

## GOD AND MAN

THE rising interest in "psychology" during recent years has been widely noted—noted and discussed by serious observers such as Carl G. Jung; noted and exploited for profit by a variety of publishers, including a number of magazine publishers. There is a direct correlation, it seems to us, between this interest in psychology, or the "self," and the growing interest in "God." Quite logically, an interest in "self" eventually provokes an interest in the "not-self," and, judging from what most people say or think about God, He—or It—is plainly thought of as belonging to the not-self.

God and Self, at any rate, form the polarities of many reflections about the ultimate nature of things. A man's thoughts about God will naturally have a decisive effect upon what he thinks of himself; or, if he thinks first about self, his thoughts of God will be shaped by his conclusions. The only exception to this rule that we can think of—and it is not really an exception—is the case of the pantheist, to whom God and Self are one and the same, although doubtless regarded from somewhat different aspects.

*This Week Magazine* often exhibits a portentous concern with the morale of America, and the March 30 issue is impressively devoted to "God in the United States." The United States, according to a national poll reported in this article, is only one per cent "downright atheist." The West Coast, for some inexplicable reason, has more skeptics per capita than any other region, while the Middle Atlantic States lead in actual atheists. An international survey found the United States ranking fourth among believers in God (94 per cent), with Catholic Brazil in first place with 96 per cent believers, and Catholic France trailing in last place with only 66 per cent believers.

Statistics of this sort can be extremely confusing. The article ends on a triumphant note, reporting that according to four nationwide surveys—

the highest percentage of church members was found among those who were best educated, and had the highest earning power. As the education and economic status of the population decreased, church membership also decreased. Persons without any church affiliation were found in increasing numbers as either education or income diminished.

This makes a puzzling contrast with a Syracuse University report of what happens to religious beliefs among school children. From a comparison of twelve-year-olds with eighteen-year-olds, it was found that as children progress through adolescence, they cast aside many religious beliefs. At twelve, 70 per cent of a large group of children expressed belief in several conventional religious affirmations, while two thirds of the eighteen-year-olds rejected the same beliefs. Education at the college level seems to be a bad thing for religion, also. A study of freshmen and seniors in six different colleges showed that, "On virtually all questions of religious belief, the seniors expressed appreciably greater scepticism than the freshmen. There was one notable exception: more seniors than freshmen believed in immortality."

Apparently, if church-going can be taken to mean acceptance of religious beliefs, then the wealthy and educated, on the basis of these studies, represent a return to childhood—or at least "freshman"—attitudes. On the other hand, heavy church membership among the wealthy and educated may indicate simply the attractions of conformity and an interest in the outward marks of social position, even if it involve some hypocrisy in the matter of "faith." Perhaps a little of the truth came out in another college survey of

over three thousand students, thirty-nine per cent of whom, although claiming a belief in God, asserted that this belief made no difference in their lives.

In all, however, save for a certain curiosity value, these surveys testify to the barrenness of this sort of approach to great philosophical questions. They do disclose an unmistakable triviality in the beliefs held—the triviality also applying to the polling methods—but this has been fairly obvious without all these surveys. Meanwhile, the somewhat pompous way in which judgments about the religious outlook of the "American people" are founded on this sort of "research" is itself convincing evidence of superficiality. Only one investigation of the nature of the God-idea is reported in this article. People were asked to agree or disagree with the following statements: (1) There is a personal God; (2) there is some spirit or vital force which controls life; (3) I am not sure there is any sort of God or life force. Responses showed 45 percent believing in a personal God, 39 per cent in a vital force, and 16 per cent uncertain.

Such an inquiry, it seems to us, is peculiarly useless, and even worse than useless, if it goes no further into the subject than this. It gives the impression that "having" a belief is all that is necessary, leaving out of consideration the idea that no human being ought to be satisfied with static "beliefs" on this or any other important subject. A survey which asked what views were held, and then invited the questioned individuals to justify their opinions or convictions, would be far more valuable than the somewhat complacent "survey of surveys" appearing in *This Week*. Of course, a mass-circulation magazine would not publish any important thinking on this issue, for the reason that it would subject conventional religious ideas to critical analysis, and this would raise a tempest of outraged objection among the representatives of Christian orthodoxy. Long after Dr. Einstein voiced his criticisms of the personal God idea in 1940, acidulous urging that

the great physicist should stick to physics was heard from religious quarters—a contention which overlooks entirely the fact that religion is the one subject on which the independent judgment of the individual remains supreme. This, we take it, is the meaning of freedom of conscience. Further, the specialists in religion have provided no acceptable evidence that they are especially qualified to determine religious truth. On the contrary, the religious quarrels of history, often leading to religious wars, indicate that theologians, simply because of their presumptuous claim of authority, are *less* qualified than anyone else to point to religious truth. In any event, the assertions of religious truth which have least claim to respectful attention are the assertions which come from institutions which are able and willing to back their declarations with the force of political authority. Religious institutions which attempt to use the power of the State to maintain orthodoxy and to punish nonconformity can hardly have "truths" worth considering, for a truth that must be defended with threats cannot have much else to recommend it.

A subscriber, otherwise well pleased with the contents of MANAS, writes to say: "I wish I understood just what you mean when you talk about not believing in a personal God." This is easy to answer. We find the idea of a personal God philosophically inconceivable, morally indefensible, and historically the source of endless misery for human beings. The idea of a personal God seems wholly as bad as, if not worse than, completely materialistic atheism. Half a dozen personal gods, of varying potency, we could easily manage with, but a single, all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good "Being" who is responsible for the universe and everything in it is an indignity to the mind and a subversion of the soul's independence. If this world is a product of struggling beings in evolution, mirroring their faults and imperfections—working out, according to Emerson's Law of Compensation, their collective and individual destinies—then the constant presence of tragedy in human life and the

numerous difficulties and obstacles which confront human beings have at least in principle a rational explanation. But a "God" free to create anything at all ("All-Powerful"), who would make the world we know and place in it infants born to disease, starvation, and unrelieved drudgery—the lot, incidentally, of at least a third, if not a half, of all who enter life—is much more of a fiend than a "God," to our way of thinking.

We are told that the wisdom of God passes understanding in these things. It certainly passes ours. Much more sensible, we think, is the comment of a *Time* writer on religion (*Time*, March 10) who remarked, in discussing the Devil, "The idea of an Evil Being is as basic as belief in a supreme God." And this, in turn, recalls the mournful comment of an Orthodox Cleric who had been placed in charge of suppressing the Manichaeian heresy among the Bogomiles of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He complained that putting down the ancient Gnostic belief in the dual principle of *both* good and evil presented an almost insuperable problem, inasmuch as this belief is so *reasonable*.

It is always the dogmatic religions, we may note, which promote the idea of a personal God. And it is always the dogmatic religions which place the greatest reliance upon organization and institutional power. Theocratic authoritarianism has been associated with a personal God all through history, from the wrathful Jehovah of the ancient Hebrews to the Roman version of the same angry and punishing Deity, to the Calvinist Tyrant who also demanded death by fire for heretics, and the jealous Monopolist of modern Fundamentalism.

A personal God easily gains the ear of prophets who find it to their advantage to become interpreters of "His" will. Each new prophet establishes a new sect, until the air is filled with the claims and counter-claims of religious competitors. The caustic observation of the pagan Julian, "See how these Christians love one

another," is as applicable today as it was some sixteen hundred years ago.

Belief in a personal God breeds fear and anxiety, arrogance and presumption. Its anti-rational assumptions oppose the spirit of all true science, all true philosophy. It demeans the creative nature of the human being by making men mere creatures of this imagined spiritual sovereign. It has produced all the impassioned and often nihilistic protests that the world has seen since the Reformation and the Enlightenment. It sponsors violence in the name of the "faith," and provokes counter-violence in the name of freedom. It is in all ways unworthy of the human race.

By contrast, a history of the pantheistic conception of deity is a history of independence of thought, self-reliant reflection and philosophizing, and of warmly compassionate humanitarianism. The idea of God-in-all is found wherever there has been love of freedom and honoring of human potentiality. This philosophic credo regards with reverence the entirety of Nature and declares the kinship of man with all living things. The history of pantheism is also a history of martyrdom and persecution. Nothing threatens the power of orthodoxy so much as the man who declares that the spirit of the highest is in everything and everybody, needing no intermediary priests to explain the "will of God." The will of God is not to be distinguished from the will of Nature, and the will of Nature, if such will there be, is open to the study of everyone. A man may give the benefit of his reflections to others, if they are interested, but no man has the authority to tell another what to believe, or to repeat what God has told him to tell others to believe. If he claims this authority, he has stolen it by lying to and deceiving his fellow men. Either this, or he is himself one of the army of the deluded, in whom the spark of his innate divinity (read, if you will, "creative potentiality," for what is "divinity," if not this?) already burns too low.

The question of whether there is a God or not is no "dead issue." It is a living question, vital to all social and moral considerations and problems before the human race. A man who thinks he was created by some outside God is in the way of abdicating from ultimate moral decision. He becomes a member of the herd, losing his status as a free man. This is behind such studies of human psychology as Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*. It is the essential meaning of that subtle work of Carlo Levi, *Of Fear and Freedom*, and it has been the burden of the utterances of every great freethinking lover of the human race from the days of Giordano Bruno, the days of Thomas Paine, to the days of Robert Ingersoll and Clarence Darrow.

There can in fact be no important thinking widespread about the soul of man, about human freedom, about the possibilities of future human evolution until, by rejection of the personal God idea, men embrace full responsibility for their nature, acts, and destiny. The religious nature of man is a fact, and the neglect of this fact has made the scientific criticism of religion weak and ineffectual. Meanwhile, dogmatic religion itself *depends* upon keeping human beings in that state of mind where they think of themselves as weak and ineffectual. So long as men despise themselves, call themselves sinners, they will be sinners, and largely despicable. Who but despicable men could have made the world what it is today? Who but despicable men, or the Devil of theological theory?

The idea of God-in-man is of course only a starting point for a truer kind of religion, and not a resting-place of faith. While this idea can never lead us back to ancient deceptions and authoritarianisms, there will still be the problem of the evil men do, and why they do it, even though the evil may be greatly reduced by abandoning the anti-human form of the God-idea. There will still be the question of immortality to ponder upon, and all the multifarious issues of private and public morality. But a real beginning may be made, with

this idea, toward establishing the foundation of a religion of and for the free.

## *Letter From* **CENTRAL EUROPE**

INNSBRUCK.—"Don't you know," said Tito lately to an Austrian visitor, "that I was corporal in the Austro-Hungarian Army, before World War I? Gorgeous times, which will never come again. . . !" And the late Jan Masaryk, Czecho-Slovakian Secretary of Foreign Affairs, a few years ago told the English historian, G. Laffan, that the regime of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had been better by far than anything that came after it. Oswald Spengler once remarked that there had been a "suppression" in the old Austrian Empire in that the Emperor did not allow any of the small nations in its state-union to suppress any other. And in the course of a Round Table Conference in Switzerland, not long ago (reported by Hopker in *Christ & Welt*), an American participant expressed the hope that the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as it was in existence before 1918, might form itself anew.

The wheel of human history, of course, goes on and can neither be held motionless nor turned back. And it is a common human frailty to surround things of the past with a nostalgic glamor—particularly since the Viennese Imperial Court is associated with a romantic tradition ornamented by flowers, music, crowns and love. But it has been interesting to observe the melancholy reminiscences of some Central European papers when—after the death of George VI—no break in internal or external affairs took place in Great Britain, and when the highest representation of the nation glided smoothly from one hand into the other. There were no elections, no anger or quarrels, no propaganda and no hammering of political slogans. Quietness and dignity prevailed. Modern socialists might simper about "sentiments" in politics and allegiance to old, consecrated traditions, but these institutions, receiving their strength from the constitution—created by a democratic parliament—are independent of accident or the "disposition of the times." As long as they remain unshaken, they symbolize a system of recognized order.

Even before World War II and, of course, since 1945, historians, economists, and especially those who noticed the ease with which most of the Balkan countries fell to the Bolsheviks, have held the Allies responsible for the unrest in Central Europe. They

reproach the Western leaders who—partly from hate of anything German or Austrian, partly from ignorance of Southeastern Europe, and partly from their desire to gain economic advantages—in 1918 and 1919 battered down institutions which had grown and maintained order through many centuries, thus creating a permanent derangement in part of the continent. Bearing in mind that even Western diplomats—of old and of the present—have acknowledged the mistakes made at Versailles, St. Germain and Trianon, and analyzing the developments during recent months, hardly anybody will still look at the destruction of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a step of "progress."

There remains, however, one question: was the monarchy itself—or better, were the Habsburgs themselves—possessed of the necessary strength and inclination to preserve and lead this mosaic of little nations to a promising future?

Some would say yes, some no. It is true that the Habsburgs, during the last fifty years of their reign, presented a tumultuous scene of family events. As individuals they were very unlike one another. The Emperor Franz Joseph, the Crown Prince Rudolf, the Successor Franz Ferdinand, the Emperor Karl and the various Arch-dukes—each represented a different type. And their acts could be regarded as those of either degenerated or of heroic individuals. A solid foundation for judging the Habsburgs is given in a new book, *Im Schatten der Hofburg (In the Shadows of the Court-Castle)*, by the Countess von Stockhausen, published recently in Heidelberg. The Countess had not only an intimate contact with the widow of the Crown-Prince, but also access to correspondence which no outsiders have seen. This book lights little candles in the darkness of "official" history, in many ways telling far more of the fall of Austria-Hungary than large and pretentious volumes.

CENTRAL EUROPEAN CORRESPONDENT

## *REVIEW*

### THE NORMAN CONQUEST

THE finest days of ancient Greece, historians tell us, were marred by the existence of slavery. Hence it is often selfrighteously concluded that the Athenians, whatever their artistic triumphs, whatever their imposing contributions to philosophy, knew little of "democracy." We suspect, however, that this is an oversimplification, and that there are kinds of "democracy" which the Greeks knew far better than we. For instance, as W. Macneile Dixon notes in *Hellas Revisited*, every Greek "politician" (in Athens, every freeman was a "politician") who cast his vote for war had to be prepared to hurry home to sharpen his spear. Whatever policies were decided upon had to be personally acted upon. The citizen would probably be setting out to fight the next morning. Thus he accepted a direct personal responsibility for anything he advocated. So, while a slave might prepare his master's bath or instruct the son in letters, gymnastics and music, the Greek citizen did his own fighting. Even when he became eminent, tradition required him to play an active part, and in warfare he may have played a much more active part than was allowed to his slaves.

It is our contention that any book which emphasizes effectively the contrast between this kind of political responsibility and the propensity of our age for divorcing political advocacy from personal involvement, is a book worth reading. *The Golden Warrior*, by Hope Muntz, is such a book.

This historical novel concerned with the history of the Battle of Hastings is a dramatic contribution to the theme of the "responsible participation" of statesmen, though the author, Hope Muntz, who spent sixteen years in the research and writing of this book, was clearly not directly concerned with this idea. It is rather that in laying bare the bases of thought and action common in 1066, and by offering a genuine

familiarity with the characters of King Harold of England and of Duke William of Normandy, the "thesis" simply appears, unannounced, as demonstrable fact.

*The Golden Warrior* must be considered an excellent novel from every standpoint. Few ventures of this sort have been blessed with a foreword such as accompanies the book—a serious recommendation by the noted British historian, G. M. Trevelyan. Mr. Trevelyan is now serving as Chancellor of Durham University, near London. During his years of service as Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge (from 1927 to 1940), he became known as a leading historical authority throughout the scholarly world. Speaking of *The Golden Warrior*, Trevelyan notes the value of the arts in vivifying historical comprehension. He believes that history should embody a sense of "heroic drama," and heroic drama needs authors who are *both* artists and philosophers—who have penetrated behind the mechanical trivia of chronicle to the core of the persons or times they discuss. Trevelyan writes:

It [*The Golden Warrior*] is not an ordinary historical novel, for the historical novel usually avoids the great personages and the famous scenes, and fills its canvas with imaginary characters. But this book is a Saga of Harold and William. The other personages, English and European, are historical portraits; they are subordinate to the two protagonists, but each of them stands as a clear-cut figure in the tapestry. The atmosphere is that of heroic drama sustained throughout. The impression is undisturbed by irrelevant archaeological description, or by modern speculations on the results of the Norman conquest. So the book has a real artistic unity. It is purely human in its appeal, leading to a tragic climax, after which silence falls on the field of battle.

Both King Harold Godwinson and William of Normandy were men of tremendous stature, in terms of subtle comprehension, vision, and practical ability. Renowned warriors also, they accepted the same responsibility that was embraced by the Greek who knew he must fight his own wars—and in the front lines of battle. In

the eleventh century, it seems, this was a requirement of Kingship, and it seems not a bad requirement for leaders in any century. The youth of any land have a right to complain about the fact that while they fight and die in the wars of modern times, the men who decide the policies that make for war are sure to escape even one day of direct experience of the suffering and carnage. When Harold leapt before his men to storm a stubbornly defended bridge, he gave only what both he and his people regarded was due; and William was no less dedicated to his portion of the suffering and dying. Perhaps, for all of these reasons, the policies adopted by Harold and William were deeply pondered and never carelessly nor casually instituted. Perhaps, too, this has something to do with the fact that kingly men of that age carried an abiding sense of responsibility and duty throughout their entire lives. They *knew* what war meant to the men they ruled and served as Lord, because they fought in each war, hand to hand, and similarly risked a death that would leave fatherless children and helpless widows.

As Trevelyan has put it, *The Golden Warrior* "draws our sympathies to the Hector, not the Achilles of the story." Through Miss Muntz' research, we are invited to revise any opinion we may have held that Harold was somehow inferior to his conqueror in manliness and strength. We are reminded, here, of the service performed in *Jenkins' Ear* by William and Odell Shepard, which revealed how easily the finest men of history may fail in scaling pinnacles of eminence because their humaneness overrides their ambitions. (Such, it seems, was as true of Harold as it was of Bonnie Charlie in a later day.) And if we hunger to see the noble Harold prevail over William—even while well knowing that history has long been written otherwise—we may be struck, too, with the fact that the conqueror himself was possessed of a strong conscience. Duke William wrestled with his ambitions and tried to justify his desires by resolving never to become a tyrant, and to serve better than any other the needs of all the people in his English kingdom. Finally, William was great

enough to sense, first dimly, then clearly, the flimsiness of his pretext for the conquest. On his death-bed, in the year 1087, he gave as his last words, "*By wrong I conquered England. . . . By wrong I seized the Kingdom . . . in which I have no right. . . .*"

The men of Hastings were indeed Titans, and it is good to read of Titans once in a while—of men who showed an almost superhuman stamina of emotion, mind and body. The role of religion in the lives of these rulers, too, is an interesting one, for it indicates that Christian faith at that time enfolded a living sense of *duty* and *responsibility* "before God," as well as intense personal mysticism. Excerpts from *The Golden Warrior* are difficult to select, but perhaps the mood of the book is conveyed in a passage bearing upon Harold's address to the hostile Northumbrians, whose support he needed in defense of the kingdom. No propaganda machine paved Harold's way; he rode, moreover, to address men who were determined *not* to accept service in a war for the crown. But he brought with him one Bishop Wulfstan, a man whom all Northumbrians trusted for his wisdom and moral excellence. He brought with him, also, the verifiable story of how, before a Council of State, he had decided in favor of Northumbria against his own brother. Harold truly stood for "justice to all," and the power of his sincerity won over the huge array of Northumbrian fighting men. Here is something of both the style and the dignity to be found in *The Golden Warrior*:

"Northumbrians," said the King, "I have fought your battle in the Council. I will fight it on the field, if the day come. Will you have me for lord?"

They made him such a thunderous answer that the blood came to his cheeks. When Harold could be heard, he gave them thanks. Then he signed to Bishop Wulfstan, and the Bishop rode forward to his side.

"Men," said the King, "see the friend who is my counsellor. You know his worth. He dwelt among you. Let us be pledged here, before Wulfstan, in the sight of God, people and King together. We have done many thing amiss. Let this day be a new

beginning, that we may be held worthy of our freedom."

"So be it," they said. "Wulfstan is our witness."

Then many men cried out: "Lord Bishop, speak to us."

"My sons," said Wulfstan, "God hears your pledge; the Saints have hearkened. They are here amidst us, those fathers of our nation, nearer than when they trod this soil. I see them watching; Aidan and Cuthbert, Bede and Oswald, Aldhelm and Dunstan and Augustine, Ethelwold and Elfheah; a countless fellowship, Saints of all England. Their land is ours to cherish, their strength is ours, if we will lean upon it. Be manful now, for the hour is upon us; our day of wrath, or our redemption. This year we shall atone, or we must perish. Ye are free men; choose freedom. 'Fear God, honour the King!'"

Religion, for these men, was three things: tradition, personal mysticism, and the intuitive feeling of necessity in the following of duty. Fully aware of the perfidy of Rome, these men nonetheless ennobled the Church by a consecration which blended the dictum, "To shine own self be true," with the symbolism focussed in Christian ritual and legend. And so they were, perhaps, not only "simple" and "primitive" men, but also subtle and deep men. They, too, comprehended something of "democracy" through the active participation of Kings and Earls in all things, and also through the feeling that no man should aspire to less than freedom. The King was worthy to be King, furthermore, only so far as he respected and served the needs of his subjects.

All that King Harold stood for during the brief months of his reign did not depart from English history, but with the ascendancy of William that history took another turning. Too often, since, have ambition and greed overridden the sterling qualities of the finest of kings, generals, and leaders of the Western world. But history also contains, we see, records of those who aspire higher, whose conflicts were more profound if less spectacular, and who have helped to carry through the dark years of incessant and *needless* warfare the hope of what leaders of men might and should become.



## *COMMENTARY*

### **OPTIMISTIC PSYCHIATRIST**

PEACE is possible, but it will take ten generations—ten generations to train the human race to the maturity of brotherly love for all men. This is the judgment of Dr. Douglas M. Kelley, formerly psychiatrist at the Nuremberg Trials, and now professor of criminology at the University of California in Berkeley. Dr. Kelley expressed this view on the occasion of his address before a national convention in Los Angeles, recently.

It will be recalled that Mortimer Adler, University of Chicago advocate of the Great Books and vigorous opponent of psychoanalysis, some years ago announced his opinion that there could be no real peace for at least 500 years. The psychiatrist is a little more optimistic, hoping for maturity in about half that time. Questioned by reporters, Dr. Kelley said that both religion and psychiatry aim at the same goal—"the manhood of humanity." When he denied the existence of a mature man, today, a reporter asked if such a man ever lived. The Los Angeles *Times* (April 2) gives his reply:

"Certainly," he said. "Christ was one. Buddha another. And Confucius and Krishna. They were selfless men. They lived by the Golden Rule. The Hindu puts it differently. Identifying himself with all men, he says, 'I cannot shun myself from me.'

"There is the basis for all religion. The root of religion—although a lot of organized churches seem to have gotten away from it. That's the fundamental religion we should get back to."

Announcements of this sort from a few more psychiatrists should help along the growth of the movement for a renewal of serious thinking about religion. Dr. Kelley, however, will need to do some thinking himself, if he is to support from history his Platonic text that "Religion is dangerous to dictators." What kind of religion threatens dictators? Not authoritarian religions, surely, for they are the origin of dictators. And would he not do well to look more closely at the churches before hoping to enlist their help in

promoting "fundamental religion and the belief in the brotherhood of man"? A church in which Jesus, Buddha, Confucius, and Krishna are equally honored may be Dr. Kelley's ideal, but it will be very hard to find.

The machinery of existing institutions is often attractive to inexperienced reformers, but this machinery, unless completely "overhauled" *from within*, can hardly be expected to reverse its customary operations.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

A SUBSCRIBER recently called our attention to a well-titled book, *When Children Ask*, by Marguerite H. Bro (Harper, 1940). There may be better and later books offering the broad coverage supplied by this volume, but we have not heard of them as yet, and welcome this addition to the growing list of books it has been our pleasure to meet through suggestions from parents and teachers.

Mrs. Bro has held herself to a minimum of theorizing. *When Children Ask* is rather a psychological study composed of "common sense" phrases and conceptions, without the specialized terminology of the "child psychologist." The author writes as a parent and teacher; as an "amateur" rather than as a "professional," she displays more interest in questions asked by children in regard to God, prayer, immortality, the Bible, Church, etc., than child experts usually do. If Mrs. Bro has a denominational affiliation of her own (Methodist, perhaps?), causing her to devote seven of her twenty chapters to questions involving religious values, this can easily be forgiven, since the treatments are usually extremely abbreviated. We hasten to add, however, that no particular religious beliefs are advocated or defended, the emphasis resting simply on the necessity for doing a great deal of clear thinking about our religious traditions. Moreover, each sample dialogue between parent and child on religious matters is presented twice—first according to the framework which might be used by a parent who "believes in God and prayer," and, second, in the framework of one who has rejected the conventional religious symbols in favor of a non-theological approach to life. The comparisons are fair to "both sides," with the accent on philosophy rather than upon either typical religious affirmations or denials.

The central theme of *When Children Ask*, appearing in the opening chapter, seems so

important that we make no apology for lengthy quotation:

Probably the most difficult hazard which parents have to negotiate is the fact that when a child asks a question, no matter how suddenly, the parent has to reply whether he knows the answer or not. If he wants to maintain an enduring relationship between himself and his child, one upon which the winds may beat and the rains may fall, then it is just plain necessary for him to come through with an answer. But only a paragon could be prepared beforehand with all the answers, and a paragon, he consoles himself, would no doubt give his child a dreadful inferiority complex. No ordinary parent can even guess in what direction a child's mind is going to move because his next question may not have any apparent relationship to the things he has previously been saying and doing.

It is at this point—answering when he does not know what to say—that a parent eventually makes a discovery. He stumbles onto the important fact that if he does not know the answer to his child's questions offhand, then he has to go find out the answer and come back to share it. Becoming a good answerer is as simple as that, and as relentless. The parent of a questioner becomes an answerer only by unceasing endeavor and unremitting honesty in finding out. Lazy minds beget lazy minds, and haziness and laziness have more in common than seven-eighths of their letters.

On the other hand, when parents are as eager as their children to find the answers to things, then the children are already half-answered. The spirit of joint inquiry is probably chief among the bridges of integrity which span the gap between generations.

Now any parent knows a large, important question when he hears it, but the odd thing is that little questions are just as important as big ones because it is the questioning which matters. Questions are the child's growing edge. He has no other way to grow. Questions are his hold upon his universe. He has no other way to take hold. Thwart a thousand little roots and the tree is never made fast in the earth. A child in the same fashion takes hold of life by the hair roots without which the main roots cannot be fed.

Some parents are "natural" answerers and others fail completely, according to Mrs. Bro. But, she feels, it is imperative to convince the "poor answerers" among parents that an ability to

be truly helpful during the crucial period of adolescence depends upon the seriousness with which parents view their obligation to answer, conscientiously, the interminable smaller questions of earlier years. Three chapters, "About Babies," "Taking in the Teens," and "What is in a Marriage?" will be of special interest to those who are firm believers that the home is the proper locale for "sex education." While all parents may not desire to duplicate the answers suggested by Mrs. Bro, they will at least find themselves provided with something very definite and inclusive to work alterations upon, and her contribution cannot fail to be appreciated. Here, also, her method is to present ways of answering questions about conception, birth, and relations between the sexes, from the differing outlooks of both religious and secular parents. Mrs. Bro's concern is with the best *methods* for encouraging a thirst for impartial inquiry, and is opposed only to those answers which close off further questions, either through dogmatic assertion or equally arbitrary denial of a transcendental basis of ethics.

Mrs. Bro's one worry is that we may allow too many children to grow to maturity without ever having learned to ask questions. Although religious indoctrination in modern times is at a minimum, the habits of social indoctrination and unquestioning acceptance of mores have been continued, however much the mores themselves have changed. Children are still "institutionalized" to a much greater extent than we may at first suspect. (See the discussion here of "Our Conscripted Children," MANAS, March 26.)

As Mrs. Bro points out, "Some children have no opportunity to question their study habits; they go through twelve years of school on chance or momentum without ever having been made constructively self-conscious of their poor habits, certainly without being taught the technique of making a new habit. Others are given no opportunity to question their too rigid routine

because even their attitudes are regimented." She continues:

But for every regimented child there are a dozen who have never questioned the dispersion of energy and the haphazard schedules of the members of their families, including themselves. How can they question an established disorder without having experienced its opposite?

Thus it goes across the entire breadth of experience! Questions denote interest, participation, awareness. Let us list the things our children never question, whether the things belong to the physical world, to the social world or to the world of ideas, and we will have before us a picture of our own limitations. Even the "sure" convictions we pass on to our children need to be questioned if they are to be successfully passed on. If children are to ask the right questions, and enough of them, then they have to have a fullness of life which makes wide questioning possible. Naturally that is what most parents hone for, strive for, wait for: fullness of life for their children. And as the days of our parenthood increase we see more plainly that fullness of life is somehow a shared experience. We cannot share what we do not have, and it is more difficult to be forever making over ourselves than to be remaking our children—more difficult and vastly more effective.

## *FRONTIERS*

### Vows—Moral and Immoral

A SUBSCRIBER writes to comment on the contribution of Dr. Arthur Morgan, "Are Vows Immoral?", which appeared here in the March 19 issue. It seems to us that both Dr. Morgan and this reader are contending for pretty much the same basic ideas, although emphasis and vocabulary are different. In any event, this further discussion should prove of general interest.

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Dr. Morgan's article is stimulating to the mind in a real sense, but I must frankly confess that it fails to satisfy something of "my best present self," as he calls it. Dr. Morgan, it seems, would chop down the whole tree because some of its branches happen to be dead or decaying. To say that vows are immoral because most of them are unwisely made, and therefore productive of evil, or because some unbalanced individuals push them to the extreme of fanaticism, or because, through them, religious organizations take advantage of their unthinking followers and hold them in the bonds of mental servitude, seems to me to mistake effects for causes. On this basis, one might say that fire is evil because it often destroys, that government is immoral because of the prevalence of corruption, or, as many people have already claimed, that religion is a farce because of ambitious priestcraft and warring sectarianism.

There is an old saying that "the corruption of the best produces the worst," and the fact that so much misery and heartache come from the use, or misuse, of the vow (and with this portion of Dr. Morgan's article, there can be no argument), is, to my mind, positive proof of its power and genuine value *when rightly used*.

Contracts, guarantees, agreements, promises, resolutions, vows and pledges are all varying degrees of one and the same thing, and not one of them possesses the slightest moral value except for the sincerity and integrity of the individuals

who enter into them. Most legal bonds, perhaps, are indicative only of a faithless, decadent civilization, but who will deny that they are now a necessary evil? Nor can they be dispensed with until the promises men make to each other, until their simple words of honor, take on greater value and become sufficiently binding for all concerned. When will this be? Only when the promises men make to themselves—their best selves—are respected and fulfilled. And this, as I see it, is the real meaning of a promise or pledge—the only kind of *vow* that a man should ever make.

Dr. Morgan says that "No contract is properly inexorable." If by this he refers to those promises and agreements which are subject to the changes of times and conditions, it is easy to agree. And for this reason, shouldn't it always be possible, where unjust contracts exist and were made in good faith, either to make a new contract or to dissolve the old one? But a vow or pledge given to one's self is an altogether different matter. A man's solemn promise to himself *to try* at all times to live up to the best of his seeing, is not given to anyone else, nor is it subject to the changes of place and time. Such a vow is and should be inexorable. The guilt of a violated Conscience is the only hell I know or accept.

Let us not place our hope for better social relationships, therefore, in the tearing down of forms, however necessary this may be at times. Without many of its forms, our civilization, as presently disposed, would fall into chaos. Let us determine, rather, never to make any contract or promise lightly, and above all, to honor those we do make. If any number of men should assume this high position of integrity, of being true to themselves at all times (and should not all men vow to do this?), then the promises we make would increase in value to the extent that external contracts and guarantees would no longer be necessary.

On the binding of a vow, few will disagree. Through its misuse, men bind themselves to partialities, often to blindness. But through

proper use of the same power, a man may identify himself unconditionally with the highest principles of morality or ethics. Instead of being immoral, it is my belief that only through this kind of vow or resolve can man become truly moral, and that the power of his better Self can flow to sustain his will.

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In justice, let us note that Dr. Morgan began his discussion with the words: "We use the word 'vow' in the usual sense of a promise which precludes the right to reexamine one's position and to change one's course if deliberate re-examination should convince one that is best." This leaves a lot of room for promises and pledges which are not of this character. For example, the spirit of Dr. Morgan's article bespeaks an unqualified commitment to the use of one's best judgment in *every* decision. Couldn't this be regarded as a kind of promise to oneself? It seems to us that every man of integrity makes such commitments and resolves. Thomas Huxley's prayer, "Lord, grant me the courage to face a fact, even though it slay me," is the kind of "promise" to follow truth, wherever it leads, which is always implicit in genuine scientific inquiry.

The effect of Dr. Morgan's essay, it seems to us, is to establish a ruling principle in the taking of vows and pledges. Those pledges, as he puts it, which bind us to any sort of intellectual or moral or social *status quo* are immoral for the reason that they are likely to frustrate human progress in understanding. A man remains free, then, to pledge himself to do whatever he can to increase human understanding, including his own. It is difficult to see any weakness or vulnerable point in a personal moral credo which declares absolutely for justice, impartiality, and devotion to humanitarian ends. These are not fixed values, but generalized ideals. They define modes of behavior in terms of motive, not in terms of fixed patterns or outward acts. Of course, it is always possible to make mistakes in determining justice, in practicing impartiality, in "doing good." Only a

fool would pledge himself to make no mistakes, although any man can resolve to be as intelligent as he can, and to make as few avoidable mistakes as possible.

The difference, we think, between Dr. Morgan and his critic comes to this: The former suspects greater harm than good from the psychology of taking a vow, while the latter feels that this act of personal commitment, provided the commitment is to oneself, may make available a resource of moral strength which cannot be drawn upon by any other means. We do not see how this difference can be resolved through debate. Here, not "reason," but individual experience, must decide. And we suspect that conclusions will vary with individuals.