

NOTES FOR REFORMERS

REFORMERS are largely in the ranks of the unemployed, these days; at least, they are not able to work very much at reforming. Apart from the fact that in a time of general hysteria and anticipation of war it is difficult to interest anyone in any kind of reform, there is still the unpleasant realization to face that we don't have any really persuasive theories of reform, any more. Even the people who have not allowed themselves to be stampeded into a reactionary political position are honestly skeptical of the methods of reform which were popular during most of the first half of the twentieth century. The idea was that you improve the lot of the common man by controlling the rich and the powerful through social legislation. But now we see that, in order to put this sort of theory of reform to work, *someone* must be given power, and there is no way of being sure that the power will be intelligently and constructively used. When you take the power away from the capitalists and give it to the State, the State shows itself to be capable of excesses and inhumanities which make the sins of the capitalists look like Sunday School mischief. And the State's claim to righteousness and infallibility is far more formidable than the special pleading of the free enterprisers. Church, Rugged Individualism, and State—all three have promised to show the way to the Promised Land, and all three have led us into war and misery, in that order, and on an ascending scale.

A reformer is a man concerned with the common lot; almost by definition, he is a *social* reformer. He is something different from a saint, whose business seems to be to persuade men to become individually perfect. A reformer is interested in the condition of man while in the process of becoming perfect. He sees that reaching perfection may take a long, long time. Plato, who for the purpose of discussion may be called the first of the great reformers of Western history, set a pattern for reform which was probably as good as any, in principle, that the mind of man can devise. Plato, it seems to us, grasped the issues of the reforming activity better than any of his successors and imitators. This judgment depends, of course, upon a special interpretation of Plato's great book, *The Republic*, but

it is an interpretation which is not without support from modern scholarship. We should like to illustrate first, however, what, of a certainty, Plato did *not* intend as his message and instruction to all future reformers.

We have three spokesmen to introduce. The first is the Grand Inquisitor of Dostoevsky's novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. According to the story, the Inquisitor is travelling with his entourage through medieval Spain, when he comes upon a street-corner speaker who says he is Christ returned to earth. The Inquisitor promptly has the "vagabond" clapped into a nearby dungeon, and, in the dead of night, visits him. It soon becomes evident that Christ has indeed returned, and the Inquisitor states the case for getting Jesus to go back where he came from, and without delay. "You," he tells the Christ—and this is a rendition, not a quotation—"expected too much of poor, weak, and sinful human beings. We, the Church, that is, understand these people. We give them security and happiness, while you—you invite them to a struggle which is far beyond their miserable powers." The Inquisitor has great eloquence. At any rate, Jesus goes away, although, apparently, he was merely convinced that this was not the time for him to return.

Our second spokesman is a member of nearly every Rotary Club in the United States. He is the advertising executive who gets up at luncheon meetings to explain how salesmanship is really the secret of the Good Life. By creating new wants and desires, he urges, advertising moves merchandise from factory to store to home. Prosperity blooms in every town and hamlet, and the advertising man earns the crown of altruistic endeavor.

Leon Trotsky is the third spokesman. Early in his career, Trotsky declared that the great engine of social revolution is self-interest. Without appealing to self-interest, he insists, the revolutionary leader can accomplish nothing. History makes it plain that no Marxist leader has ever ignored Trotsky's rule. It is true enough that the aroused self-interest of the masses is a weapon of incalculable ferocity, but it seems equally evident that only a corresponding amount of

terrorism makes possible the control and use of this weapon. Meanwhile, the idea of "reform" loses its original meaning. The philosophy of self-interest leads rapidly to the theology of naked power, until the rule of absolutism penetrates to every rank and order of society.

So, these three, the Grand Inquisitor, the Advertising Man, and the Radical who espouses the Materialist Interpretation of History are in basic accord on their definition of human nature. To build the Beloved Community, or a prosperous Utopia, you rely upon and expect human weakness, the multiplication of wants, conveniences and comforts, and the power of self-interest. These, they tell us, are the springs of human action, and the planner or reformer who counts without them is a visionary, a dreamer, or a reactionary.

What about Plato? What would he have said to these three? Plato's critics, and they are found in every school, lay great stress on his dislike of the romancing poets; they regard with great disfavor his harsh treatment accorded to atheists and unbelievers when reason fails to make them see the Light. But was Plato only the first and greatest of the Utopians, the forerunner and teacher of all subsequent makers of social blueprints? He has often been called this—and both "fascist" and "communist" besides. However, we have the impression that, most of all, Plato was an allegorist, an instructor who used the myth, the play, and the idea of the State merely as means to get across to his readers certain leading ideas about human nature.

Instead of a rigid caste system, *The Republic* seems, to us, to set forth an analysis of the character of human beings—the levels of motivation and action in all men. This, we think, is the proper study of reformers. There is a philosopher and a guardian in every man. And in every man there is a warrior, as well as an unthinking clod. There is wisdom and discipline, more in some than in others, and ungoverned passion and apathy, more in some than in others. The natural "castes" that emerge everywhere in history, past and present, are but these dominances coming to the surface. And Plato's book, quite possibly, is no more than an invitation for us to face the moral diversities in ourselves.

All these things are in human nature, but Plato, unlike the inquisitor, the merchandising expert, and the radical, placed his faith in what is best in men, instead of what is lowest, if not worst. The wise guardian, he maintained, must rule; and, we might add, if he does not rule in the individual—or in enough individuals—he can never rule society.

Plato, in short, chose the hard way in setting out to be a social reformer. Socrates was his spokesman, and Socrates, as the *Apology* makes plain, never ran for office. Socrates was an educator of individuals—any individuals who would listen to him. Socrates was interested in helping his listeners to comprehend the foundations of their own thought and behavior. It is as though Plato is telling us that "reform" is an idle dream unless it is really a species of education, a department in the great educational project of life. The hard way, in short, is the only way.

What stops the individual from realizing his ideals? It is the recalcitrance of his psyche, which will not obey his will. It is the inconstancy of his purpose, which flies off in several directions at once. And what frustrates the reformer but these same susceptibilities, writ large, in the mass, organized and even "educated" by the inquisitors, the advertising men, and the stirrers and exploiters of self-interest?

Reform, genuine reform, can never be less than an engagement with the destiny of the whole man. To change only the environment is like building a theater when there is no play to be produced. It is like training but never running in the race. But the play is the thing, and the race, whether we know it or not, is inescapable. The good life can never be good without a high purpose for every human being. To try to construct the environment of the good life without taking into account what we are to do with our lives, afterward, is no better than building comfortable barracks where men can waste away their lives doing nothing important. And that, come to think of it, is the kind of a world we are now moving toward, without wanting it in the least.

Letter from **ENGLAND**

LONDON.—A statement from a Religious Bodies Consultative Committee, prepared jointly by Anglican, Roman Catholic, Free Church, and Jewish members of the Committee, declares that "there exists a passionate effort to destroy the institutions built upon these beliefs and to set in their place a new world order, wholly materialistic in conception, denying the spiritual nature of man, despising absolute morality, and relying on violence for its complete justification." Referring to the idealistic contribution made by Europe to the world, the signatories mention as the first of these ideals that human personality is sacred, and that truth is an absolute. "The Spirit of man has power to choose." The statement then goes on to say:

The ethical outlook here summarized has grown up gradually in Europe and the Near East over a period of nearly 4,000 years. It has been embodied in religious institutions and legal and political systems which were themselves rooted in the fundamental belief that man is the creation of a Supreme Power, the author, the judge, and if he will have it so, the saviour of his being. Deeply embedded in the Greco-Roman tradition lies the warning against *hubris*.

Undoubtedly, the committee speak for all those who are under contract to impart religious orthodoxy when they add as "a fact" to be recognized as the foundation on which European civilization has been built, the Bible picture of "God, the creator and ruler of mankind, the guide and inspiration of his people, whose will is the law and strength of man's being." Naturally, they promise "complete disaster" if man refuses "to recognize the divine demand for his obedience and allegiance."

Similarly, we see in the writings of Bertrand Russell and other apologists for what has been called "the New Scepticism" the anxieties and

apprehensions accompanying the existing challenge of mass civilization to intellectual independence and cultural achievement. "Rugged individualism," whether in the field of scholarship or economics, seems to have had its day. The pinnacles of intellectual fame have been levelled to the plains of collective mediocrity. Man has transferred his war for security in earthly affairs from the unit to the species. Here is no free co-operation in the pursuit of aims that give meaning to human destiny; but mass appeals to "enlightened" self-interest, with an overriding State determining the limits within which man is free to think and act. These apprehensions are summed up by Mr. Isaiah Berlin, for example, in a recent issue of *Foreign Affairs*, where he appeals for "more enlightened scepticism . . . less fervent application of general principles, however rational or righteous. . . ."

It has been said that the certainties of one age are the problems of the next. True it is that the dogmas of the Christian churches and the assurances of materialistic science, now that these have become re-embodied in the new ideological forces of today, are the contemporary "realities" of the economic and political worlds. Apart from the fact that Christian potentates have never hesitated to use the sword to propagandize the faith, the irony of the statement of the Religious Bodies Committee lies in the fact that history bears witness to the repeated blindness of ecclesiastics to "the dignity attached to man" (a phrase used in the manifesto). No longer is it the fashion to defend Christianity, as an organized institution, on the ground that it is an expression of truth. Rather is it claimed to be socially useful, or, as in the case of the declaration by the Joint Churches Committee, that the religion of which the members are official exponents, is the source and defender of "European ideals." It is too often forgotten that if truth, justice, and love, in conformity with the simple injunctions of the Gospels, are not the accepted code of European nations, the fault lies as much in the pretensions and hypocrisies of institutional Christians as in the

violent attempts to overthrow the existing order. "The summary of seven hundred years of Christian expansion in northern Europe," wrote Mr. J. M. Robertson in *A Short History of Christianity*, "is that the work was mainly done by the sword, in the interests of kings and tyrants." The history of Europe affords little hope for the sanctity of human personality at the hands of the churches.

Nor can we look for much help in securing "rights to life, freedom, and security" to an amoral scepticism, scientific or otherwise. Wholesale negation is as far from reality, and as dangerous to mankind, as wholesale credulity. And the same criticism may be advanced against the spiritual vacuum now advocated by the New Scepticism, which tells us that it really does not matter so much what we believe, provided we adopt "less fervent application of general principles."

Upon what, then, does the future of Europe depend? Surely, as Professor R. H. Tawney said in another connection, "on an act of choice between incompatible ideals, for which no increase in the apparatus of civilization at man's disposal is in itself a substitute." That act of choice is native only to a soul that has freed itself from the arid dogmas of the past, as well as from the "enlightened" scepticism of today which would have us retreat within the fortress of moral indifference, to the neglect of the obligations implicit in the unity of all nature.

ENGLISH CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW THE "WAR PROCESS"

WE are still reaping the harvest of "penetrating reflections" on World War II in our popular novels. The cycle since 1945 has been an interesting one. As might be expected, the earliest stories were usually unformed and jerry-built tales. Later, however, book after book of considerable merit appeared. These have been mostly explorations of psychological common denominators for the unfortunates who fought the war, with little but formal attention paid to the matter of what side anyone was on. As in Irwin Shaw's *The Young Lions*, much of what the artist-psychologist (and that is what good novelists have to be) does is to establish truths which are equally valid on both sides of the "front."

In any case, we can be grateful for many of the reflections inspired in writers by that combination of Götterdämmerung, Walpurgis Night, Dachau and the Last Supper, which was World War II. "The evil that men do" is only hopeless evil when no insights are forthcoming about its nature. If we are privileged to have insights about dark deeds, we are something better than tragic—we may be tragedians in the better Shakespearian sense, or in the Greek sense, believing in the natural-moral-laws, the "Nemesis" of the *Iliad*. And then we may feel that we learn enough about ourselves to have a greater sympathy for the equally complicated relationships of all the humans who surround us, however different their cultures.

The present post-war authors sound to us a great deal more mature than those of 1920. While the AEF was out after the Kaiser, the revolutionary novelists were out after the munitions makers and the general betrayal of The Masses by Anglo-American capitalist intrigue. But most of the novels presently being published show an analysis less naïve in tone. Authors now do not wish to be political in any sense whatsoever; they don't even think they *should* be. The war process has become so big, so all-engulfing, that the populations involved in total wars must be classified not in terms of nationality, but in terms of their contacts with the "war experience."

Even a book such as *River of the Sun*, January Book-of-the-Month selection, by James Ramsey Ullman (also author of *The White Tower*), contains a few remarkable passages on the moral equilibration of the war process. Mr. Ullman, we fear, has slipped down the literary hill a couple of country miles since he wrote *The White Tower*, but we are nevertheless interested to see that his reflections on the war-work of an aviator in serving the cause of the Democracies, which received a bit of attention in *The White Tower*, now leaves the author in no doubt about what to say. It does not appear that Ullman says these things because he wants to be popular. Here, as elsewhere in *River of the Sun*, he is obviously not trying to write the-story-most-people-like-to-hear:

Major Mark Allison, said the Oakland Tribune one late spring day in 1945, returned home yesterday after four years of as wide and varied experience as perhaps any pilot in the Army Air Force.

Yes indeed. Very wide. Very varied. I had dropped bombs on airfields, fortifications, factories, power plants office buildings, street corners, tenements, museums churches, kindergartens and hospitals. I had killed Germans, Italians, Frenchmen, soldiers, politicians, grocers, linotype operators, cripples, schoolchildren, great-grandmothers and nursing babies. By the time the war ended I was an honored master-craftsman at my trade. "I'll tell you something off the record, Allison," my commanding general confided to me on the day I was separated. "If the show had lasted a little longer in the ETO, you'd have been one of the first to carry an A-bomb."

Sometimes, lying there on my bed in the Pensao Alberti, I would try to think back to those days; but there was nothing much to think about. What I had done in the war was neither more nor less than thousands of other men had done, and that of course had been the thing that made it possible. The lines were drawn clear, you knew what your job was; and the fact that that job was destruction on a scale never before known in history made very little difference. Once in a while—not often, but once in a great while and after a great many drinks—you would try to talk about War and Death and Fear and Guilt and the other upper-case abstractions that nibbled like mice at the margins of your mind, but even then there was nothing much to say. The terrible part of it was that you lived in a world in which you could do such things without guilt. That was the way it was. You

did what you had to do. Another bourbon, Mac, and light on the water. *Do not judge me, Lord God; I only work here.*

Yes, you had worked there: at your trade. After a while you worked superlatively well. It was not until later that you began to realize that you would never work at anything so well again; that in piloting your bomb-loads you had reached a height of effectiveness and importance compared to which the rest of your life would be an aimless mediocrity. As a flier—an instrument of destruction—you were an integrated purposeful mechanism, performing its appointed function. As a civilian, you were something quite different. As a human being.

Call it Treason by George Howe (issued by Viking in 1949, but now available in a twenty-five-cent edition) is another unusual war tale, "based on an actual episode of U.S. Army Intelligence—an authentic picture of the hazardous world of espionage." It is an inside-Germany story, exploring the whole gamut of attitudes encountered by the German soldier who, after being captured by the Americans, volunteers to spy against the Fatherland in order to bring the Nazi regime to a quicker end. The atmosphere of the book is convincing. For a quotation of some psychological value, we choose a few lines from the speech of the ailing Nazi general:

It is insane to claim that we can press back the horde of savages from the east and the west. But tomorrow, to my division, I shall claim it. Until the ruin strikes, we shall be as stern and as brave as we have been to win the greatest victories in history. And I tell you the ruin will not tarnish them. . . . History will never forget these five years when no German soldier has swerved from the path of honor, in Tunisia or at Stalingrad or on the River Platte, or in Norway or France or Holland, in the air or at sea or on the ground. They quibble about ghettos and concentration camps. I brush aside their wailing, and history will soon forget it. It is nothing compared to the cleansing, I can even call it the consecration, of a whole great nation. A hero is killed but his heroism lives on. Only a day later the coward dies and is forgotten with his cowardice. . . .

As readers will note, perhaps with either puzzlement or annoyance, we have been running down the Better People again, and in this last, trying to appreciate as sympathetically as possible (we cannot—in truth—"brush aside" Dachau), a Nazi.

First we allow Mr. Ullman to show the worst of all that may be said about the U.S. Army Air Force, and then we invite Mr. Howe to suggest—just a little—that some of the warped and peculiar Germans had something heroic about them. But this is the whole point of the war novels we are considering—the fact that they present attitudes and viewpoints which may deepen our understanding of the evil that men do. As orthodox commentators have pointed out, one of the reasons we are apt to have a war with Russia is because no free circulation of opinion is possible under the Soviet dictatorship. There are no "pocket books" available in Russia, working quietly at stretching minds and lessening prejudices. This parallel, of course, is hardly fair, for the reason that novels of this sort did not appear for mass circulation until Germany was a pile of rubble, but we could really use, today, the insights which such authors could give us were they able to come into close and sympathetic contact with various phases of Russian life and problems. Lacking the opportunity for this sort of reading, we yet have something of an advantage in being able to see how misleading were our wartime notions of all human beings on the other side--Germans and Japanese. And from seeing this, we might come to a rather obvious conclusion—that "all the Russians" may be different from the version propaganda gives us, just as "all the Germans" are now realized to be.

COMMENTARY

WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE?

FOR some time, now, we have been saving a quotation from Raymond Moley on Politics in the United States. It first appeared in *Newsweek*, last November, as commentary on a particular campaign, but it is general enough, and accurate enough, to add another dimension to this week's leading article. Mr. Moley says things that should be said more often:

We can't all have all we want. No government . . . can make good such promises. The tricky people who make them do not expect to make them good. They will as always cover their failure by blaming someone else. . . .

Another moral blemish in the appeal of the politicians who claim to speak for the working man is stark, brazen, unqualified materialism. The copious expensive literature of political agencies . . . offers nothing but argument for more material benefits. There is no hint of the need for those things that touch the life of the mind and the spirit. The appeal is all stomach and no heart.

What kind of people do they think Americans are? Has politics degenerated to a point where its objective is the kind of life that might haunt the dreams of a savage? . . . There is plenty of talk of a good life. But in that talk attention is fixed entirely upon the material basis of a good life, never upon what should be done with life after its material needs are supplied. In fact, the appeal . . . is against the very things that bring reality to life once material security is attained.

It is a campaign against education.... Abraham Lincoln, like _____, had no college education. But his glory was not in his lack of opportunity, but in his self-education. . . . Are boys and girls out there to be told that success lies in ignorance, not in knowledge?

There are sneers at _____'s forebears because they, too, were blessed with security and attained eminence. Is a young man. . . to be told by this election that if he seeks a life of public service the memory of his father and grandfather is to be fouled? . . .

Are the gates of public service open only to those who promise falsely, scatter hatred, mock at education, shrink from independence, and walk humbly with materialistic gods?

Is there any political party to which these strictures do not apply? Such appeals, of course, are seldom "intentional" at the start. The drive to power always begins with the assertion of high aims. Even "reform" movements, setting out with unquestionably humanitarian motives, succumb to the lure of the "practical," when political power is regarded as the necessary means to their ends. And this, perhaps, is the basic delusion—that power, in and of itself, has anything to do with human good.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

"Children . . . and Ourselves" often refers to the zest for life which one feels in "the spirit of adventure," the thrill of the unknown, of new horizons. No doubt every normal boy lives in this delicious anticipation. However, in the light of Dr. White's psychological reorientation of the problem of "equality," in his *Educating Our Daughters* (MANAS, Nov. 8, 1950), girls have less opportunity to "anticipate adventure." Yet many women wish for adventure, too, and are not content to simply breed. (In Dr. White's dream world, you have babies for seventeen years.)

Another question for Dr. White, this time about schooling *during* the child-bearing years. Should not mothers, too, be simultaneously engaged in supplementing their store of knowledge via the best school or university facilities, to meet each new need of the child?

Frankly, I like best the plan carried out by Ethel Goldwater and her husband—share and share alike, six months in and out of the home for each.

APPARENTLY we did something less than an adequate job in reporting the emphases of Dr. White's book, for the present questioner seems to mistake his position. One might even say that White's chief inspiration is his conviction that women must learn to look forward to a destiny *other* than home-making. When he proposed "seventeen years" as an expected time for special preoccupation with the family, his real intent was to point out that seventeen years is still a small portion of one's life, and that it is the spirit of independent learning, preserved and intensified during this interim, which finally allows women to re-establish themselves as creative individuals when their special tasks have been successfully completed.

Far from being a Conservative, Dr. White may be regarded as something of a Radical. He clearly does not believe that the "family" is an end in itself, but rather a means for the mutual education of young and old. The end of life, he is implying, is a full awareness of the truth that living stops when learning stops, and that enjoyment

never parallels acceptance of a static condition, no matter how secure or apparently enjoyable that static condition may be. And must we not consider, on any growing view of man's potential intelligence, that no grouping of humans is ever more than a temporary means to the end of further learning?

When people come to regard the family as an Institutional End-in-Itself, they will obviously oversimplify its values and functions. There is nothing valuable, *per se*, in "living a family life," the only values coming from the deepening of understanding and experiences which *may* occur. When the family becomes an end in itself, moreover, it becomes an excellent means to the end of a dictator or ecclesiastical authority. We will observe that the Catholic Church, from medieval times to the present, has done the greatest amount of talking about the sanctity and the end-allness and be-allness of the family. Similarly, the totalitarian regimes controlled by Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany gave special state awards for large model families—and this was not only from the standpoint of interest in numerous children for future national manpower. Contented families, provided they can be contented with minimal stereotypes of expectation, give stability to a dictatorial regime. Families often have settled propensities for accepting the prejudices and preconceptions of the dominant member of the family. Thus the paterfamilias, as Hannah Arendt once showed many years ago, provided an excellent foundation for blind acceptance of the caprices and beliefs of the bigger Father—the Dictator.

Modern sociology has adopted a constructive position in respect to our sentimentalized and unthought-out generalizations about family virtue. The sociologists simply use the term "family unit." The family unit may be considered as good, or bad, in terms of its function in relation to the lives of the individuals involved. It is not ever good just because it is The Family. The family unit held together by religious or by societal pressure, and

on no other grounds, can ultimately lead to psychological and sociological disorganization. And the psychiatrists have often been bold enough to assert that society benefits more from some divorces than it could possibly benefit from prolongations of an uncongenial home atmosphere. One of the effects of this broader and more critical view of the function of the family in human life is that it suggests a different type of "family unit" for different individuals, rather than a stereotype which serves all equally. Such suggestions are good, for nothing is more psychologically retrograde than a person—or a family—satisfied to be what people like to think it "ought" to be, and nothing more.

This must be the reason, we think, why Plato went to such lengths in his *Republic* to challenge the prevailing conceptions of family life. Plato probably did not actually believe that all children should be separated from their parents in the ideal state. But by using the device of a startlingly different concept—that of non-partisan parents—he perhaps hoped to stimulate deeper thinking. We certainly will not create a cooperative society unless the parents of children transcend an excessive partiality for their own offspring.

Our lack of clear and close thinking about the social institutions we inherit trips us up. We have gone on preaching the virtues once associated with the cooperative family economy, in an urban society affording no opportunity for their actual practice. In consequence, the children acquire a positive distaste for the pious platitudes of their elders. The platitudes are irrelevant, and "the family" may become something from which children actually wish to escape, for humans, young or old, always have an urge to escape an atmosphere of self-deceit. The children's prejudice against the innumerable attitudes their parents and grandparents tell them they *ought* to hold will subsequently make it more difficult for them to create a happy "family unit" of their own.

This is not to say that what is generally called family life is not one of the key experiences for the

deepening of human nature, but it is to say that we must consider both an intellectual and moral obligation to show respect for innovations. The Ethel Goldwater experiment, for instance, to which the questioner refers, should be a most useful point of departure for discussions between husbands and wives. The value of Dr. White's contribution is partially in the fact that he provides an abbreviated but accurate historical background for our evaluation of the family, and partly because his own recommendations are certainly innovations. On Dr. White's definition, for instance, the ideal woman is not conservative, but ingenious and creative. She is not content to accept a patterned role in the home, yet eager to explore all the learning potentialities inherent in her necessary and enjoyable task of raising and educating children. And when they are raised, she still has somewhere to go and things of her own to do.

FRONTIERS

A Tilt At Immortality

IT is probably as much of a mistake to call a man a "materialist" because he writes against so-called "religious" ideas as it is to say that the churches, because they employ the vocabulary of religion, are the custodians of our "spiritual values." For some three or four centuries of Western history, many of the men who have been against the angels have been for human freedom and the emancipation of the mind. Materialism—by which we mean philosophical materialism, as distinguished from mere animalism in personal behavior—has therefore been the credo and gospel of countless humanitarians and rebels against oppressive authority. It follows, therefore, that there is a double problem in attempting to evaluate the issues between spiritual and materialistic ideas. There is first the idea itself, in metaphysical isolation, and then there is what men claim as the meaning and importance of the idea. Take for example the idea of immortality. In its most simple form, it is the proposition that when the human body dies, *something* continues to live, and that that "something" is of sufficient integrity to be termed the "soul" or the "reality" which formerly animated the body. This, we suppose, can be termed a spiritual idea, if spirit be taken to mean a substance which is capable of intelligent existence apart from the coarse rind of a physical body.

But then suppose that a small group or caste of men claims to have exclusive information concerning the workings of immortality, and even power over its processes. Suppose it is asserted that death is simply the portal to either an infinitude of agony or endless ineffable bliss, depending upon the beliefs and loyalty of the individual to the group or caste of priests. In these terms, immortality is no longer a spiritual idea, but an idea which has become guilty, by association with a spurious system of rewards and punishments, of an attack on the self-determination of man.

In coming to this conclusion, we have, of course, redefined the meaning of "spirit," or "spiritual." Our first definition could be called "metaphysical." It had to do with a possible scheme of things, in which, it was suggested, spirit is a more enduring sort of reality than matter. But when any theory or proposed scheme of reality is used as a weapon or a bribe to control human behavior, the metaphysical classification of the system loses its importance, giving way to more dynamic judgment. Whether an idea is spiritual or not now depends upon how it affects the practice of human freedom.

This is our second definition of "spiritual." An idea is "spiritual," we may say, when it has a liberating effect on human beings—when it makes men think more deeply and freely, when it brings courage to their hearts and inspires their minds with self-reliance. Instead of being metaphysical, this definition is dynamic or functional.

Probably, a whole series of books could be written to show how functional ideas are rendered into metaphysical terms, and then are allowed to become rigid, in the form of dogmas, until a renewal of "spirituality" attacks and breaks them down. The new spirituality is usually skeptical toward all metaphysics, and only reluctantly and gradually translates itself into a new set of metaphysical doctrines. But when the translation is complete, new dogmas are already on the way and the spirit of freedom gathering its forces for still another revolution and overturning.

Some such introduction as the foregoing seems pertinent for reference to a book like Corliss Lamont's *The Illusion of Immortality*, which first appeared in 1934, and is now available in a revised and amplified edition. Mr. Lamont is clearly concerned with the cause of human freedom, so that it is fair to say that he writes his book with a "spiritual" purpose. Yet the metaphysical system or attitude he proposes is as clearly on the side of what we today call Materialism. If the reader is able to separate the author's purposes from his conclusions, there is

great value to be had from reading the book. For Mr. Lamont is an exponent of freedom engaged in an attack on any and all theological systems which betray human beings into the bondage of belief. In doing so, he seems also to betray himself into a measure of bondage to denial, which may, in the long run, be as constricting and oppressive as the bondage to belief. But meanwhile, *The Illusion of Immortality* may be used as a searching critique of numerous religious doctrines. The point for the reader to decide, is whether such criticism should aim at abolishing religion and metaphysical ideas entirely, or simply expose their frequent irrational extravagances, oversimplifications, and ethical corruptions. Conceivably, the best service to mankind would be to clean up and rationalize religion, instead of trying to abolish it.

At one point in his argument, Mr. Lamont lists the Eminent Men who got and get along very well without believing in immortality. Among them is H. G. Wells, although, elsewhere in his book, Mr. Lamont notes that Wells showed an interest in the theories of the psychic researchers, to the extent of discussing favorably the idea that man may have fragmentary *psychic* remains after death, with which the seance medium gains contact. However, we shall take the author's word for it that Mr. Wells felt he could do without expectation of a life eternal. The interesting thing about this is that H. G. Wells' son, who writes under the name of Anthony West, has recently completed a rather astonishing novel, *The Vintage*, which is entirely the story of what happens to human beings after they die. It is of course a work of the imagination. Our point is—and other writers besides Mr. West give it support—that men with imagination now feel a strong impulse to break out of the confinements of a world of merely physical reality. They get moral leverage from the idea of immortality—leverage and richly illuminating perspectives. A book like *The Vintage*, product of a free mind at work, makes the reader feel that we are all rounding some important corner in our psychic and moral development, and breaking through into some

new terrain of awareness. It is a novelist's device, perhaps, but the device is so effective that we shall not part with it casually.

We shall not debate with Mr. Lamont. His argument is with the past in human delusion, not with the present and the future. When he patiently exposes the nonsense of physical resurrection from the grave, we can all patiently approve. The breath of immortality is not in the religious dogmas he tears to shreds, nor was it ever really there. The breath of immortality is in his devotion to the free ranging of the human mind, in his contest with the dead shells of religious belief. Finally, *The Illusion of Immortality* will support or disturb only the man whose faith is no more than a reliance upon the hearsay of either science or religion. The book is an attempt to do justice to the mind. We may rest content that the will to do justice is paramount in the quest for truth, and if the idea of immortality cannot survive the will to do justice, then it had best succumb. If it is a true idea, such books will only clear away the corruptions of it, making the ground ready for new advances and attempts at solution of the mystery of life and death.

Has it Occurred to Us?

HYPNOTISM, strange anesthetizing power operated by man on man, is used and denounced, defended and criticized, glamourized, debunked, and viewed with alarm—but what is it, really? A whole catalogue of psychological diseases has been investigated by means of hypnotism and the hypnotic drugs (so we are told), and some doctors of the psyche regard hypnotism as a useful therapy. Yet others—and among them some of the foremost authorities in the field of psychology and mental health—have entered strong pleas against the practice of hypnotism under any circumstances, so that the layman is left floundering as to what to believe. Is there any way for him to decide, for example, whether or not he himself should submit to hypnosis?

In the presence of vehement disagreement among authorities, it is difficult to maintain full confidence in "experts," especially since those who speak most judiciously about the question of hypnotism are also those who indicate that there is more unknown than known about the process itself. Hypnotic subjects have "escaped" from the operator, some have almost failed to wake out of the trance, and others, again, have awakened only to insanity. These may be rare instances, and it will be said that every therapeutic practice has hazards, but a lingering superstition—if nothing else—suggests that we draw a line between the hazards we will risk on someone else's say-so, and those we will not.

Possibly, in matters psychological and mental, we have another order of responsibility to ourselves. It may not even be the best thing for us to be operated upon surgically without comprehending the necessity, the purpose, and the method of operation: who is to say how much the conscious and intelligent cooperation of the patient might affect the "success" of the surgeon? Where inner disorders are concerned, however, the would-be surgeons seem more doubtful of their infallibility, and the patient himself may be utterly at a loss for certainty. Withal, a feeling

persists that our emotions and the contents of our mind should not be subject to invasion and reorganization by others.

Has it occurred to us that this innate disinclination, persisting in certain temperaments regardless of education or the lack of it, and found to some extent in every one, may be both rational and natural? Shall we ignore the feeling, simply because we do not wholly understand it, or shall we respect it until we discover a more intelligent substitute? Let us respect it in proportion to its strength and depth, and as a part of ourselves, mindful that we are *required* to respect ourselves, if we would solve the riddles of self. May it not be wiser to assume rationality of ourselves than to begin by postulating an abysmal ignorance? Just because we have a notion that nobody else appears to have, is no proof that we are aberrated. Nor, on the other hand, is it evidence that we are right.

Now, hypnotism, aside from the details of method and result, strikes precisely at the root of man's self-consciousness. Whether one enters the trance state under the influence of words, mesmeric passes, or drugs, and whether the operator is serious or frivolous in his intention, what has happened to the subject is always the same: an interruption of consciousness, a temporary lulling of the will, an involuntary absence of the mind and the governing faculties. It might be argued that no achievement involving the use of hypnotism is as important as the effect of hypnotism itself upon the general coordination of mind and body. And if we happen to feel that nothing is so necessary as the extension of conscious control over the human faculties and psychic functions, then we are likely to conclude that hypnotism is inevitably more debilitating than useful.

It would evidently not occur to us to argue in this fashion unless we had some special conviction about the power of the mind and the force of the human will. If we are lukewarm about human integrity, we shall also be lukewarm about

hypnotism. If we are undecided as to the reach of the will, we shall be undecided about hypnotism. If we do not care particularly to maintain self-awareness and our sense of judgment in all events, we shall hardly be squeamish about surrendering to hypnotic influence. We may prefer to escape the demands of consciousness; we may desire to silence, from time to time, the insistent monitor of our discrimination; we may choose not to remember what we know or not to act upon what we hold to be true and, for each of these endeavors, there will be excuses galore, temptations multiple, and companions legion. Perhaps we never fully succeed in severing ourselves from moral consciousness, but, so far as hypnotism is concerned, we cannot always depend upon fortunate failure.

Another aspect of this question is self-hypnosis. We may not all be hypnotists, nor interested in hypnotism, but we know the process of self-hypnosis very well indeed: the Jesuitical logic of rationalization persuades us, for the time being, that we cannot conquer our difficulties, and therefore we must avoid them; consciousness of error and ignorance is painful, and must be eliminated. We try to "escape" by disconnecting will, judgment, and consciousness. By holding the *thought* of helplessness, we become helpless. Hypnotism, in any form, can be seen to disengage the conscious mind from the evaluation of experience—the central function of the perceptive intelligence and therefore many hold hypnotism to be, without equivocation, a disaster from the standpoint of the will.

Has it occurred to us that the same power which allows us to transform ourselves into moral jellyfish, mental ostriches, and psychological dodges, can also be employed in the other direction? For every fear we can imagine, we have the power to imagine—and thus create—a commensurate courage. For every difficulty, we can summon a new resource of the will. For each baffling situation, for every heartbreak and sorrow, for bewilderments small and great, we

have the inexhaustible capacity to understand, to resolve confusion, to perceive new wisdom. For what shall we forsake this power?