displays in the *Phaedo* and in other Platonic writings, and which gave him his extraordinary serenity in the face of death.

An intelligent attitude toward death is certainly possible for non-believers in personal immortality, too, but this would also involve an exceptional rigor of the spirit. The stoic philosophers of ancient Rome seem to have possessed this rigor. The stoics, however, were indifferent to immortality rather than deniers of it. As Lecky says in his *History of European Morals*:

Stoicism taught men to hope little, but to fear nothing. It did not array death in brilliant colors, as the path to positive felicity, but it endeavored to divest it, as the end of suffering, of every terror. . . . Life and death in the Stoical system were attuned in the same key. . . .

"Accustom yourself," said Epicurus, "to the thought that death is indifferent; for all good and all

evil consist in feeling, and what is death but the privation of feeling?" . . . Seneca, consoling Polybius concerning the death of his brother, exhorts his friend to think, "if the dead have any sensations, then my brother, let loose as it were from a lifelong prison, and at last enjoying his liberty, looks down from a loftier height on the wonders of nature and on all the deeds of men, and sees more clearly those divine things which he had so long sought in vain to understand. But why should I be afflicted for one who is either happy or is nothing? To lament the fate of one who is happy is envy; to lament the fate of a nonentity is madness."

The ancient stoic, however, unlike the modern materialist, felt himself to be a part of the spiritual order of things. He believed that "the Deity is an all-pervading Spirit, animating the universe, and revealed with especial clearness in the soul of man; and he concluded that all men are fellow-members of a single body, united by participation in the same Divine Spirit." The Roman stoics declared that man is not born for himself, but for the whole world. Among them the idea of personal virtue in all relationships was developed to a pitch of such intensity that they were able, as Lecky observes, to regard death as attuned to the same key as life.

The stoic view of death, or any philosophic attitude which regards death with equanimity, although without a firm conviction of immortality, is possible, it would seem, only for those who have eliminated the feeling of personal egotism. This is a stiff requirement for most human beings, but one that has been met by numerous skeptical philosophers, from Montaigne to present-day scientific thinkers. Here is the expression of a young English astronomer, Fred Hoyle, on the question of survival:

It seems to me that the greatest lesson of adult life is that one's own consciousness is not enough. What one of us would not like to share the consciousness of half a dozen chosen individuals? What writer would not like to share the consciousness of Shakespeare? What musician that of Beethoven or Mozart? What mathematician that of Gauss? What I

would choose would be an evolution of life whereby the essence of each of us becomes welded together into some vastly larger and more potent structure. I think such a dynamic evolution would be more in keeping with the grandeur of the physical Universe than the static picture offered by formal religion.

What is the chance of such an idea being right? Well, if there is one important result that comes out of our inquiry into the nature of the Universe it is this: when by patient inquiry we learn the answer to any problem we always find, both as a whole and in detail, that the answer thus revealed is finer in concept and design than anything we could ever have arrived at by a random guess. And this, I believe, will be the same for the deeper issues we have just been discussing. I think that all our present guesses are likely to prove but a very pale shadow of the real thing; and it is on this note that I must now finish. Perhaps the most majestic feature of our whole existence is that while our intelligences are powerful enough to penetrate deeply into the evolution of this quite incredible Universe, we still have not the smallest clue to our own fate. (*The Nature of the Universe*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1950.)

A clue to Mr. Hoyle's feelings in the matter, as to those of his predecessors, the Stoics, is afforded by the word "majestic." Men who ponder greatly on the nature of things are often led to the conclusion that an essential fitness prevails throughout the natural order, and that whatever the destiny which awaits beyond the portal of death, it will be an expression of the universal harmony in which the reflective mind always finds satisfaction and repose. If a man could forego his lust for personal survival for a calm acceptance of whatever the processes of nature have in store for him, he might be able to see and feel more clearly concerning the meaning of death, and learn to be less afraid.

For what, actually, is death, apart from our personal relationship to it? First of all, it is some kind of separation of the elements of what we call "life." Those elements now pursue their separate ways, forming new combinations and entering into other forms of existence. In this sense, there could be no science, nor even any life, without death. The chemist is as dependent upon the laws of disintegration as upon the laws of synthesis for the practice of his science. What would we think of an engineer who knew everything about how to put

things together, but nothing about how they became dissociated? All compounds, as Buddha said, are perishable, and every constructive process that can be imagined, whether in nature or in art, depends upon the dynamic reality behind this rule. The modes of death, then, are as important to us as the modes of life. We probably should say that life and death are not opposites at all, but that death, or the breakdown of combinations, is an aspect of life itself.

Why should we behave as though human death is the Great Exception? Why should we think that, when all nature dies to live again, the death of a man is a dark and evil thing? When Plato said that the art of the philosopher consists in learning how to die easily, he must have meant a gaining of a sense of fitness concerning death: the recognition that the dissolution of the body serves a purpose that is necessary to life—that this dissolution is like all the other processes of dissolution we know about and use constantly in our daily lives.

The fear of death is really a somewhat pathetic deprecation of the sense of identity which we prize and tremble at the prospect of losing. If our identity is real, it will not be lost. Nothing fundamental in nature is ever lost. Even matter, the apparently inert stuff of which our bodies are made, continues forever. It may undergo transformations, enter into synthesis after synthesis, dissipate into a stream of energy, or impart its essence to some other aggregate or activity—but whatever it is, it is not lost. Nor is form ever destroyed except temporarily. There is no matter without some kind of form—some pattern, energetic or static. And, why should we not say, too, that there is no form without mind, which may be called the indwelling principle of all relationships?

It is this mind, this sense we have of entering into relationships, of making them, learning from them, dissolving them and making new ones, that we do not want to lose. But if there could be nothing at all without mind, then so long as anything exists, mind will exist. But what about our mind? What about our personal self-consciousness and sense of integration?

Well, is our personal identity, after all, so wonderful that it should last forever? Perhaps it is,

in principle. Perhaps we can make it so. This seems to be the view taken as possible by Mr. Hoyle, who wants an immortal mind that will include Shakespeare, Mozart, Beethoven and Gauss. Supposing this were possible, we could hardly develop into such universal geniuses without undergoing some radical changes—"deaths," we might think of them, or dissolutions and recombinations, if we do not like the word "death."

In any event, such an approach to death seems vastly more sensible than the usual practice of disregarding death because we fear it as personal extinction. Why not assume that a human being has as much opportunity to "use" death, just as he uses every other type of dissolution in nature? The man who takes this view will certainly enjoy a saner life. There is something extraordinarily inane and adolescent about trying to live as though death were not a natural part of life. We should think it very foolish of any man to try to make a single suit of clothes "survive" forever. We expect a suit of clothes to wear out; we know this is unavoidable; and so we give our clothes a reasonable amount of attention and care, but no more. We make use of clothes according to some scheme of conformity to what we know about them. We do not devote all our energies to patching them up, and least of all do we, when they are completely worn out, put them in a very expensive box, paint them to look pretty, and then bury them under a piece of ground that has a thousand more important uses.

Are we so certain that bodies, much more than clothes, make the man? There is one thing, however, of which we can be certain, and that is that if we could learn to think of death as a natural process which, like all other natural processes, may be of use to the human intelligence which participates in it, we might begin to live lives of far greater happiness and constructiveness than those we now pursue. Simply to postulate an immortality of the spirit or mind could change our entire outlook upon existence. It would eliminate fear of death, which turns many people into anguished sufferers. It would make the last half of a man's life as much a time of eagerness and interest in experience as the first half. It would wipe out an incalculable amount of sham and

unworthy sentimentality with which we now try to hide the terrors of extinction. It would give a new meaning to "survival," a word which has almost the same psychological potency, today, as "security." And it would impart a quality of dignity to human existence by destroying the hunger for countless petty illusions which we now embrace in order to pretend, for a few short years, that death is something we have never heard of and never expect to encounter.

Our learned men and doctors of the mind speak a great deal of the need we have of coming to terms with life. But how can a man come to terms with life without at the same time coming to terms with death, which is an essential part of life? Our failure in this, perhaps, is the most deeply rooted psychosis of the age. It is fear, they tell us, which erects the barriers which make us mad. But if we can tear down the barriers which separate us from the rest of life; if we can see the germs of life in every atom of space—the seeds bursting with potential existence wherever we turn—then we may realize that our lives are like the lives of all the rest. Everything is ceaselessly reborn through the universal sharing of life. And human beings—their minds and souls—can be no exception.

Letter from **ENGLAND**

LONDON.—The 1949 Reith Lectures over the BBC radio network were given by Robert Birley, now headmaster of Eton, and, from 1947 to 1949, Educational Adviser to the British Military Governor in Germany. His subject was "Britain in Europe: Reflections on the Development of a European Society." With all the committees and commissions that have been and are still sitting in Western Europe, and the growing suspicion that, notwithstanding incessant activity, Western Europe is not reaching any real co-ordination or union in the things that matter, it is obvious that the question of Britain in Europe has become of more than academic importance.

The omnipotent State still exists, and no sufficient reasons other than strategic are adduced for its integration in a larger grouping. Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, envisaging the State as (to quote Dr. G. P. Gooch in his *Studies in German History*, 1949), "the realized ethical idea, the divine on earth, and, therefore, a law to itself," continues to influence, consciously or unconsciously, the thought of European peoples. As an exercise within the larger ideal of One World, the trials and tribulations of Western Europe have their lessons for all of us. Britain is being blamed for difficulties "which are in fact inherent in the European problem," observes *The Times*. How is this problem related to cultural issues?

Bertrand Russell has stated the peculiar features which distinguish Western culture as being the moral ideas which have their origin in Christianity, the political theories of law and self-government, and the intellectualism which finds its expression in the scientific method, effectively beginning with Galileo. Arnold Toynbee emphasizes the necessity of belief in a Transcendant God, if the Brotherhood of Man is not (in his view) to remain an impossible ideal. Indeed, his historical studies have been so inconsequential that they have led him to the conclusion that "the great need of the modern world is a rebirth of supernatural belief." Is it any wonder that mere legislators lose their way!

Apart from all interested motives, it may be said that, in Western Europe as elsewhere, there is a growing longing for union. The ideal of what may be called "a European Society" begins to shape itself in men's minds, if not fully as yet in their hearts. England's decision to join Western Europe is a revolutionary one, though Robert Birley has pointed out that, in the past, England

had undoubtedly a great influence on Europe. In the eighth century, St. Boniface came from Devonshire and was chiefly responsible for the conversion of the German tribes to Christianity, thus beginning the slow process of uniting Germany. In the same century Alcuin of York was summoned to Aachen by Charlemagne to lead the attempt to create a common literary culture for his Empire. Then in 1726 the young French writer, Voltaire, came to England, and his letters, published in France in 1734, brought this country forcibly to the notice of Europe. Locke and Adam Smith, too, were read all over Europe, and, as Robert Birley remarks: "the original ideas, which changed men's views on politics and social relationships and were to cause the great revolutions at the end of the century, came for the most part from this country."

To define what should today form our main contribution to the common way of life of Western Europe is to elucidate also the chief obstacles with which that same union is faced. Robert Birley mentions three qualities in the English way of life which seem to fulfill real needs in Europe today: (1) the strength of the social cohesions in this country, (2) our ability generally to preserve a balance between a belief in individual freedom and a sense of social responsibility, (3) the acceptance of the principle of the rule of law, to be worked out afresh in each phase of society: "We have to learn the very hard lesson, expressed once by AK, the Irish poet, that 'no country can marry any particular solution and live happily ever afterwards'." All this is far removed from the sterile analyses of Bertrand Russell or the effete supernaturalism of Arnold Toynbee. It is more related to the historical aspects of Jung's "Collective Unconscious." Even so, these contributions to the programme of European unity do not go down to the real issues. No true union of countries or individuals will be accomplished by the machinery of organization or the exchange of cultural values. With Amiel (writing in 1870), we must hold that, if liberty is to be saved, "it will be by the seekers after holiness, by those old-fashioned pious persons who speak of immortality and eternal life, and prefer the soul to the whole world; it will be by the enfranchised children of the ancient faith of the human race."

ENGLISH CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW

"THE MONKEY ON OUR BACKS"

FRANKIE MAJCINEK, in Nelson Algren's National Book Award Novel Winner, *The Man with the Golden Arm*, carries the cocaine habit back from a war hospital to the skid row of Division Street in Chicago. Frankie could feel the compulsion of the needle riding with him, spoiling the reputation of his "golden arm," won as dealer in Schwiefka's gambling joint. The Habit felt, he said, like a thirty-five-pound monkey on his back. Frankie pried the paws loose once, with the help of a girl who asked less than his invalid wife and gave more, but they dug themselves in again, and finally pulled the dealer onto a slab in the County Morgue. Here so many heroes of fiction end prematurely these days.

In this book about Frankie, Algren continues development of his feeling for personal tragedy, ever hovering, like the Nemesis of Homer, over the head of Collective Man. When Algren wrote *Never Come Morning*, another story of Chicago's Lost and Forgotten, it may have seemed he was only sure that a Nemesis hung over the Poles and the Negroes who lived in the wrong end of town. But we now see that Algren is a writer who believes that tragedy is universal. This is why *The Man with the Golden Arm* won the Book Award—because tragedy reaches men's attention with a sense of intimacy, whenever it is focussed by the artist who sees that "We are all a part of one another"—the sentence which finally convinced Precinct Captain Bednar he was guilty with the sins of all the men he booked, and impaled on the same cross. And, Algren says to us, so long as one man is impaled, so are we all. This is the strength of his writing; its weakness may be in the implication that the brotherhood of tragedy is permanent, the beauties of living never able to outweigh frustration. Here we may intuitively prefer Steinbeck to Algren, for Steinbeck seems to have some sort of faith that the game, even a bad one, may be worth its cost.

Why was *The Man with the Golden Arm* written? Is it in the nature of a crusade, an attempt to make a "Cause"; or simply an exposition, the result of careful, sympathetic observation? It is perhaps

both, but with the themes separately treated. The book is divided into two distinct parts. The tone of the first section is reminiscent of Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flats* or *Cannery Row*, in which the writer's tolerant amusement at the activities of characters who are lawbreakers and vagabonds makes them acceptable and even endears them to the reader. Algren introduces us to a tougher set, petty criminals of every sort. Though some are more vicious than others, they are all understandable, as we participate in their situations and conversations. Algren softens the psychological effect of witnessing their criminality, sometimes by a special kind of humor indigenous to the time and place.

The pages of literature are filled with rogues, beloved and perhaps even envied by readers. There is one such figure in popular current fiction who is reportedly fast becoming a favorite. This is Gulley Jimson in Joyce Cary's *The Horse's Mouth*. Gulley is served up with humor, too, like Frankie Machine in the first part of Algren's book, but Gulley, who, because of his total contempt for law and convention, could almost be classed a "criminal," still is forgivable and reasonable in that his thievery and chicanery are for a "good" purpose—the obtaining of materials with which to carry on his painting. Algren's people are different and a question arises whether anyone can feel *full* understanding or even pity for men who have apparently lost all spark of constructive living, any desire for a change to the better. Algren was successful in describing the horrible cravings of a morphine addict, almost as successful as Jackson in making understandable the sick cravings of the alcoholic in *The Lost Weekend*. But do the majority of readers come close to Algren's character, or are they simply pleased by being not quite so "impaled" as Frankie, Sophie and Drunkie John?

In the second half of *The Man with the Golden Arm* there is a change of mood, Algren becoming the out-and-out crusader. Gone is the condescending, amused tolerance. He strikes at the reader with passages of brutal realism, poignant descriptions of the hopelessness, chaos, and fear riding these lost people as the monkeys on all their backs. Parts are reminiscent of Thomas Wolfe in mood—and even in

phraseology, when the latter wrote of the "lost souls" of Brooklyn. Algren's people are so fundamentally intimidated by life that just to keep themselves going from day to day, out of reach of the law, is their only thought; just themselves—too bad for the others. Actually, the character closest to ourselves in Algren's story is the precinct captain who, year after year, has to book the same heads for the same crimes, seeing no changes of heart, hearing the same flippant or evasive answers. The passages about the captain are powerful; they have, shall we say, more than "sociological significance"? They have to do with philosophy, religion and the heart of man:

He [the captain] had to find out, he had to find out what he had done to himself by doing his simple captain's duty. It was time to be stoned. He had been so proud to be an enforcer of the laws men fell by, of being the kind of man who tempered Justice with Mercy. Now it was time to see himself whether there were any such things at all. If there were neither one nor the other for himself, he would do without. An iron life, an iron heart, he could wish for an iron death.

Alone below the glare lamp in the abandoned query room, stifled by a ravaging guilt, he knew now those whom he had denied, those beyond the wall, had all along been members of himself. Theirs have been the common humanity, the common weakness and the common failure which was all that now could offer fresh hope to his heart

Yet he had betrayed them for so long he could not go to them for redemption. He was unworthy of the lowliest—and there was no court to try any captain for doing his simple duty. No place was provided, by church or state, where such a captain might atone for everything he had committed in his heart. No judge had been appointed to pass sentence upon such a captain. He had been left to judge himself.

All debts had to be paid. Yet for his own there was no currency. All errors must ultimately be punished. Yet for his own, that of saving himself at the cost of others less cunning than himself, the punishment must be simply this: more lost, more fallen and more alone than any man at all.

The mood of Algren's book is one becoming better known to American readers with every passing year, for Algren is not the only contributor. It is the mood of writers determined to face

themselves nakedly in the mirror of their society. The "happy ending" is presently a little less likely to make the best-seller or prize-winning list, and less omnipresent in the magazine short story.

There is a challenge in facing all the evil that men do together, and it takes a kind of courage to meet that challenge, yet a courage of the last resort variety. The man who only faces without flinching is not quite a hero, and heroes we should still like to be, if we could only decide what we can be heroic about. The biggest monkey of all riding the back of man is the persuasion of original sin, or, phrased differently, the conviction of one's own inadequacy to transcend the tragic. The paws of this foreboding will be hard to loosen; we are culturally just beginning to realize that they are there.

COMMENTARY

PROGRESS REPORT

WHILE the discharge of 157 University of California professors for refusing to conform to the University's new employment requirements (see MANAS for June 7) has raised a cloud of gloomy doubts about the future of academic freedom in America, the prospects for racial equality have become much brighter as a result of three U.S. Supreme Court decisions.

The first decision abolishes segregation of Negroes in dining cars. Elmer W. Henderson, a Negro Government employee, was refused a seat in a dining car except at a table reserved for his race and curtained off from other tables. The Court held that this was in violation of the Interstate Commerce Act. Justice Harold H. Burton's opinion for the court said that "curtains, partitions and signs emphasize the artificiality of a difference of treatment which serves only to call attention to a racial classification of passengers holding identical tickets and using the same public dining facility."

The second decision ruled that Heman Marion Sweatt, a Texas law student, need not accept his education in a hastily established Negro law school without an independent faculty or library, but that the University of Texas must admit him to its "all-white" Law School. Chief Justice Vinson's opinion for the court declared that the University of Texas Law School "possesses to a far greater extent those qualities which are incapable of objective measurement but which make for greatness in a law school. . . ."

The third decision requires the University of Oklahoma to allow G. W. McLaurin, a Negro graduate student in education, to sit among white students, whether in class, in the library, or in the cafeteria. Oklahoma law permits Negro graduate students to attend the university, but obliges them to study in the library at a special desk on the mezzanine floor, to eat in the cafeteria at a different time or separate from other students, and

to sit in class in a railed-off section marked "Reserved for Colored." These restrictions, Justice Vinson's decision declared, "impair and inhibit his [Mr. McLaurin's] ability to study, to engage in discussion and exchange views with other students, and in general to learn his profession. . . ."

These cases are especially notable for the reason that the Department of Justice intervened to ask the Supreme Court to reverse an 1896 decision which established the "separate but equal" doctrine, by means of which segregation in schools and transportation has been legalized for half a century. While the Court took no action in this respect, the rulings in these cases will give peculiar force to the meaning of "equal," with the probable result that no state will be able to afford "separate but equal" accommodations for Negroes. What the Supreme Court failed to decide, the tax-payers may enforce.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

THE greatest help that can be given to a young person in relation to questions about "sex" is that which focusses his attention on *why* things are done and *how* they are done, and which aids him to perceive that the essence of morality is actually in attitudes and not in appearances. These approaches will strike an answering chord in a far greater number of adolescents than any argument from tradition or the status quo. What we have to count on in young people, as in all other humans, is a determination to discover the Truth. Young people are fully aware of the stereotypes of conventional pronouncements on good and evil; they sense them if they have not formulated them in words, and, if they desire to think things through for themselves, they will wish to pass above and beyond this unsatisfactory means for coming to terms with one of the most difficult matters in human existence.

Here, as in so many other instances, the parent cannot *give* the child an answer. What he can do is to help the child work out a method of thinking by which he can find answers for himself. But the difficult thing about such a parental attempt is that it must contain no classifications of good or evil which the adolescent understands he simply must accept at the outset. A young person will probably show enthusiasm for discussing problems relating to sex in proportion to the degree he is really allowed to think freely. Generally speaking, our democratic culture encourages the teacher to accompany the child on a *quest* for *truth*, rather than to impose certain conclusions. But many parents and teachers who have adopted this as the most enlightened method in respect to all else may yet have found it too difficult to actually apply to the realm of sex; it would entail, for instance, admitting that there have been in the course of history pre-marital involvements under rather unusual conditions, which have greatly served the human race. To

adopt this position, even for the purposes of discussion, however, means that the parent has temporarily to overcome some very strong and well-meaning protective instincts toward the child. We can't be surprised by this. It is natural to wish to protect a child, and to try to turn him away from the things which may result in unhappiness or harm. The parent reasons that he has had to forbid many things to protect the child from harm—ergo categorical "bads" are functional. Yet the fact remains that a young person is in an entirely different relation to the problems of sex than he once was to a hot stove, to ant poison, or to overeating candy. The promptings of sexual feelings and allied emotions are an integral part of the adolescent. He needs to understand them, not fear them.

It must, then, be the parent's purpose to encourage *thinking* rather than the acceptance of a certain set of mores; he will help the youth to see that no Act can be called "good" or "bad" on the basis of its external appearance. Any other approach will be inadequate because oversimplified; an apparent agreement of the adolescent with the parents' view will probably mean little and fail to endure. If we cannot rid ourselves of the temptation to attempt indoctrination through asserting that all pre-marital and non-marital contacts are inevitably evil, we obliterate the far more important question of *why* experiences classified in these terms are actually so often destructive. They are not destructive because they may be statistically labeled as "sexual deviations," but destructive because of failures in attitude, in honesty, in assuming responsibility for one's choices, or failures to seek a goal worthy of human potentiality.

Perhaps the next step in parent-youth discussion would be to try to determine the most constructive uses to which humans can put their energies. Even the child is able to see that the worthiest expenditures of energy are those which result in a deepening feeling of understanding

between people. To understand people, we must first respect them, consider them as "ends" in themselves and not merely as means to our ends. Casual sexual experiences, unaccompanied by any real concern for the other's welfare, or for our future association with them, lead to the condition described by Arnold Green (MANAS, 24, 1950) as "embattlement" between the sexes. When men or women—or boys or girls—adopt the position of trying to "get" something from others of the opposite sex they cease to look at members of that other sex as persons. The latter have become means to the end of one's own indulgence. And no one can be happy living a life of being periodically drawn to associate with a sex for which a concealed antagonism is felt. Moreover, the child who adopts a "libertarian" sexual code at an early age will find himself gravitating to a certain type of relationship—the only one he understands because it is the only one with which he is familiar. Often, this in itself prevents boys and girls from later discovering a worthwhile and lasting companionship. So the real problem for the sexually interested adolescent is the problem of determining what sort of human relationships are going to be most important to him, and in recognizing that it is impossible to build two entirely different kinds or *qualities* of relationships at the same time for in each instance we are building Ourselves as well a mode of conduct in relation to another.

There is one point about the relationships of the sexes which, though hardly a new one, cannot be repeated too often. It is neither a commandment nor a moralistic counsel to state that the essence of genuine intimacy between men and women is a mental sharing. Human beings live in their minds, and no amount of physical or emotional excitement can itself give sufficient continuity, or even happiness, in a marriage or involvement. Whenever an adult presumes to counsel an adolescent by suggesting that mutual enthusiasm should be a prerequisite to physical intimacy he is not implying—or at least he need not imply—that the psychic aspect of relationships

between the sexes is unimportant. But primacy of mind in all human affairs is demonstrated by the fact that the most transcendent emotions exist only where there is capacity for understanding and constructively using them. When we finish telling ourselves and our friends not to begin "sex education" by a long list of don'ts and viewings-with-alarm, we can of course recognize that there are many dangers and pitfalls about which our children or our pupils may need to have some intimation. We have here been attempting to indicate, however, that these warnings should neither be the beginning nor the heart of our approach to the matter; however important they might seem, they are incidental to the primary necessity of encouraging the young person to think for himself—to think for himself enough so that he will learn to value the thoughts of others in terms of their reasonableness.

FRONTIERS

The Balance of Nature

A RECENT issue of *Science News Letter* anticipates the extinction in the twentieth century of more species of animals and birds than in any other 100-year period in human history. While this prospect alarms the keepers of wildlife refuges and nature-lovers in general, the question of extinction does not seem to be the most serious aspect of this trend. The geological record contains evidence of the passing of countless forms of life and it is conceivable that when, in 1693, the last Dodo passed out of existence, the law of the survival of the fittest was having its way with a bird that had lost its hold on the necessities of life.

A distinction, at any rate, ought to be made between the human wish to preserve rare species as living "museum pieces," and the protest against the wanton slaughter of animals by hunters. The passenger pigeon, for example, which once existed in North America in billions, has been completely eliminated by hunters. As *Science News Letter* relates:

. . . men cut down forests in its nesting area. They devised a net that could catch thousands of pigeons at a crack (a million were netted from one flock in Michigan in 1876). Squabs, the young birds sold in every market. The last passenger pigeon died of old age in the Cincinnati Zoo in September 1914.

The Florida Keys deer, also, may soon be a fading memory:

The Fish and Wildlife Service says only 30 to 40 are still hanging on in mangrove-choked islands between Key West and the mainland.

They swim from key to key in search of fresh water. Far more dangerous than their thirst, however, are the illegal hunters. These "sportsmen," some coming from as far as Cuba, set fire to the keys or put dogs ashore. Then they wait in boats for the exhausted deer to try to escape by water.

Such illustrations could be multiplied. The chinchilla rabbit of South America, prized for beautiful fur, is threatened with extinction; there

are only 37 of the snow-white whooping cranes left in the world—birds which as the tallest of American waterfowl once darkened the skies in their annual migration. The last of the eastern heath hens died on Martha's Vineyard in 1931. The woodland caribou and the grizzly bears are also gone. As the *News Letter* writer remarks:

Wherever men have brought "civilization," wildlife which was good to eat, had pretty fur or feathers, or was fun to shoot at, met the greatest predator on the face of the earth.

But the ruthlessness of hunters is only a part of the story of man's relationship with nature. Humans have practiced another kind of "imperialism" in the processes of evolving their civilization, and have done so in the name of "progress." It may some day be discovered that even our "scientific" attempts at the control of nature have been misguided, leading to unexpected disasters. Julian Huxley, the eminent zoologist, has called attention to the possibility that the scientifically sponsored drive to wipe out the germs of infectious diseases may not be the best way to combat these diseases. Suppose we do succeed, he says, in eliminating some of these germs locally, or even universally: this will mean, also, that natural immunity to the diseases they cause will disappear along with the infection. Dr. Huxley recalls:

Before measles were known in the South Seas, there was no biological necessity for the South Sea Islanders to possess any immunity to the disease, and there were among them all grades of inborn and inheritable resistance, from zero to moderately high. When it was introduced, it killed like the Black Death, and by the elimination of those with least natural resistance, the average resistance of the race has been considerably raised. And the converse will hold: with the banishing of a disease, the biological need for resistance will disappear, the less resistant will survive just as well as the more resistant, and the average resistance of the population will gradually go down.

What will then happen if the disease is re-introduced after several centuries of banishment? It might be reintroduced during a war by an unscrupulous enemy; it might get in accidentally; the

nation might decline and pay less attention to sanitation, so that the barriers to the entry of the disease-germs were lowered. And in any such event, the disease would race through the country like flame through dry grass, killing by the tens of thousands.

The concept of "pest elimination" has worked havoc in other directions. "We gaily set about killing the carnivores that molest our domestic animals, the hawks that eat our fowl and game-birds; and find that in so doing we are also removing the brake that restrains the multiplication of mice and other little rodents that gnaw away the farmers' profits." Some years ago, after a plague of grasshoppers had laid waste many of the farms of the Middle West, a letter to the *New York Times* (Aug. 8, 1937) pointed out that the Department of Agriculture had for several years past advocated aggressive destruction of the coyotes because of their occasional depredations upon sheep, cattle and poultry. But after the coyote population had been reduced, the wild rabbits, previously devoured by the coyotes, multiplied into a major economic nuisance. Now the rabbits had to be trapped, shot and poisoned out of existence; but the rabbits, this correspondent maintained, fed upon grasshoppers, and with the rabbits destroyed, the hopper pest became endemic to the regions where there were no rabbits to eat them! The further comment is made that the use of poison sprays to kill off various insect pests has the effect of also poisoning the birds which eat the insects, rendering the countryside increasingly dependent upon artificial controls.

According to Julian Huxley, man "has done more in five thousand years to alter the biological aspect of the planet than has nature in five million." He might have added that the disastrous effects of this meddling with the balance of Nature may be largely due to the lack of reverence for Nature with which man carries on his aggressive and acquisitive activities, and to the ignorance which is always present when power is exercised without a sense of responsibility for the great fraternity of Life.

Has it Occurred to Us?

VARIOUS protectors of the American young and innocent have had hard words recently for the "Hollywood" standard of life, and special censure has again been directed at film stars for failing to inspire the great American movie public by their conduct in private life as well as (occasionally) on the screen. Much confusion is betrayed in the opinions and views thus expressed, which often leave in the mouth the bad taste of self-righteousness, while the frenzy in certain quarters speaks ill for the strength of all *other* protectors of what is called morality.

But has it occurred to us that there is an altogether different sense in which the actor and actress may be expected to conduct themselves with more dignity and intelligence than the ordinary or non-dramatic individual ?

It is commonly recognized that although some actors are lost in or inseparable from a particular role, the artist of creative spirit is known for the ability to realize and project a character utterly contrasted with his own. Unfortunately, perhaps, Hollywood—working usually with something less than original spirits, and concerned only incidentally, in most cases, with the often thankless task of evolving a distinguished work of art—has given currency to the reverse type of performer: one whose imagination is so untrained that every role becomes only an imitation of his own limited personality. We have had great men and famous whose biographies were sketchily pinned on a carefully costumed manikin in period makeup and then expected to vibrate as in life. There can be few sights more distressing to a respecter of persons.

We take the liberty of imagining how a great artist might think of his work. The field is as broad as men are individual, and, whether painter or novelist or actor, the artist must, it would seem, be intrigued by the necessity to fathom human nature, to read all kinds of characters, and to experience by observation and sympathy every condition of life. The only man who can truly be called prosaic is he who does not realize that no human being is limited to one manner of existence. A simple, unchanging

set of circumstances may belong to a man from birth to death, and yet his life—by reason of the inner man's mobility and freedom—may be one of strong thoughts, vivid companionships, and wide-ranging import.

The artist within the limitations of his medium, like the man in an apparently rigid personal situation, has need of the power of transcendence. In two dimensions, with daubs of paint, he must somehow contrive to show the life, feeling and genius (for each man has a genius) of his subject. Or he must, through words on paper, manage to fill the reader's mind with the sound, the fury, and the music of human action. The actor, in a no less circumscribed form, must transform the stage with seeming, and evoke reality in the midst of makeshifts and props. Yet each of these artists, when casting upon us the spell of an imagination made visible, does more than entrance and amaze us, for is he not implying that life is what man creates it, that circumstances are what man may make of them, that limitations exist only so that the mind may learn its power to surpass them?

The notion persists that persons of talent and of special gifts must somehow be above the common vicissitudes of human experience, and it would be difficult to account for this idea. It may be the outcome of an unspoken feeling that character should develop harmoniously, that precocious knowledge without unusual moral fibre is as regrettable as a fanatically developed will without the balancing force of sane convictions. But whatever its origin, the idea of the balanced genius, of one with remarkable skill and an equally remarkable sense of responsibility for the use of that skill, is not yet extinct, even though there are more than enough exceptions to disprove the "rule."

Has it occurred to us that this notion belongs not to "artists" and special people only, but to man himself, whatever his talents and medium of expression—that "all the world's a stage" for any player alert enough to catch the cues?