

## LETTER FROM INDIA

[This article by an Indian correspondent, concerned with the future national destiny of the Indian Republic, should be of interest not only because of the sympathy felt for India by many MANAS readers, but also because of its account of a problem by no means unique to India. The problem is the maintenance of both government and a free life for individuals, all over the world. Some editorial comment is appended at the end of C.V.G.'s article.]

DISQUIETING reports have lately been spreading about Mr. Nehru's health. While one hopes that the reports are not true and that the Prime Minister will live for many more years, such apprehensions have once again revived the question, "What happens to India after Nehru?" The sense of national precariousness that, off and on, prompts this question in India is heightened by the dreaded, unspoken suggestion that many Indians now find increasingly difficult to dismiss: "After Nehru, the deluge?" This situation might appear both curious and tragic to a foreign observer who has seen and perhaps admired the progress made by the country since independence, while lacking so much in vitality that the prospect for India after Mr. Nehru is nothing less than a "deluge."

When Mahatma Gandhi commenced his freedom movement against the British, he inaugurated an era of heroism in Indian history, and his ethics of non-violence drew out the noblest from the nation. The concern and despair now being felt in India over what might happen when Mr. Nehru is no longer with us stem from the painful recognition that Mr. Nehru represents the last link with this era of heroism during which the country won freedom. The most disturbing problem after Mr. Nehru's eventual disappearance from the Indian scene is posed by the threat of internal disruption and dismemberment. It would be better to leave Mr. Nehru aside for a while and

examine the problem of "national integration," about which there is much talk in India right now.

The British, when they ruled India, tried to discredit the nationalist movement by pointing out that India was a geographical expression and an administrative entity, but not a nation. They were speaking the truth. Many Indians will now readily admit that the concept of the nation—an essential prerequisite of which is a unifying factor like language or religion—is derived from Europe and is foreign to India. In fact, only under British rule did India have a powerfully unifying factor—the unanimously resisted British rule, not to mention the English language learnt and spoken by the Indian educated classes. The hallucination that a vast and varied agglomeration of Punjabis, Sindhis, Bengalis, Maharashtrians, Andhras, Tamils, Malayalees and Kannadigas makes a nation was an achievement of anti-British, liberationist sentiment and it was bound to disappear once freedom was won. The outlook for independent India was well stated by a competent Indian writer:

With independence in 1947 . . . we were ready to disintegrate, because we were wholly unprepared for the shock of self-recognition. It was as if a huge fog had lifted and in the dazzling clarity of the aftermath we saw ourselves as we had never imagined possible, each with distinctly separate, unrecognizable faces. (Victor Anant, in *Alienation*, Ed. by Timothy O'keefe, Macgibbon and Kee, London.)

The unity that has characterized India from very early times is religious and cultural, deriving from widespread Hinduism and Sanskrit learning, and this has survived all the political vicissitudes that India has gone through. But this did not make India a nation in the modern political sense, though the argument does not have to end there. There is indeed every reason why India, though it may not be a nation yet, should be

welded into one in the best interests of the country.

One would be startled to hear that after an apparently successful record of fifteen years, parliamentary democracy in India now has greater potentialities for evil than good. This seems to be distressingly borne out by the progress of the separatist movement in the south led by the D.M.K. (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam or the Dravidian Progressive Party). The D.M.K. agitates for a separate state, "Dravida Nad," consisting of the four Southern States of Andhra, Madras, Mysore and Kerala, despite the fact that they have been repudiated by all the three states other than Madras, where they have built up a following. The D.M.K. seem to be confident of being able in the course of the next ten years to capture a majority of seats and thus put themselves in a position to demand a separate State, at least in Madras.

This problem raises some important questions for the Government of India. If it reposes faith in the freedom of operation of parliamentary democracy, it will have to reckon with the possibility of a State of India walking out of the Union at some time in the future. If, however, as every one expects, the Government makes the separatist movement a treasonable offence, at the appropriate time, and resorts to a military solution of the D.M.K. problem, this will amount to giving up some measure of faith in parliamentary democracy.

It may be instructive to inquire how things have come to such a pass in India. It is said that the D.M.K. are quite aware that economic realities make nonsense of a small separate state of Madras, and cannot be, therefore, serious about their separatist ideology, but having dangled "independence" too long before their followers, there is no possibility of their being able to abandon it now. Why, in the first place, did the D.M.K. think of a separate state, despite overwhelming odds against it? It is fairly obvious that the people who were drawn to the D.M.K.'s

political ideology did not share a sense of emotional oneness with the rest of the Indian people, and the D.M.K. could successfully persuade them, with perhaps spurious evidence, that they belonged to a separate racial stock. The movement gathered strength when more spurious evidence of industrial neglect of the South by the Northern Central Government was thrown at them.

This aspect of the D.M.K. movement alone indicates where in India democracy faced a difficult problem and how it failed. The freedom movement unified India emotionally, but to retain that sense of emotional oneness after independence is always difficult for a democracy. Dictatorships, on the other hand, use artificial means to sustain the national spirit by keeping up a perpetual sense of crisis—as for instance by generating hysterical fear of enemies both inside the country and outside, imaginary and real. Democracy always relaxes, as it did in India, which gives time and scope for lurking disruptionist forces to spread and gain strength.

The emotional reserves that have kept India going since independence are now almost exhausted. Old guard politicians imbued with a sense of service and public good are being replaced by a second generation of politicians who have no memories—or disregard them—of the great Gandhian era, and who are inclined towards self-perpetuation and power-mongering. In this context of disintegration and self-seeking, Mr. Nehru alone remains the single emotionally unifying factor in India. He makes the concept of India meaningful to his people as no other living Indian politician can. The love and affection in which Mr. Nehru is held throughout the country and the huge crowds that he draws wherever he goes also represent a disappearing era. Mr. Nehru may be the first and the last great Indian Prime Minister of our epoch who has been able to forge an emotional kinship with the people.

It is difficult to imagine what complexion Indian politics will take on after Mr. Nehru. It

will certainly not be a bad thing if parliamentary government, though ceasing to have an emotional relationship with the people, becomes an impersonal affair and is disinterestedly run. But the present political tendencies in the country do not leave much hope that they will not take the country to pieces through the parliamentary institutions. The situation becomes more confused from the questions that are likely to be asked. If the multi-tongued and (as alleged) multi-racial Indian people decide through parliamentary expression to break up into separate states, should a myth of "Indian unity" frustrate their will? The Indian nationalist's answer would point to the lesson of past Indian history, when the country broke into small states or principalities after a mighty empire crumbled, becoming dangerously vulnerable to external invasion. Political democracy, however noble in its origins, should not be allowed to destroy Indian political unity. It will not be fanciful to argue that the manner in which India has become economically and administratively well-knit during the past two centuries is an expression of the historical motif working to keep the country together. If, therefore, the Central Government in India at some future date is obliged to declare the separatist movement as high treason and stamp it out with determination, then it will have no alternative but to snuff out parliamentary democracy in at least a few areas. This would seem to be the only course left for a government faced with the terrible necessity of having to preserve India's political unity.

How far this will turn out to be a good thing is predictable only up to a point. One need not have studied contemporary Indian politics long to discover the crassest abuses that the autonomous state governments have perpetrated on their people, the most outrageous among them being the systematic penalization of merit, while extending patronage to the inefficient, the corrupt and the mediocre. The Indian people will be certainly grateful for an efficient and clean administration—which they are not getting from

their present elected state governments. The multi-communal and multi-caste electorates of India oblige the state governments in a very unfortunate manner to relegate merit and pander to the politically important communities. In fact, almost all political movements in free India have sprung from their most unbecoming readiness to curry favour with a potentially useful section of the people. If a unified, dictatorial action could cleanse the Indian body-politic of so much refuse and waste when Mr. Nehru is no longer present to hold the country together, and to keep the depredations of its politicians in check, not many tears would be shed. But who can speak with such certainty? Usually the general who takes over after a revolutionary *coup* is of the wrong kind, a man who mistakes intolerance for firmness. The military type of administrator is more likely to bask in his own power and glory and to perpetuate himself than to have a sense of dedication to his people.

The foregoing, perhaps, takes too gloomy a view of the possible course of Indian politics after Mr. Nehru. The Indian people may after all succeed in preserving political democracy in India and making it really synonymous with freedom instead of succumbing to the mob frenzy that her politicians, particularly the separatists, try to introduce. The course of Indian politics since independence should abundantly illustrate the desirability of having to temper the principle of democracy with some hard-headed rationality, if the good, hard work done over a long period by India's founding fathers is not to be callously destroyed.

C.V.G.

Madras, India

---

One gets from this discussion the feeling that India, despite the good will of devoted patriots and the great sacrifices of the few, is fighting a losing battle. The dilemma presented by this correspondent is extreme, and while there are sure to be those who will try to carry on in an

approved democratic manner after Mr. Nehru's departure from the scene, the charismatic role played by Gandhi's political successor can hardly be denied.

But what troubles us more than the apprehensions as to India's fate in a Nehru-less future is the unquestioned assumption that being bound together in a strong, united *nation* is the only way to live in the modern world. Today, when the thoughtful people of the West are calling out to one another, eager to compare notes on how *to get rid of Nationalism*, India is worried about how to bestir the national spirit!

To this a sophisticated Indian could, and probably would, remark that it is all very well for Westerners, who have enjoyed the fruits of strong national existence for a couple of centuries or more, and who have by no means given them up as yet, to preach to a struggling India, but that Indians have an equal right to the glories and emoluments of a national history. In the framework of modern times, the retort is just and we have no answer to it—except, perhaps, to say that India is indeed entitled to her "national" cycle, the same as everyone else, although it would please many Westerners to see that India is also prepared to learn from the mistakes of the West. Possibly, it is necessary to experience to the bitter end the physical, economic, and psychological environment of a strong national state, before one becomes willing to experiment with another kind of social order.

Another version of the same dilemma confronted France when threatened by the Nazi invasion in 1939. Musing on French behavior in the face of this prospective aggression, Raoul de Roussy de Sales wrote for the January, 1942, *Atlantic*:

What may turn out to be the most important and characteristic trait of the times we live in is the existence of a universal and deeply rooted opposition to war. This sentiment is so general and so new in some of its manifestations that it will take the perspective of history to analyze it fully and to appraise correctly its influence on the state of mind

and on the behavior of the millions of men and women who are involved directly or indirectly in this war.

Modern man, Mr. de Sales continued,

does not need any further demonstration that war is not only inhuman and evil, but also senseless and futile. And yet we live in a time when this lesson has to be unlearned, when we have to rehabilitate within our own selves instincts which our reason has condemned as barbaric, or create new reasons and new impulses to justify our plunging into what we want to avoid. . . . Given the mentality of the Western people, their ideas of war, and the education they received during the twenty years that separated World War I and World War II, there was no possibility for them to accomplish over night the fundamental transformation from pacifism to full war-mindedness that was necessary to meet the crisis. Still clinging to peace, they slipped into war. They behaved like a man who has fallen in the water and who struggles desperately to reach the shore, but whose frantic efforts will not prevent him from drowning if he does not know how to swim.

Back in those days, angry critics of the best qualities of civilization spoke of the "decadence" which had overtaken the democratic peoples, and called for pageants of barbarism to recapture for the West the spirit of martial valor and eagerness for war. And, somehow, the West did become warlike and conquered the Axis powers. We did not of course "solve" the dilemma. We rolled over it with the juggernauts of military technology and drove it from our minds with atomic explosions. Yet the dilemma is now revived in the West and is felt so acutely that personal moral agony is not uncommon among thoughtful citizens of the Western nations which are shaping the future into a battlefield for an unimaginably destructive war. Caught in their own *mores*, pressed on by the very strength of the national state, emotionally confined by the arbitrary limits of national sovereignty, the peoples of the West are like alcoholics who stand in numb despair at the bar, drinking to efface the memory of yesterday's debauch. This is the climax of the national state's development, seen in terms of its "strength" as a military power. And, in the

*modern* world, a political community without military power is neither a nation nor a state.

It takes, of course, some imagination to imagine a community which has cultural and moral identity but no national or military cohesion. And it would take considerable daring on the part of those who endeavor to form such a community. This, incidentally, was Gandhi's dream. "My idea of Village Swaraj," he wrote in 1942, "is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbors for its vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity." The "village," of course, is today conceived of as the prototype of a free society only with the greatest difficulty. Technology has vastly complicated the widespread implementation of the Gandhian ideal. But as Ralph Borsodi pointed out many years ago, the engineering designers of the machines for mass production have been preoccupied with "bigness" and their genius has been directed at the goal of enormous quantities of goods. A similar concentration on decentralized patterns of production might bring results that would astonish even the most reactionary champions of bigness and centralized control. The small community may yet find balanced integration with the processes of technology, scaled to operations which free instead of confine human beings.

It is at least possible that the *malaise* experienced by India in her attempt to follow the example of the Western nations is a kind of inner reaction against the follies of Western nationalism and the excesses of modern technology. This may be true, even though much of India's troubles may also be seen to result from the small-mindedness of her politicians and the self-seeking of the educated classes. The trouble of India may be only a symptom of the sickness of the world, giving evidence that the time has come to find a new pattern of human relations, free of the illusions and artificial categories and values of the national state. One Indian leader, Jayaprakash Narayan, is already moving in this direction, in his

analysis of the shortcomings of parliamentary democracy. He, it seems to us, is saying that when people find themselves unable to resolve their dilemmas in familiar ways, it is time to seek a higher ground.

## *REVIEW*

### FEEDING THE HUNGRY

USUALLY, this Department has a choice in what to review next. At least half a dozen volumes lie about, waiting their turn, and often whim or accident makes the pick. Nor are the discussions here "reviews" in the formal sense. We "make use of" books rather than review them. A lot of the time we don't know enough about the author's subject to make a proper review, but we can always exhibit a passage out of his book, or say why we think it is worth reading.

Now we have a problem of selecting a book. For example, there is a paper-back edition of Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*, a work we ought to have read long ago, but got around to only recently. And then there is John Collier's *On the Gleaming Way* (paper, \$1.85, cloth, \$3.50), published by Alan Swallow of Sage Books, in Denver. It would be difficult to find writers more different than Camus and Collier, in feeling and mode of expression. Both, you might say, are on the side of Man, but there the similarity ends.

Camus' book is a struggle to recognize the terms of human life and to define the nature of the human struggle. Collier's book is a cry of the heart and a call to some kind of ancestral wisdom that he finds in the traditions and practice of the Indians of the United States. Both books speak to the human longing to understand, yet it seems virtually impossible to relate what they say. It is as though we have here jutting, rocky evidence of the extraordinary diversity in the wanderings, wonderings, and necessities of the human mind.

When you read John Collier, you have the feeling that whole continents of inchoate thought are struggling for articulation. He piles sentence upon sentence in a kind of desperate effort at communication. You can read him and be moved by the same longing to understand, or you can turn away, abashed and wondering a little about the enthusiasm of this man. With the strength of his spirit, Collier drives a deep well into the arid

land of the American Southwest. The reader must judge what he has drawn up from far beneath the surface. Early in the book he writes:

In the autumn of 1922, I had occasion for long and absorbed meetings with the Governor of Tesuque and his Council of Principal Men. Whites had seized nearly all of Tesuque's irrigable land. Legislation had been forced through the Senate by the Interior Department at Washington, designed to legalize the whites' seizure of the tribe's lands. The bill momentarily might pass in the House, and was assured of Presidential signature. And a drive to exterminate the Pueblo's ancient religions had been launched by the government. Tesuque at that date was subsisting (I did not then know the fact, because the Tesuque never mentioned their bodily hunger) on a per capita income of a few cents over sixteen dollars a year, including all produce grown and consumed.

Gradually, as our meetings progressed, and as Martin Vigil of Tesuque enlightened me by interpretation, I came to realize that I had entered a time dimension not like that of the white world from which I had come. These men and women were living in a time a thousand years ago. An event of many thousand years of group volition, no part of it lapsed into a dead past, was travelling across the present into a future of unknown thousands of years. Toward that "enduring future," the tribe's being and soul was winging like a migrating bird along its ancient migration route. So intense was the reality of this effort of flight between the "twin eternities" of past and future, that all minor aspects fell into oblivion. Personal contingency, personal fate simply did not figure at all. Hunger did not figure. A white well-wisher in Santa Fe discovered that the little tribe was in famine, and set in motion a newspaper campaign for relief. The Tesuques smiled, because the diversion from their real issue was friendly meant; they stayed with their real issue.

A violent action was in process (this was how the Tesuques viewed their crisis), an action directed from the outside against the tribe. The action was designed to kill what the white man called the Indians' past, by shattering the bridge of tribal land and tribal religion which united past and future—the bridge on which the deathless two-way journey plied from living past to living future, living future to living past. Meeting the crisis, the "twin eternities" merged their brooding power; and this they did at each of the twenty-one menaced pueblos in New Mexico, of which Tesuque was one. The result was

planned action in the linear present—action which will be mentioned at its place in this book; the action marked and made the beginning of the historic change in governmental policy which revolutionized the situation of all Indians. But at this point, the subject is the time dimension of tribal Indian life, that all-conserving abyss of time wherein is no past wholly gone and no future wholly inert.

On another occasion, some years later, at a pueblo which I may not name, the tribe's priestly representative was assisting for initiation into the tribe a young man from another pueblo who had married a girl of this pueblo. Much that he told this young man, the teacher was not free to tell me. But part of the tutelage was the unveiling of the hidden names and the spiritual meanings of hundreds of physical places, wide over the land. Mesas, plinths, streams and springs; forests that existed no more, trails unused for hundreds of years. Some of the places had vanished utterly with the passage of linear time; the highest mountain peak, in one of the sacred areas along the Rocky Mountain range, was the highest no longer, and the tree line had moved upward two hundred vertical feet since these tribal memories, as we would call them, this tribal present, as the Indians knew it, had been born. The memories, the present, spanned geological time.

"But, Geronimo," I remarked, "your tribe does not own these places and boundaries any more." He replied: "We own them in our soul."

This is an ancient truth. All men own all the world in their souls, but few suspect it, fewer still are able to speak of it, and the ones who are content with this kind of proprietorship are almost unknown. We speak confidently of various sorts of "evolution," collect the data of the social and economic sciences, and fill our libraries with immeasurable weight of research concerning human relations with things and places, and how, by tradition and legal convention, these relations are defined, while the hungers of the heart are left in a silent loneliness, with only poets and dreamers to give them voice. Mr. Collier is obviously of the persuasion that certain truths of man's being, embodied in the inner life of the Pueblo Indians, made partially explicit in their customs and rites, expressed through a kind of regulated irrigation of the spiritual feelings of the tribe, ought to be recognized as primary realities. All his life Mr.

Collier has given expression to this conviction. He has not hidden his heart. In a long career of service as educator, anthropologist, and public official, he has exposed his most profound convictions. Even in his scientific writing, the loves of the poet break through. In a world of politics and scholarship as arid as the Southwest desert, and about as receptive to this kind of writing as idols of wood and stone are to the prayers of the faithful, Collier has never been afraid to try. There is no way to measure the debt of such an age to such a man. The age has only one way of dealing with such a man. It tries to break his heart. But John Collier has never stopped working, and *On the Gleaming Way* is another rich fruit of his life.

Collier rushes past the dilemmas and necessities of science and severe intellectuality, his eye on the horizon which lies beyond. Camus is hung up on method, but he makes of his struggle with the problem of knowing a Promethean *tour de force*. To this reviewer, Camus is magnificent because he refuses to capitulate in what is by all rational definitions a perfectly hopeless situation. Collier leaves his age far behind him, going on alone, or almost alone. Camus refuses to go ahead, but makes what a man can make of the here and now, with the materials that are given.

Camus ends *The Myth of Sisyphus* with these words:

At that subtle moment when man glances backward over his life, Sisyphus returning toward his rock, in that slight pivoting he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which becomes his fate, created by him, combined under his memory's eye and soon sealed by his death. Thus, convinced of the wholly human origin of all that is human, a blind man eager to see, who knows that the night has no end, he is still on the go. The rock is still rolling.

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain in

itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.

Sisyphus ends as a man. One feels, however, that this sort of transfiguration, torn from the unfeeling matrix of our age, was too much for Camus, even though he gave it heroic form. But we, as we read, sense his heroism, his uncompromising commitment to the terms of life as they appeared to him. This we will remember. The terms, which are the terms of the time as Camus was able to read them—read them with all the lucid power of his French intellect, his precise and disciplined understanding, his acceptance of and responsibility to the mind's integrity—these terms may change, or will certainly change. Other times will have other terms. The present terms we shall certainly forget, or enormously remodel or change. Yet we shall never forget Camus, nor the way in which he made Sisyphus from a mythic outline become a living symbol of man—man, it may be, transfixed by one of the major crises in the human drama. It is possible that we shall in some sense be better able to move forward from that crisis, just because Camus found out all the meaning that it could from that crisis, just because Camus found out all the meaning that it could contain, without himself going on.

## COMMENTARY

### THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF REVOLUTION

IT is a commonplace that the modern world is undergoing a revolution. A. Whitney Griswold, president of Yale University, for example, believes that five distinct revolutions are going on simultaneously. Many of the psychological phenomena which accompany revolution are plainly in evidence, including anxiety and insecurity on the part of those who feel that the ground is being dug out from under their feet, with wild and desperate activity by people determined to preserve the status quo as though it were life itself. What is not in evidence is any sort of open recognition that revolution, agreeable to dictionary definition, means "total or radical change."

It is quite possible, for example, that the meaning of the present world disorder is that the National State is no longer of any value as a form of human society. Yet even those who say that they recognize the "fact" of revolution cling to the idea that human survival means the survival of the National State. What if the reality should be exactly the reverse—that human survival *depends upon* replacement of the state with another form of human association?

Why, basically, do people rely so much upon the idea of nationality for their identity and sense of having a future? Probably because—in the West, at any rate—the modern idea of individuality developed in close historical association with the emergence of the constitutional nation-state. Today, however, while technically the protector of the individual, the Western Nation-State has become an aggressive force in effacing the qualities of individuality. The expression of this force arises from no inner malignancy, but has come because the state is being called upon to perform functions beyond its capacity. It cannot resolve contradictions which are produced by causes lying

outside and deeper than the scope of national politics.

The political atmosphere of the so-called "free" countries, today, is filled with the anger of men who are blaming one another for the breakdown of a system that *nobody* could make work well. If some of this emotion could be turned to uninhibited social invention toward a non-violent, non-coercive social order, we should probably find our way rather quickly. But massive self-righteousness and fear stand in the way of such developments.

Meanwhile India, which has never really been a national state, and may not ever become one (if the writer of this week's lead article is correct in his analysis), now has an opportunity to pioneer a new social form, out of sheer necessity, since it may be too late to make the old one work.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

THIS discussion needs no particular title, since Walter Kerr's *The Decline of Pleasure* (Simon and Schuster, 1969) fits quite naturally under our regular heading. Mr. Kerr's analysis of our culture begins and ends with observations on the relationship between twentieth-century children and the sort of adult culture which surrounds them.

Recently we looked at evidence for the idea that most children have a latent capacity for "abstract" thinking—even though the interests to which they most easily respond are "factual" or "scientific." The adult world, according to Mr. Kerr, is still obsessed with the notion that utility equals value, so that the man with some leisure time is usually discontented unless he can find something "practical" to do with it. Is there a relationship between this scientific-factual bent, apparent in most children, and the failure to gain pleasure from reading stories and fantasy?

Mr. Kerr illustrates a good deal of what has happened to the adult mind by examining children's tastes in entertainment. His first contention is that the average child is not actually a captive of television: "A captive is someone who cannot wrench himself loose from whatever it is that confines him. The children I know are not only able to free themselves at will from what is presumed to be spellbinding but are also able to free themselves without the least sign of wrenching. The drift from the set is the most casual thing in the world." While children do read the comic books adults deplore, and sometimes read them while the TV set is on, may this not be a simple adaptation to their environment, and not especially indicative of the children's chief interests? In Mr. Kerr's findings, the child wants only so much entertainment of this sort. He also desires to educate himself, though he has no conscious plan to satisfy this inclination. If the schools do not teach him much, he is still "inner

directed" by orientation in the areas which occupy the chief attention of adults. Mr. Kerr continues:

As publishers have learned, the contemporary American child will read any volume in the Landmark Series or any other historical, biographical, geographical, or otherwise useful Treatise on the true. Mr. Barzun, in his lament over the follies of twentieth-century teaching, has concluded that any modern child who becomes truly educated will have to have become self-educated. The sales records of books sold to the young—especially in series that are resubscribed year after year—suggest that self-education is now beginning early and that the young are handsomely compensating for the defects of their mentors. Publishers who have dared work against this grain, who have issued handsome series of once-standard children's classics or fresh retellings of age-old myths, have sold some copies: they have sold them to adults with long memories who have sentimentally wished to pass cherished delights along to a new generation—and who have failed. Success has not attended the attempt to revive interest in the idly imaginative; where such series survive, they survive as prestige appendages to the line of "scientific" books that sell.

But Mr. Kerr's *Decline of Pleasure* is in no sense a defense of "permissive education" as it is practiced in most elementary schools. And while he gives little time to "deploring," neither does he sympathize much with those who clamor for the classic disciplines during the early years. Rather he points to an impoverishment which has very little to do with the way children are taught in school:

It would seem that contemporary children are a good bit freer of the television opiate and a good bit more dedicated to sober inquiry than our sometimes panic-stricken outcries proclaim them to be. I find that their conversation reflects the essential seriousness of their preoccupations. I am not myself particularly good with children; when one of my own brings a friend to the house, I am often distressed by my inability to hit upon a genial opening that will let him know he is officially welcome. But I have grown better at this lately, because I have learned what to talk about. If, instead of asking artificially cheerful questions about his vacation or his prowess at fishing, I adopt an entirely adult tone and draw him into a discussion of the now-vanished land mass by means

of which the original Eurasian tribes crossed the Bering Straits to Alaska during the fourth glacial period, I can establish almost immediate *rapprochement*. The problem after that is to get away from him. . . .

If these things are as true as they seem to me to be—if our children are psychologically free to take or leave entertainment and deeply drawn to sources of factual knowledge—what is there left for a father and a citizen to worry about?

It is precisely this inversion of the expected that disturbs me. I am disturbed by what may seem a small thing and may seem a sentimental thing but is nevertheless a real thing: by the fact that the modern child's mind is not susceptible to the attractions of free narrative.

By free narrative I mean story-telling for its own sake; story-telling that draws upon what is instinctive in the child and not on what is provable in the world about him. I mean the sort of "fiction" that takes its energies and its power to compel from a profound, though playful, tapping of the child's intuitions.

Our children, according to one reviewer of *The Decline of Pleasure*, are missing precisely what we miss in our own lives. Our need, he says, is to "rediscover the gifts we lost during the century in which man's genius was totally directed toward freeing himself from hunger and physical burdens: the gifts of playfulness, of contemplation; the gifts of being pleased, of experiencing joy, of recreation that refreshes and truly re-creates. For it is not virtue but joy that is its own reward."

And now for a quotation concerning "ourselves." The following is from Mr. Kerr's introduction:

I am going to start out by assuming that you are approximately as unhappy as I am. Neither of us may be submitting ourselves to psychiatrists, neither of us may take an excessive number of tranquilizers each day, neither of us may have married three times in an effort to find someone who will make us happier. We are not desperate, but we are, vaguely, dissatisfied. The work we are doing is more or less the work we meant to do in life; it does not yield us the feeling of accomplishment we had expected. The family pattern we have created around us, with wife and children arranged neatly in a home, would pass muster in a magazine series devoted to typical American

domestic relationships, it leaves us tense. We own the car, the television set, and the encyclopedia that are generally suitable to our better than modest station, and we are neither terribly envious of those who have accumulated a greater number of these things nor terribly determined to acquire very many more for ourselves; these things have given us some pleasure and some feeling of competence, but not so much that we are convinced that all felicity lies in acquiring more of them. By the standards of another generation, and by the standards of the present generation in an alien three-quarters of the globe, we might be forgiven for thinking ourselves rich; and we are restless.

The question to be answered about our own restlessness is whether it is a creative restlessness or an enervating one. I shall say quickly that it seems to me to be an enervating one self-feeding, on the way to being self-destructive, unproductive of either the general happiness or the specific satisfactions it seems to seek, random, objectless, at sixes or sevens with itself and with everything about it. I believe that our dissatisfaction is both real and damaging and that it may be progressive; that it may, at some future time, do total damage to the human personality.

As a drama critic, Mr. Kerr is singularly good at pointing out the lack of drama in contemporary American living.

## *FRONTIERS*

### The Good Old Fuzz

THE other evening I was peeling a peach, one of a half dozen I'd just bought in the supermarket, and suddenly I found myself thinking wistfully, "The peaches don't have fuzz like they used to." As I looked at the bald but perfectly colored and sized globe of fruit in my hand, the binoculars of nostalgia brought into view a different fruit, a peach as heavily furred as a healthy mouse and just about as edible until it had been deprived of its pelt. How completely silly, I thought; now I'm growing homesick for something I once resented. There'd been a lot of work involved in getting to the essential juicy goodness of the old-time peach.

This bit of yearning seemed to me to epitomize the nature of the nostalgia that has turned the American dream backward and aimed it at the heart of a fuzzy past. It doesn't come from just the fact that modern marketing, or modern anything else, requires an improving on nature that produces slick products. Though most would consciously deny it, it may be that what is resented is the radiation that has slipped into the juice of most of the fruits of modern life. That and a bewilderment over the fact that the *bad guys* have managed somehow to give the good guys an image that by older standards would have been bad, too. Gone are old certainties and decencies that may have had existence only in the American myth. But they did have that, just as the peach had fuzz.

As has been pointed out in this Magazine and many others, the Western story, on the screen, in TV, and in paperback books has been one of the strongest indications of our nostalgic trend. *Wagon Train* has caught man's longing for a new and uncomplicated frontier; a dozen or more stylized "lawmen" have given justice its old simplicity, limning things in black and white, and settling them with a hostility-purging violence in the big shoot-out. The Rebel, just home from a lost war, and with all hands seemingly against him, is a popular figure in these tales of the old West. Perhaps all of us have rebelled and lost and now are wandering. In pictures such as *High Noon*, man's essential aloneness is anatomized.

But it is the kind of loneliness that can be ended with bravery and with a gun.

I think that even the landscapes of these Westerns draw us back. Man can ride alone into distances, and while he has only one horsepower against the two or three hundred at our command as we inch along freeways headed for new "certainties," which most of us consider as phoney as a three-dollar bill, he is faced with simple threats. What is a Piute's shaft or a bushwhacker's bullet in comparison to a 40-megaton weapon; what are a couple of dry camps compared to being displaced by automation? Yes, and the little ranch house in the cottonwoods by the creek, or even the sod hut on the great desert or prairie hold an appeal not to be found in Escrow Ranchos where the "spreads" are 60 feet by 90 feet and the low thunder of garbage disposal units grinding in the dusk seem more symbolic than they have any right to be.

People act out these backward drawn fantasies in many ways. The "camper" craze is one of the currently most noticeable. In Los Angeles and many other cities there are tens of thousands of these living units on the backs of pickup trucks, making them ready for living in the mountains and in the desert. When the *Big One* comes, here is a shelter that can move, man, move! If the owner has been studious, and I think most have, they have manuals on survival and have probably studied Erle Stanley Gardner's article on how to get game with a handgun and snares. In a current man's magazine there is even a recipe for pemmican for use in the long haul.

Developments such as California City situated far out in the Mojave desert draw thousands of people. It matters not that these places are located where a prospector wouldn't dig or a cowman camp. What matters, though no one talks about it openly, is that they are out of the target area and in a region like the open spaces of the past where things were simple. In New Mexico they are selling five-acre parcels of land that no administration was ever corrupt enough to try to pawn off on the Indians, and apparently finding takers. I imagine most of the people who buy this land will not even go to look at it; owning a little token of this strange, backward "security" to dream about will be enough.

Perhaps it is significant that Las Vegas, a city that declared that in the event of a bombing it would take up arms against people fleeing Los Angeles, sponsors the national quick-draw championship tournament. There, annually, hundreds of fast guns from the quick draw clubs from all over the nation compete. These men are said to be far faster than Billy the Kid and his like and, luckily, they shoot only against electronic devices that reckon up their scores in split seconds. Maybe the nearness of a test ground for nuclear devices inspires these new gunmen to greater efforts. The enemy is time and time is the present.

One of the weirdest cases of acting-out of this nostalgia is the resurgence of the manufacture of muzzle-loading pistols and rifles brought on by both the Western craze and the Civil War Centennial. Replica guns have been made by the hundreds of thousands and black powder clubs are springing up all over the nation. The arms of both the Union and the Confederacy are available and one can take his choice and choose up sides, so to speak. There is even a Dixie Gun works which offers the authentic article to the constitutional southerner.

In its Seminars on American Culture, the New York State Historical Association in Cooperstown, N.Y., offers a course in The Civil War as the Soldier Lived It. Everyone in the class was allowed to blast away happily with percussion rifles and pistols, as many as sixty-eight shooting in one afternoon. In another class on the life of the frontiersman, flintlock rifles of the Revolutionary war period were used.

We want to get back to when combat was simple and it's apparent that casting slugs and making black powder are no deterrent to this drive. Then, there is always a chance that man may once again have to start over and depend on weapons of this sort. Maybe there is a day coming when a man will have to live off the land and protect his own. Past wars have come to seem so inconsequential that people use their most lethal equipment for desperate and innocent role-playing. No one, I think, wants to shoot anyone; people just wish that if there has to be another war, it will be simple—just shooting at each other. Most of the people who collect these old guns and fire them don't even hunt, but use paper targets.

The past of my youth for which I am nostalgic was, frankly, miserable in its psychological aspects. The time when I could roam freely in the woods and mountains was during the first world war, a time of death for others. In the Northwest, where I was after that war, there was a violent conflict between the old Wobblies and the citizens and I looked from a train window at Centralia and saw men hanging from the bridge of a parallel railroad line. During some of those years I look back on, I wondered if I were going to live through them. But they don't seem so bad now; in fact they seem better and better. Even later, during the Depression, one could sustain a forward dream.

Perhaps I didn't notice it then, and I'm sure few others did, but the day after Hiroshima was blasted, our dreams of the future must have begun to falter. The American dream as I remember it was mighty, but included no such might as that. In an anatomized second, time went crazy and there would never again be a horizon such as we knew before—never a future that would sustain a forward-going myth.

Going back to while I was peeling the peach that, like Proust's pastry, opened this excursion into nostalgia, a most horrible thought came to me. It was that in some future time there might be people who would look back on the present *lovingly*.

However, one thing is sure; no state historical society will be giving demonstrations of nuclear weapons. A few more such "seminars" over the Pacific and Siberia and the most persevering archeologist won't be able to dig up a past that is remote enough and safe enough. Even glaciers are frangible.

WALKER WINSLOW

Los Angeles