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A RARE INSTRUCTION

WE have today many carefully compiled books and articles on how to run the planet, but very little on a much more difficult subject—how to live a life. It seems entirely likely that the excellent advice now available on the management of the planet will not be taken until there is far better understanding of how to live our lives. Actually, there is only a very low-grade consensus on how human life ought to be lived. While we are pursued and drenched with numberless instructions on the best way to satisfy our desires, and constantly invited to multiply them, an impartial account of a "good life," above the cliché level, is hard to come by.

There may be reasons for this. Too much definition of the good life from any "authoritative" source might be condemned as an attempt at "thought control," or violation of the First Amendment. We do have vague political generalizations concerning the good life, which vary with ideologies, but politics, even at its best, is concerned with only the grossest questions of human behavior and usually focuses on issues of property and power. It would hardly occur to a youth who is wondering about what direction to give his life to consult a political counselor. The qualities that people seek for their lives can be served by politics in only a partial and minimum way, and there are deep longings, indefinable hungers, and aspirations to which no political system, as such, is competent to speak. The question of choosing a life is further confused, for it is by no means agreed whether a human being's career is self-created or imposed by forces over which he has little or no control. What humanist philosophy we have, although weak and often compromised by contradictory doctrines, asserts that man has the innate capacity to make decisions for himself, and is therefore able to plan his own life. Our science, however, cannot take cognizance of this view of man without accepting metaphysical assumptions which are believed to be incompatible with scientific method. And there can hardly be any doubt of the fact that vast numbers of people in the world are severely limited in their choices by poverty, ill-health, and hunger. It follows that small comfort is given to the idea of human freedom by statistical reports of the human condition.

On the other hand, if we admit the reality of all these circumstances but go on to the observation of individual lives, we may find examples of free human beings who not only compel recognition that they are doing what they themselves decided to do, but also command the deepest admiration. Danilo Dolci in Italy is one such individual, Cesar Chavez, in California, another. These two are comparatively well known, but there are countless others who are in some way breaking out of the prison of circumstances and conditioning, and making lives which are the distinctive result of their own decisions, and could even be called monuments to human freedom and resolution.

There are many ways to generalize the human situation. One might say, for example, that the world of today has become a forbidding place; that the momentum of past human action has made it into an environment affording fewer and fewer alternatives which invite and encourage; that our very knowledge of our circumstances, as defined by economists, sociologists, and others, makes an increasingly depressing prospect for the young man or woman trying to look forward to or plan a future life. But this is only the report of statistics.

Another view, well put by Ortega, makes a more fundamental claim on assent. In *What is Philosophy?* he said:

> If the shot fired by the gun had a soul, it would feel that its trajectory was pre-fixed by the powder and the firing pin, and if we call this trajectory its life, the shot would be simply a spectator with no way of intervening in it, the shot neither fired itself nor did it choose its target. But for this very reason, that kind of existence cannot be called life. Life is not felt as predetermined. However sure we may be as to what is going to happen tomorrow, we also see it as a possibility . . . at any moment we find ourselves forced to choose among various possibilities. If it is not given to us to choose the world in which our life is to be unrolled—and this is the fateful dimension—we find ourselves with a certain margin, a vital horizon of possibilities, and this is the dimension of its liberty; this life is fate in freedom, and freedom in fate.
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> The great fundamental fact which I want to bring you is here. We have to put it into words: living is a constant process of deciding what we are going to do. Do you see the enormous paradox wrapped up in this? A being which consists not so much in what it is as in what it is going to be: therefore in what it has not yet become! This essential, this most profound paradox is our life. This is no fault of mine, but in solemn truth this is just what it is.

This, surely, is abstract truth about our lives. Taking it, working with it, remaining ever conscious of it, must be a part of living well, of creating a good life. Whatever we say about the world around us, the advantages or limitations of our times, the remoteness or accessibility of our dreams, the vital area of our lives is precisely that *margin* in which possibilities arise, where appear both the obligation and the necessity of choice.

If our study is entirely made up of the circumstances which confront us, if we give no attention to ourselves and why we do what we do, believing that we act only under constraint, the margin will grow smaller and smaller, or will *seem* smaller and smaller, and this is almost, if not quite, the same thing.

How can one know about these matters? Should he listen to his heart—to the feeling, as Ortega says, that life is not predetermined? Or should a behavioral study be made to settle the question? Would a behavioral study showing that men are entirely shaped in their lives and thought by outside forces be sufficient to persuade a man who *feels* free that his freedom is an illusion?

Perhaps we should consult both our feelings and a behavioral study. It happens that a report covering both viewpoints is available in Viktor Frankl's book, *From Death-Camp to Existentialism.* This psychiatrist, who *close* to go to Auschwitz because of a sense of duty to the human beings incarcerated there, wrote of the effects of the camp's brutish environment:

> The camp inmate was frightened of making decisions and of taking any sort of initiative whatsoever. This was the result of a strong feeling that fate was one's master, and that one must not try to influence it in any way, but instead let it take its own course. In addition, there was a great apathy, which contributed in no small part to the feelings of the prisoner. At times, lightning decisions had to be made, decisions which spelled life or death. The prisoner would have preferred to let fate make the choice for him. . . .
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> In attempting this psychological presentation and a psychopathological explanation of the typical characteristics of a concentration camp inmate, I may give the impression that the human being is completely and unavoidably influenced by his surroundings. (In this case the surroundings being the unique structure of camp life, which forced the prisoner to conform his conduct to a set pattern.) But what about human liberty? Is there no spiritual freedom in regard to behavior and reaction to any given surroundings? Is that theory true which would have us believe that man is no more than a product of many conditional and environmental factors—be they of a biological, psychological or sociological nature? Is man but an accidental product of these? Most important, do the prisoners' reactions to the singular world of the concentration camp prove that man cannot escape the influence of his surroundings? Does man have no choice of action in the face of such circumstances?
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> We can answer these questions from experience as well as on principle. The experiences of camp life show that man does have a choice of action. There were enough examples, often of a heroic nature, which proved that apathy could be overcome, irritability suppressed. Man *can* preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress.

> We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.
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> And there were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self your inner freedom; which determined whether or not you would become the plaything of circumstances, renouncing freedom and dignity to become molded into the form of the typical inmate.

The testimony is clear, but we must note that what Dr. Frankl says about the heroic preservation of human freedom was not revealed in the behavior of the "typical inmate." That is the trouble with statistics. They hide the flowering excellence of the few. For reasons which grow out of the aristocratic abuse of power in the past, modern thought tends to regard the excellence of the few as not worth examining, and when noticed as somehow undemocratic, which seems almost an oblique assertion that excellence should not be recognized as a goal or fulfillment of human possibility. Yet this habit of mind is surely a perversion of the democratic idea. Excellence is a fruit of striving, and it seems quite ridiculous that we should admire it in athletes but pass it by in men of rare character and moral intelligence. Indeed, the neglect of these qualities—by reason, as John Schaar has said, of the doctrine and sentiment "that each individual comes into this world morally complete and self-sufficient, and not in need of fellowship for moral growth and fulfillment"—is probably responsible for the diminishing margin of freedom in the Western world. Those who ignore the obligations of freedom eventually lose the *feeling* of freedom, and this is followed, in time, by loss of even its outward forms, since nothing is done to preserve them. The forms of freedom require continuous renewal.

What restorative measures are open to us?

Two paragraphs from Arthur Morgan (taken from the section on Education in his *Observations,* Antioch Press, 1968) suggest an answer:

> A person without history or knowledge of the past must see the world as commonplace because, except at extreme times, he is going to live among commonplace people who have come to that conclusion. . . . The only way to get the sum and substance of human experience is to reach out beyond the years we have into the years of the past, into the significant experiences of the human race. . . .
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> Education includes not only the transmission of knowledge but also the process of "apostolic succession,' the passing on of the spirit which has emerged in the ages of human aspiration. In the lack of this latter element, knowledge may be only the instrument of primitive or vagrant impulse.

To illustrate what Dr. Morgan is talking about, we could do no better than to read *Talks with Emerson,* by Charles Woodbury. This writer, who died in 1927, was a student at Williams College when Emerson came there to speak in the autumn of 1865. At once attracted to the visitor, Woodbury met with Emerson many times and after his graduation was chosen by him to be his personal secretary. Woodbury knew the Transcendentalists, some of them intimately, and recorded his reminiscences of Emerson in 1890, in this book, the only one he wrote. *Talks with Emerson* was republished in 1970 by Horizon Press, with a thoughtful introduction by Henry LeRoy Finch.

Woodbury carefully recorded many of his conversations with Emerson, and notes in particular the great influence he had on the young. It was at the demand of the students that he came to Williams College, and quotations from Emerson's letters show that he was drawn to many other schools by similar appeals. Woodbury weaves in material taken from other sources (the Essays, etc.) with his recollections and notes of talks with Emerson—all from Emerson, but not all said or written at the same time. Here are some

counsels on writing, the occasion being Emerson's notice-of a placard, "Laws of Writing," on the wall of Woodbury's room:

> "The most interesting writing is that which does not quite satisfy the reader. Try and leave a little thinking for him, that will be better for both. The trouble with most writers is, they spread too thin. The reader is as quick as they; has got there before, and is ready and waiting. A little guessing does him no harm, so I would assist him with no connection. If *you* can see how the harness fits, he can. But make sure that you see it. . . .
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> "What is it you are writing for, anyway? Because you have something new to say? . . . To make anew and not from others is a grand thing. You can always tell when the thing is new; it speaks for itself. And even among the unlettered it declares well and strong enough. From this is the projection of idioms. But add true, and make sure of this. Without such sanction, no one should write.
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> "Then what is it? Say it! Out with it! Don't lead up to it! Don't try to let your reader down from it. *Say* it with all the grace and force you can, and stop. Be familiar only with good expressions. Speak in your own natural way. Then, and only then, can you be interesting. Let your treatise be yourself, so your friends will say, '_____wrote that.'
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> "Expression is the main fight. Search unweariedly for that which is exact. Do not be dissuaded. You say, know words etymologically. Yes, pull them apart; see how they are made; and use them only where they fit. Avoid adjectives. Let the noun do the work. The adjective introduces sound, gives an unexpected turn, and so often mars with unintentional false note. Most fallacies are fallacies of language. . . .
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> "Neither concern yourself about consistency. The moment you putty and plaster your expressions to make them hang together, you have begun a weakening process. Take it for granted the truth will harmonize, and as for the falsities and mistakes, they will speedily die of themselves. If you *must* be contradictory, let it be clean and sharp as two blades of scissors meet.
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> "Reading is closely related to writing. While the mind is plastic there should be care as to its impressions. The new facts should come from nature, fresh, buoyant, inspiring, exact. Later in life, when there is less danger of imitating those traits of expression through which information has been received, facts may be gleaned from a wider field. But now you shall not read these books"—pointing—"Prescott or Bancroft or Motley. Prescott is a thorough man. Bancroft reads enormously, always understands his subject. Motley is painstaking, but too mechanical. So are they all. Their style slays. Neither of them lifts himself off his feet. They have no lilt in them. You notice the marble we have just seen? You remember that marble is nothing but crystallized limestone? Well, some writers never get out of the limestone condition. Be airy. Let your characters breathe from you. Walk upon the ground, but not to sink. It is a fine power this. Some men have it, prominently the French. How it manifests in Montaigne, especially Cotton's translation, and in Urquhart's 'Rabelais'! Grimm almost alone of the Germans has it, Borrow had it; Thoreau had it; and James Wilson—sometimes."

Speaking is the man who advocated self-reliance, who urged self-trust and self-discovery, who declared that "imitation is suicide." Emerson's counsel to young writers grows naturally from his fundamental conception of man. It was this strength of selfhood that the youth of his time sensed in Emerson—an "Emerson 'field of force'," LeRoy Finch calls it—"result of Emerson's own practice of his own endlessly repeated message: *Be yourself; never imitate; listen only to the voice within you."*

If we should decide to consult Emerson on the living of a life, it is wise to take him whole. He deserves more than an occasional dipping into. For this was a man whose days were a continuous reflection on the meaning of human existence and what a man or woman can do to fulfill whatever he finds within himself to work with. The principles he found and avowed are good, no matter what the circumstances; they always apply, since they are indeed principles rather than plans. Yet Emerson is rich in his own sort of illustration.

What one gets from Emerson, slowly perhaps, yet inevitably, is the sense of human life as a drama, as the making of something, possibly good and fine, by each one of us. He does not wish to be a "model," he would have none, himself, but his own ideals, and those he forged from his thought; but if a model is wanting he

might be a good one to choose, so far as hard thinking is concerned. Yet more important than making him a model would be to take him in evidence of what Morgan said—that in Emerson we have an example of a very uncommon man, a man who all his life rejected the commonplace and mediocre, who labored toward perfections that would satisfy his own vision. So life, in Emerson's view, was both drama and art, the art of living, and he would make his craftsman's decisions by the best light he could find.

In the few passages we have quoted on writing and reading are plain clues to what his practice was. This, surely, was what Arthur Morgan had in mind when he spoke of education as including "the passing on of the spirit which has emerged in the ages of aspiration." Emerson's counsels on reading could be taken as directions for recognizing that spirit, while being sure that the touchstone of its excellence is always the awakening perception that one has in oneself, through a lively awareness of nature and experience.

Emerson is sometimes regarded as recording only a vast affirmative, yet in Woodbury's book we see that his critical faculties were active enough. What he says about writers who fail to emerge from "the limestone condition" was a good critical direction to a young reader, and it is even more important today. In *Language and Silence*, George Steiner said of the present:

> Actions of the mind that were once spontaneous become mechanical, frozen habits (dead metaphors, stock similes, slogans). Words grow stronger and more ambiguous. Instead of style there is rhetoric. Instead of precise common usage, there is jargon. . . . All these technical failures accumulate to essential failure: the language no longer sharpens thought but blurs it.

Steiner describes the reversion to "the limestone condition," all the more difficult to overcome for the reason that it represents a decline from better days, a lapse and submission to mechanization of mind and externalization of thought. In the *Structurist* for 1972-73 (No. 12), George Whalley traces the course of this decline:

> Technological obscurantism having become a virtual imperative in our lifetime threatens to destroy language as it has never been threatened before, by degrading language to the level of univocal technical jargon or a conventional code. The destruction of language is to a great extent the destruction of the self, as the development of language is the development of the self. But in this process, as in the process of language itself, the initiative of the self is paramount: newspeak is not murder but suicide—we don't have to speak it unless we want to, or unless we allow ourselves to be persuaded.

It is indeed a matter of choice. Yet one cannot choose to *say it*, as Emerson exhorted, without the deeper preparations and invitations to the self which had become the loving and finally the spontaneous discipline of his entire life. It seems too much to say that the development of language is the development of the self; the working, manifesting self is rather the creation of a life well lived, brought into being by choices deliberated and taken; and then language grows in strength and maturity as the natural voice of that self, its faithful reflection. Along with the symptoms of decline, we have our critics and diagnosticians, well able to see the ills from which we suffer, but Emerson was one of those rare souls who do more than diagnose: he knew the sources and meaning of active, productive health, and he gave unlabored instruction in the regimen of wholeness. For him, healthful activity became as natural as breathing.

REVIEW
BUDDHISM IN TODAY'S CHINA

BOOKS on Buddhism as a cultural institution, in terms of organized groups affected by historical forces, which at the same time exert an influence on history, are likely to puzzle Western readers who have become interested in Buddhist thought for quite different reasons. Many of the latter think of the teachings of Sakyamuni as philosophy rather than religion, or even as rather wonderful psychological science. They read the Buddhist scriptures, finding them sources of sublime ideas and illuminating conceptions of moral law which have both cosmological and ethical aspects. They had known little or nothing of the compromises and admixtures revealed by the sociology of religion.

This is a problem by no means limited to the understanding of Buddhism. Hardly a century goes by when some band of determined Christians does not declare intentions to go back to what they understand to be the moral simplicities of the original Christian way of life, as lived by the apostles, and to the undiluted inspiration of the Gospels and the Sermon on the Mount. Similarly, it always comes as a shock to students happily under the spell of Lao tse's *Tao Te Ching* to discover that the Taoist sects of later centuries adopted shameless practices and beliefs which seem utterly opposed to the ascetic wisdom and purity of the Chinese sage.

Yet the history of Buddhism presents a special case of the secularization or denaturing of an undeniably great original teaching, since, for all the decline in the stature of Buddhist teachers, it often seems that more of the initial vision has remained in Buddhism than in any other religious tradition. For this reason, the recently published third volume of Holmes Welch's researches into Buddhism in China, *Buddhism Under Mao* (Harvard University Press, $16.00) holds particular interest. The previously published volumes are *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism* (1967) and *The Buddhist Revival in China* (1968). What are these books like? They are, one might say, the best you could expect from turning a tough- but fair-minded Yankee scholar loose in China for ten or fifteen years, with the assignment of finding out all he can about what Buddhism means to the Chinese people and how Buddhism as a practical faith or philosophy to live by is getting on in a country ravaged by invasion, torn by internal dissensions, and finally given a fresh material start by a successful Communist revolution.

This third volume, about Buddhism under Mao, involved special difficulties not applying in the case of the previous studies, which required only much careful research. In trying to determine what had happened to Buddhism in China since the revolution, Mr. Welch found that China's political leaders had two policies, one which they used in China, and another embodying their "public relations" attitude toward Buddhism for foreign consumption. Further, the Buddhists, especially those who tried to play some part in national affairs under the Communists, suffered from a syncretism of views which emerged in a form that took Mr. Welch some time to understand. Apparently, the Communist leaders were willing to use Buddhism as an expression of Chinese culture, but decided to try to change it into a credo wholly acceptable to Marxist thinking, which would make it into something that was not Buddhist at all. The logic behind this revision, as explained to Mr. Welch by some Buddhists who embraced it as reasonable, and anyhow inevitable, is as follows:

> Communism has spread over half of the world in the last fifty years. Though it seems to be temporarily arrested, the Western powers are far away and, in any case, looking to them for one's own defence might mean the return of colonialism. Therefore Buddhists [those throughout Southeast Asia] wonder what is going to happen to Buddhism—what is going to happen to them—if and when Communism reaches their countries? Is it not better to reach an accommodation now?

> Furthermore, as I was so often told Buddhism and Communism have many points in common: both deny the existence of God, the existence of the soul, and think dialectically. The Sangha practices some things that the Communists have so far merely talked about: no personal property, living a communal life, taking all decisions unanimously, and devoting oneself to the service of people and world peace. It may be true that the Buddha differs from Marx on a few points, but such differences can be rationalized.

But this is the view of the "cooperators." A little later Mr. Welch says:

> I do not want the reader to be misled by the conversations recounted above, many of which I have selected because they are more striking than because they are typical. I do not consider that the *majority* of Asian Buddhists have sacrificed their good judgment or intellectual honesty for the sake of currying favor with their own government, or for the sake of foreign trade, Chinese donations, guided tours, or the prospect of converting the Chinese to Buddhism. Let me make this point very clear: the *majority* of the people I talked to were more or less aware of the nature of the Communist regime and had doubts about the survival of Buddhism in China. They were not stupid, nor were they Communist dupes.
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> If they often seemed evasive and self-contradictory, it was because they were trying to observe a cardinal principle of Buddhism: avoid partisanship. Monks may not engage in partisan politics. If Buddhism is persecuted, they must, as always, obey Government decrees and wait for a suitable time to speak. At the right time they can and should speak out on all questions of right and wrong, even political questions, *provided they do so in a non-partisan way.* This proviso is the crux of the matter. Because it can be interpreted so differently, the outsider gets a bewildering variety of answers when he asks the Buddhists about the role of the Sangha in the modern world. . . .

An illustration:

> Thus the monk who shrugged his shoulders when I mentioned the possible demise of the Chinese Sangha and said: "Well, if the Sangha is destroyed, it can be revived"—his concern at that moment was not for the Chinese Sangha, but for himself and for me. Would he allow my question to turn him against the Chinese Communists? Was there any way in which he could turn me, perhaps, away from my partisanship? It was not he who was "fuzzy-minded," but I. In his view, my efforts were directed toward criticising the People's Government, whereas they should have been directed towards criticising myself. . . .
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> It is my impression that the devout Buddhists of Southeast Asia, if confronted by a choice between self-defence and destruction, would choose destruction. They may remember the famous Jataka tale in which the Buddha, in one of his previous lives, felt compassion for a hungry tigress and provided his own body as a meal. Non-Buddhists may wonder what practical purpose was served by the sacrifice: they miss the point. The point was the change that it represented in the Buddha's mind. Unfortunately this is not the kind of mental change that a Communist regime will permit.

One is led by such passages in Mr. Welch's book to make certain comparisons, none of them quite accurate, yet useful, perhaps, in reflecting on the dilemmas of the human condition. Here are people, millions of them, who have inherited the doctrine of *ahimsa* from the Buddha and earlier instructors, who sense and reverence the majestic meaning and promise of this teaching, yet do not feel within themselves the strength to comprehend it fully, and therefore to apply it with full confidence as a "law of nature," as distinguished from a religious instruction, a transmitted moral "ought." They feel weak, yet they will be faithful. There is some greatness, but also much pathos, in the situation. It is as though men had been given some great truth, but have been able to grasp or retain only pieces of it; they feel that they know the truth, but only the form, not the dynamics; and so they are pained that their religion is not "up-to-date," and wish to modernize. But can they modernize without still further emasculation of belief? Not without being, not only better, but greater and *deeper* Buddhists, it may be. Their religion bears the diminishing marks of time in its confrontations with worldly pragmatic and political philosophies. Yet they will be true to what remains, if only because this, though incomplete, still has the shine of timeless truth.

Their dilemma is something like the dilemma Dostoevski gave to the modern world, in the

argument of the Grand Inquisitor and his reproach to Jesus. "You," he said, "want men to be heroes, but they are *not* heroes, only weak, failing, timid men." Yet a Buddha or a Gandhi calls these men to a Promethean mission. The question is, How will they respond? Should they, can they, live above themselves, no matter what? Especially when hard politics does not permit? This inner change of mind which grows from sacrifice—is it real? Does it endure?

One thinks, too, of what Milton Mayer relates about the mood of the Czechoslovakian Christians whom he met while teaching, as he did for years, as a member of the Comenius Theological Faculty in Prague. Speaking as a Christian, Joseph Hromadka, the Dean, said to Mayer:

> I know that it is we Christians, alone, who are responsible for Communism. We had a burden to discharge to the world, and Jesus Christ left us no room to wonder what it was. We failed. We "said and did not." And now another power has arisen to take up this burden.

"All over Eastern Europe," Mayer says, "one hears the same agonized words from churchmen: 'The atheists had to come to teach us the social gospel'."

But this is a hard way to learn. We have heard from many eye-witnesses of the great progress made in China under Mao; and social planners cannot help but admire the combination of agriculture with industry in the large autonomous communes which have developed in the new China. There is a blazing pride and self-respect, as well, among the Chinese, and a vast consensus which seems almost unnatural to the individualistic Western reader. Great things are happening there, but also some very bad and sad things, if we look at the fate of independent individuals who find themselves unable to be silent in the presence of the Communist opinion-making machine. (See *World* for Aug. 28, in which there is an abridgement of a book by a man who was released from one of China's forced labor camps.) Is all this what happens when people stop *trying* to fulfill through individual resolve the high moral duties of teachers such as Buddha and Jesus? Is there some sort of continuum of moral law behind the dark events of the twentieth century? A Buddhist would maintain that there is, and would call it Karma, but Western historiography is still a long way from such a coherent view of the affairs of men. The metaphysical stipulations required are too far-reaching.

Meanwhile, the Buddhist philosophy continues to attract the attention of some of the most thoughtful people in the world, and Buddhism keeps on having periodic revivals. There is *power* in these ideas, however imperfect their human representation.

COMMENTARY
REVIVALS OF BUDDHISM

THE periodic revivals of Buddhism spoken of in Review have been sufficiently numerous to have had sporadic coverage by reviews and other articles in MANAS. There was notice of the revival brought in the seventh century to China by the famous traveler, Hiuan Tsang, whose arduous journey on foot to the place of the Bodhi Tree, in India, and then home again, bearing precious copies of discourses on the Law, occupied seventeen years. Skipping to a much later time, there was the reform and purification of Buddhist literature begun by King Mongkut of Siam, in the nineteenth century, who was himself a monk in a monastery for twenty-seven years before he undertook rule of Siam. He was fated to be wholly misunderstood by Westerners because of the misinformation about him supplied by an ignorant governess, and spread by a book and a movie called *Anna and the King of Siam!*

A similar scriptural reform and revival was sponsored in Burma in the 1950's by the devout U Nu, who was then premier. He arranged a two-year convocation of all Buddhists, which was proceeding in 1956 when the 2500th Buddha Jayanti (anniversary of the Enlightenment) was celebrated, note then being taken of an ancient prophecy that 2500 years after Buddha's death his teaching "would put forth green shoots and flourish more vigorously than ever." Gandhi did much to revive attention to Buddha's teachings in India, and in the West the first edition of Edwin Burtt's *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha* was exhausted in two weeks, hundreds of thousands of copies being subsequently sold. The world-wide interest in Zen Buddhism hardly needs mention, and the impressive struggle of the Buddhists in Vietnam will not soon be forgotten. Meanwhile, Mr. Welch's books tell of the revival of Buddhism in China, toward the end of the last century, led by Chinese but helped and sparked by the Indian leader and Buddhist missionary, Dharmapala, whose work was continued by the *Maha Bodhi Journal,* still being published.

Buddhism has always had unique appeal for Westerners. Freud is said to have acknowledged Buddha as a great psychologist, and H. G. Wells gave Buddha and Buddhism generous space in his *Outline of History.* Chief among the early influences which spread understanding and appreciation of Buddhism in the West was Edwin Arnold's exquisite poem, *The Light of Asia,* which has been through countless editions. This was the book which caused Lafcadio Hearn to wonder, speculatively, whether some form of esoteric Buddhism might become the religion of the future. Hearn, of course, had himself become a philosophical Buddhist as a result of discovering the riches of Japanese literature and religious thought.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
. . . IN A DECLINING WORLD

ALTHOUGH the world is in many respects coming apart at the seams, children keep on getting born, and there is the problem of bringing them up in an uncertain and very insecure age. Traditions crumble, inherited religions are dying, honored institutions and offices command diminishing respect, and meanwhile troubled adults impose their anxieties on the young long before they are ready to bear such burdens. And what, we have often wondered, do resentful militants who speak of nothing but "revolution" say when they are alone with their children? Vast evils are abroad in the world, no doubt of that, but childhood is the time when trust must be fostered, when confidence in others is natural and needed, and when the sinews of health in both body and mind require years to develop in a friendly and hospitable atmosphere.

Speaking freely and easily, an old friend recently recalled the reading of his own childhood, back in the teens of the twentieth century. His was a household without conventional religion, but a deliberate effort was made by his parents to bring him in daily contact with the good and the beautiful. He learned by heart poems by Blake and Wordsworth, starting when he was five. He was read to out of Howard Pyle, of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. A friend of the family fashioned him a wooden sword and a painted cardboard shield, and he played by himself at tourneys and jousting. He knew the pure elevation of Galahad, the veteran strength and faithfulness of Lancelot. H e learned the story of Sigurd the Volsung and treasured the tales of Asgard and the Æsir. Naughty Loki made him wonder about this curious mix of good and evil in one related to the gods, and the binding of Fenris, the dread Midgard wolf, with gossamer threads made strong by magic spells was an image which remained with him all his life. There was another James Baldwin in those days, who devised exciting stories of the Greek myths for children, and from the legends and folklore of other lands. His books, *Fifty Famous Stories Retold*, and *Thirty More Famous Stories Retold* (and others), became the foundation of an undying love of the classics. Years later, our friend said, he came across William Morris' well told epic of the voyage of Jason and the Argonauts, and was delighted to find, in Morris, that Jason was the hero who, as a boy, had been given into the charge of Cheiron, the wise old centaur, for instruction and training during his formative years. And looking once again at *Thirty More*, which he had as a small boy—it first appeared in 1905—he discovered that in this book he had first come upon the unforgettable tale of Roger Bacon and the Brazen Head, a cunningly fashioned visage that could talk, although its priceless counsel was lost through the ignorance and carelessness of Friar Bacon's inexperienced but cocky young helper. Bacon it was who wrote in the thirteenth century that the four causes of error in the pursuit of knowledge are authority, custom, the opinion of the unskilled many, and, finally, the concealment of real ignorance with the presence to real knowledge. The last error, Friar Bacon said, is the most dangerous, and in a way the cause of all the others.

A book our friend remembered as one of his favorites was Howard Pyle's *Pepper and Salt*, first published in 1885, a collection of stories of the lives of common folk of medieval England.

This broad exposure to literature did much to make him a reader all his life; and his early love of ancient myths led him to the epic literature of the East as well, after he grew up. But even in boyhood he found in the library a wonderful collection of East Indian fairy tales, the title and editor of which he could not recall. More recently, however, Elizabeth Seeger made available her fine young peoples' version of the Mahabharata, *The Five Sons of King Pandu,* and there is also Dhan Gopal Mukerji's *Rama,* which does the same for the Ramayana. If justification be needed for making such books the first introduction to the young of the wonder and meaning of the world, Miss Seeger amply provides it:

> For the great epics came out of the dawn of the world, when everything was new: before man wrote or read, when intuition and experience were the only source of his knowledge; when amazed and stirred by the cosmic

> drama in the midst of which he found himself, he tried to find his part in it, his relation to the earth and its creatures, to the heavenly bodies, to his fellow men. In order to record them, he put them into stories that caught the rhythm of the turning earth. There is no better way to remember and to make others remember than to make a story and to put it into rhythmic speech.

Who knows what would be the best preparation, in any specific way, for the world of the next twenty or thirty years? Who knew enough, years ago, to prepare the young for the rapid and bewildering changes that have come like earthquake shocks since the strained and anxious nineteen-thirties? Who sees clearly now?

Danilo Dolci, a man often mentioned in these pages—sometimes called the Italian Gandhi—tells about his own preparations for life, sought and found when he was sixteen years old:

> A normal day was now not long enough for me; every morning I got up at 4 (in winter I would put on my coat to keep from shivering, and go and sit beside the kitchen stove which, although unlit, still retained a modicum of warmth) and for three hours before beginning my regular school day, I silently communed with *my kin*, at first more or less at random, then more systematically. Every morning I was deep in one of Plato's dialogues—at least one of the shorter ones—or in a tragedy of Euripides, Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, Ibsen; then, going back to the beginning of things, in an effort to understand how men who had preceded me had interpreted the world and our life in it, I read the Bible, the Upanishads the dialogues of Buddha, the Bhagavad-Gita, and on to Dante Galileo, Tolstoy. I was truly happy.

Circumstances alter, governments fall, customs decline, religions die and others are born, but the fundamental issues of life, the principles of good and evil, change but little. The young who have encounters with the best of human thinking in the area of great decision find themselves the best prepared to cope with disorders that are unpredictable, often ruinous to all ordinary plans.

There is a mythopoeic strain in every child, and qualities which respond with their own resonance to tales of the heroic. What if the world is no longer brave and bold, but old and tired; all the more reason to go back to beginnings, for the old splendors and strenuous trials will come again; they must, if human life is not to waste away in sickening timidity and passive waiting. The riches of the mind are the raw materials of human achievement. No matter that other mysteries are added, as in the question of *why* Dolci was a boy who got up at four o'clock in the morning to spend three hours of each day with his beloved *kin*, in the pages of great books. Someone provided those books, his family or a kindly neighbor, and Dolci homed on them as though some inner magnetic needle showed the way.

If all the young are myth-makers, then they should have the best materials we can find. It need not much relate to the silly, shallow world out there, for the object of the young must be to make a far better world than this. Speaking of his childhood, Ralph Ellison remembered his early days in Kansas City, when he and his friends roved as a company of Huck Finns:

> Like Huck we observed, we judged, we imitated and evaded if we could the dullness, corruption and blindness of "civilization." . . . We were seeking examples, patterns to live by, out of a freedom which for all its being ignored by the sociologists and subtle thinkers was implicit in the Negro situation. . . . Looking back through the shadows upon this absurd activity I realize now that we were projecting archetypes, recreating folk figures, legendary heroes, monsters even, most of which violated all ideas of social hierarchy and order and all accepted conditions of the hero handed down by cultural, religious and racist tradition . . . being boys, yet in the play-stage of our development, we were dream-serious in our efforts. But serious, nevertheless, for *culturally* play is a preparation, and we felt that somehow the human ideal lay in the vague and constantly shifting figures . . . evolved from our wildly improvisionary projections—figures neither white nor black, Christian nor Jewish, but representative of certain desirable essences, of skills and powers physical, æsthetic and moral.

Few have put the matter better. The world, in the last analysis, is a work of the imagination. What fills the minds of children will have a large part in their future image-making, and so their world-making. And they are competent magicians, as Ellison suggests, quite able to transform imagery according to an enlarging vision. If we give them the best, we need not worry about what use they will make of it.

FRONTIERS

Local Energy Production

WHAT is methane? We take the answer from *Newsletter* No. 3, of the New Alchemy Institute, Box 432, Woods Hole, Mass. 02543.

> The gas produced by digestion, known as marsh gas, sewage gas, gungas, or big-gas, is about 70% methane (CH_4) and 29% carbon dioxide (CO_2) with insignificant traces of oxygen and sulfurated hydrogen (H_2S) which gives the gas a distinct odor. (Although it smells like rotten eggs, this odor enables one to trace leaks easily.)

Why is there interest in methane production, these days? The *Newsletter* reports that, "speaking generally, methane gas converted from easily available organic wastes could supply about 150% of the gasoline energy used by all farm equipment (1965), 7% of the 1970 natural gas energy, and 2% of the total 1970 U.S. energy demands." The Chinese have used "covered lagoons" to supply methane to communes and factories for decades. The first digesters were built in Bombay at the turn of the century, and methane was used in Germany to power tractors during World War II. Today many farmers in France and Germany use home digesters to produce methane for use as fuel.

In the United States, wastes such as manure and garbage are generally regarded as a disposal problem, although in some cases methane is used to operate generators and pumps in treatment plants, and the sludge is sold as fertilizer. Early digester models built in India showed that biogas plants could: (1) provide light and heat in rural villages, eliminate the need to import fuel, to burn cow dung, or to deforest land; (2) provide a rich fertilizer from the digested wastes; and (3) much improve health conditions by providing air-tight digester containers, thus reducing disease spread by exposed dung. (The *Newsletter* speaks of the use by the Hyperion sewage treatment plant in Los Angeles of methane to run its pumps, and we phoned an engineer there, learning that ten 1688 hp. diesels are involved. From three to five million cubic feet of methane are generated daily by the plant, much of which is sold to other users as fuel to produce electricity.)

The New Alchemy Institute is a group of scientifically minded people who have formed a community to do research in small-scale organic agriculture of value to those who want to return to a more natural life on the land and at the same time to apply the best available scientific knowledge. Basic reason for a manual on methane production:

> The small farmer or rural homesteader can take a step toward ecological self-sufficiency by producing some of his fuel and fertilizer needs, using a digester to convert local wastes.
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> Total dependence on conventional fuels, especially in rural areas, is likely to become a serious handicap in the years to come, as reserve shortages and specialized technologies hike the costs of fuel and nuclear fuels. But by producing energy from local resources, it is possible to be partially freed from remote sources of increasingly expensive fuel supplies.

The advantages of using methane gas as a fuel are several. If one has available sufficient organic materials (manure and vegetable wastes), it is fairly easy to construct a digester which hastens the breakdown of these materials, by anaerobic decay, into several products, two of which, big-gas (70% methane), and sludge (an excellent fertilizer), can be put to practical use. The *Newsletter* gives plans for two digesters and answers these questions:

> How much raw organic material can be expected from the plant or animal wastes available? How much gas will they produce? What kind and size of digester should be built? (so that it suits the needs and resources of whoever builds it). And how is the digester started?
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> . . . we have found that productive digester operations can be built and maintained by knowing some things about the biology of digestion, and the properties of the raw materials going into the digester. Of course, this knowledge is useless without direct experience with small-scale *models* (which can be constructed cheaply from easily available materials). Once the digester is understood at this

> level, the larger units can be built with more sophisticated ways of using methane gas energy and recycling sludge back into the biological systems.

Pure methane has a heat value of about 1,000 British Thermal Units (BTUs) per cubic foot. One BTU raises a pound (pint) of water by 1°F. If five ft.^{3} or 5,000 BTUs are available, you can bring a gallon of water to a boil and keep it boiling for twenty minutes. If the big-gas produced by the digester is 60% methane, the five ft.^{3} of big-gas will provide about 3,000 BTUs. The other major ingredient of big-gas is carbon dioxide. The *Newsletter* gives the general biological background and instructions for optimum production of methane, and for assuring that the sludge is a good quality fertilizer.

Methane has a little less than half the BTU value of propane. It can be used in any appliance that burns natural gas. Its drawbacks are the comparatively low fuel value and the large storage area required, since it is difficult to liquefy. Its best use, therefore, is in stationary applications.

This issue of the *Newsletter* has 48 pages. (Price, $3.00.) There are many clear diagrams, a number of photographs, and a bibliography of sixty-nine entries. The principal author is John L. Fry, who once constructed a large digester on his hog farm near Johannesburg. Mr. Fry says:

> We are taking the experience gained from this major experiment to draw plans for a series of projects in methane digestion, in a range of sizes. However, it is worth mentioning that the whole methane plant including engine cost about $10,000 and produced 8,000 ft.^{3} gas daily. At the altitude of 5,500 ft. above sea level the BTU was 585 per ft.^{3} Thus, 4,680 BTU per day or 46.8 Therms. At the present 1973 price in Santa Barbara this amounts to $7.57 a day or $16,578 over the six years, in gas alone. The saving in labor in the loading and spreading of manure made for a far faster return on capital. By far the greatest return was neither in gas nor labor saving, but in the value to the soil of the effluent returned as fertilizing material.