

## THE DREAM OF REALITY

IT is customary, after some ardent man has made a synthesis of imaginative longing for human good, to say that poetic dreams have their place, that they exert a refining influence and are a better pastime than vulgar pleasures, but that they should not be allowed to conceal the hard facts of life. We tell this man to "come down to earth." We remind him that such dreams have never been made practical in any society. We point out the inconsistencies in visionary constructions and we contrast what he says to sober-minded accounts of the human situation as most men find it to be.

What this response overlooks is the irrepressible role of the imagination in shaping *all* accounts of human life. Even the so-called "practical" view uses the sediment of old and dissolving dreams, and is anchored to the undemanding fragments of past theories concerning the meaning of life. The plea for adherence to "reality" is often an argument for avoiding involvement or commitment. It is true enough, however, that the pages of history seem strewn with the shards of idealistic failure. This aspect of the record supports the prudence which says it is foolish even to attempt what cannot possibly succeed.

What needs pointing out is that we do not reject works of the imagination, but only works of a daring imagination. The consensus code of the commonplace and the mediocre will freely allow permits to builders of structures that stay within the bounds of the "safe" and the "possible." And when, from causes unknown to us, a genius breaks all the restraining rules, winning acceptance from the sheer power of his vision, within a generation or so conventional opinion succeeds in rubricizing his ideas so that they no longer make demands upon human daring. A work of the imagination tends to be rejected unless it can be believed in without effort or risk.

Orthodoxies vary, but the temper of orthodoxy varies hardly at all. Orthodoxy consistently opposes any proposal of far-reaching change, and especially proposals involving moral exertion. A good illustration of this is found in the reception given to the youthful Shelley, who was above all a man of imagination. In her Note on Queen Mab, composed by the poet at the age of eighteen, Mary Shelley wrote:

Shelley came among his fellow-creature, congregated for the purposes of education, like a spirit from another sphere; too delicately organized for the rough treatment man uses toward man, especially in the season of youth, and too resolute in carrying out his own sense of good and justice, not to become a victim. To a devoted attachment to those he loved he added a determined resistance to oppression. Refusing to fag at Eton, he was treated with revolting cruelty by masters and boys: this aroused instead of taming his spirit, and he rejected the duty of obedience when it was enforced by menaces and punishment. To aversion to the society of his fellow-creatures such as he found them when collected together in societies, where one egged-on the other to acts of tyranny, was joined the deepest sympathy and compassion; while the attachment he felt for individuals, and the admiration with which he regarded their powers and their virtues, led him to entertain a high opinion of the perfectibility of human nature; and he believed that all could reach the highest grade of moral improvement, did not the customs of society foster evil passions and excuse evil actions.

The oppression which, trembling at every nerve yet resolute to heroism, it was his ill-fortune to encounter at school and at college, led him to dissent in all things from those whose arguments were blows, whose faith appeared to engender blame and hatred. . . . it was the cardinal article of his faith that, if men were but taught and induced to treat their fellows with love, charity, and equal rights, this earth would realize paradise. He looked upon religion, as it is professed, and above all practiced, as hostile instead of friendly to the cultivation of those virtues which would make men brothers.

Can this be wondered at? At the age of seventeen, fragile in health and frame, of the purest habits in morals, full of devoted generosity and universal kindness, resolved at every personal sacrifice to do right, burning with a desire for affection and sympathy,—he was treated as a reprobate, cast forth as a criminal.

Discussing the impact of Shelley's work—which was not felt in his brief lifetime William Rossetti spoke of "its controlling power over the reader's thought and feeling, the contagious fire of its white-hot intellectual passion, and the long reverberation of its appeal." Shelley, Rossetti declared, "is emphatically the poet of the future," one who combined "sublimity, beauty, and the abstract passion for good."

Now the point of considering such a man here is to take into full account the *power* of great works of the imagination. Rossetti's adjectives do not exaggerate. Shelley is able to embody in words so enduring a sense of perceived reality that at least some of his poems may ring in the memory of the reader throughout a lifetime. There is ineffaceable grandeur in his final image of Prometheus, which is truly more than an "image," rather the essence of the noble Titan, who is symbol for Shelley of the potentialities of Man:

To suffer woes which hope thinks infinite;  
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;  
    To defy power which seems omnipotent;  
To love and bear, to hope till Hope creates  
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;  
    Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;  
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be  
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;  
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

Shelley's love of ancient Greece made him think of Hellas as the promise of a golden age of peace for all mankind. Here the power of the poetic imagination is devoted to generating the vision of a world purified of hate and conflict. This honor was owed to the Greeks because—

. . . Greece and her foundations are  
Built beneath the tide of war  
Based on the crystalline sea  
Of thought and its eternity. . . .

The reader of the triumphal chorus at the end of *Hellas* begins to wonder if such profound prophecy could be made at all, were there not truth in it. This was Shelley's way of embodying the hope found in many of the world's great religions, only now, instead of being the concert of a common faith, it is the declaration of a single man:

The world's great age begins anew,  
    The golden years return,  
The earth cloth like a snake renew  
    Her winter weeds outworn:  
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam,  
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream.

A brighter Hellas rears its mountains  
    From waves serener far;  
A new Peneus rolls his fountains  
    Against the morning star.  
Where fairer Tempes bloom, there sleep  
Young Cyclads on a sunnier deep

Another Athens shall arise,  
    And to remoter time  
Bequeath like sunset to the skies,  
    The splendour of its prime;  
And leave, if nought so bright may live,  
All earth can take or Heaven can give.

In this we have the very breath of Shelley's conviction; for him it was no mere "poetry."

One thinks, for both parallel and contrast, of those all-enclosing myths in which old races, as well as those whom we presume to call "primitive," lived out their lives. There was, indeed, no life that could be called human that was outside these tapestries of meaning, which we can only attribute, without being able to explain, to the archaic imagination. In our time we owe to men like Mercea Eliade and Joseph Campbell the beginnings of an appreciation of the splendor of the cosmos of mythic faith. What we wish to suggest, here, is that there is no human life of any sort, save as it subsists upon works of the imagination. We inevitably inhabit dreams. If we have no dreams of our own, we borrow from the dreams of other men, although realizing in them only a borrowed security. The most serious

mistake we can make is to fail to see that the faith we live by is a dream.

At issue is the essential nature of human beings. Western intellectuality has long supposed that the great and unprecedented achievement of science was to put an end to the imagined world of mythic powers. The advent of proper definitions of the elements of the natural world, together with increasing control of its energies, has been regarded as having reduced to "airy nothings" the works of the transcendental imagination. But the scientific encounter with nature, while productive of many wonders—and horrors—has not led to increased self-understanding for man. The men of today cower in the shadow of great scientific inventions. This is not a criticism of science, but of the gratuitous assumption that science has made unnecessary the meaning-seeking exercise of the imagination. Pre-scientific and pre-industrial man could obtain a sense of human purpose from ancient religio-philosophical systems, and if this was not the highest way, it was at least a way. Faith in an established system of meaning was held by the ancients themselves to be only a way-station in the project of life. But faith in science—in what is no more than a vastly developed manipulative power over the forces of nature—this, having no potentiality of meaning in it, is no faith at all. So, as man's works in the world grew, his human stature declined, by comparison and even absolutely, and there was a decline in both the temper and the capacity which made great affirmative works of the imagination possible.

It should be obvious that there can be no explaining of these things without a theory of history. Unless we can find some human meaning behind even the loss of meaning, then—as is already happening—men turn their minds to making dark theologies of self-defeat, and theories of cosmic absurdity and final alienation. So, as a modest essay of the imagination—something required for even the simplest conceptions of meaning—we propose that, despite the disasters

of recent history and discouraging portents in the present, there is a meaning in the present breakdown of meaning, and a reason for the cultural impoverishment suffered by all. It is that we are in a transition period between the age of public myth and the age of individual discovery of meaning—between the nourishment of many by collective works of the imagination and the necessity of learning how to nourish ourselves individually, by the use of our minds.

This is a theory, at any rate, into which can be fitted the numerous intellectual and psychic phenomena of what we call the modern age. At some point in the past three hundred years, it became *right* for men to break with tradition for no further reason than that it was tradition. The time for this break had come, not only because of the decay in the mythic inheritance, not only because of the theological inversion of its ancient truth, but because the destiny of progressive human development required the making of individual matrices of self-discovery. A man could no longer become a man by growing up in the established mode. He had to begin to find his own way.

The entire literature of the conformity/nonconformity debate is infested with difficulties which this idea helps to dispel.

The ontogeny of a human being begins in the undivided continuum of psychic unity. No past, no future, no separation. Slowly, as the external world gains definition, the idea of a self is generated through contrast with the experience of the not-self. The child begins to say "I," meaning that he has a sense of self. And then, as time goes on, he acquires a practical understanding of the world around him. Science, you could say, is an attempt at systematic description, followed by control, of the "world out there." For most men, and for many of its practitioners, science contains the promise of some kind of finality in definition and control. *Some* day, men have long believed, all the major facts will be in, all the chief problems solved, and then we shall achieve in fact the

utopian expectation which the ancients vaguely dreamed of but could not possibly bring about. And since that "some day" has sometimes seemed almost within our grasp, champions of science have also claimed that we already have enough knowledge to declare a lot of preliminary certainties, so that much cockiness resulted in the practice of some of the sciences—although this cockiness usually appeared in fields where the confirmations enjoyed by hard-core sciences such as physics and chemistry were conspicuously lacking. It was the psychologists and the social scientists who exclaimed their certainties, infecting even historians with a slavish attention to *minutiae*, until, as one of the latter pointed out, history was regarded as nothing less than past "everything."

But this endless description of the environment was accomplished at the total neglect of the human being himself. In the mythic account, and according to the ancient imagination, man had a work to do, a destiny to achieve, a salvation to gain. But in the world as described by science, he was only a neutral observer—or some kind of lucky, cosmic gate-crasher with no more responsibility than to help himself. He could ad lib his purposes as he wished, and whatever he did under this guidance of random impulse was called "freedom" and the "pursuit of happiness."

There have of course been various attempts to revive the old myths, but more as social expedients than genuine beliefs. Today religion of the institutional sort is regarded as a regulatory agency, a national resource, rather than an enlivening conception of meaning. The public advocacy of religion is a political pretext, a device of state, with honest clerics sometimes admitting that there may be more integrity in an earned atheism than in inherited faith. Meanwhile, under the benign, somewhat Unitarian, spirit of present-day science, the imagination is allowed to frequent back-alleys where research is inactive or concedes "uncertainty" (the unpredictable path of the electron reinstated "free will"!), and to generate a

little "poetry" within the confines of a meaningless physical system, but hardly anything more. The manifest and enormous claim of the human being's imaginative power—the natural fact that every theory of the universe, every doctrine of social or moral or spiritual meaning, is the work of the mind—that this power we live by, hope by, strive by—that there is, indeed, nothing real, nothing to be taken seriously, nothing that can be even talked about, thought of, or that can touch our sensible awareness, save through the power of the imagination—this omnipresent reality of all human life remains practically ignored.

It does not help us out of our dilemma—nor does it excuse the neglect—to say that the real world is a world of eating and sleeping and getting and spending. The dumb beasts do that. A condition of life is not a limitation of meaning. A launching pad is not a flight, and precise measurements with careful studies of its underpinnings and mundane stabilities give it no meaning or existence as a launching pad until a craft takes off.

But are there no follies of the imagination? We know little, really, of the possibilities of the imagination, and are hardly qualified to judge, except trivially, as we might find fault with a children's game. If we could say to ourselves, and mean it, that the stuff of the imagination is the real stuff of human life, our conceptions of ends and means would be so revolutionized that new disciplines would be born, and fine new works of the mind would occupy our attention, such that the question of what is foolish and what is good would be decided by criteria very different from the ones we are accustomed to use.

How do we now identify a folly? The common practice is to check it by "the facts." But we must ask ourselves, do we know even "the facts," independent of works of the imagination? It is becoming increasingly apparent, from year to year, as scientific thought grows more self-conscious, and criticism of the idea of scientific knowledge more sophisticated (see works by J.

Bronowski and Michael Polanyi), that what were once supposed to be simple scientific facts gain their significance and utility for human decision from being studied in a matrix created by the imagination. If, then, facts are opposed to imaginative thinking, and made its critic, a spurious pretense to independent authority afflicts the whole judgmental operation.

It follows that criticism of the works of the imagination, to have validity, must grow from a general grammar of the use of the imagination. We cannot get outside of the systems created by the imagination, since all possible systems are works of the imagination.

But if this is the case, then how can we justify the devastating effects of, say, the Copernican theory on medieval cosmology? What about the rejection, as a result of circumnavigation of the earth, of the "imaginative" geography of Cosmas Indicopleustes, who maintained that the world was flat, and that rain was the tears of the angels? Reminding ourselves of such needed surgeries accomplished by science does indeed point to excesses of the religious imagination, although, following the distinction made by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, it is probably more accurate to call them improvisations of fancy. The point, here, is that serious humanistic thought which rises by the imagination, yet minds a discipline appropriate to its energies, may reach to conclusions neither suggested by scientific "facts" nor in any way contradicted by them. Consider the large conquests gained by humanistic psychology for the autonomy and possibility of the human being, within the past fifteen or twenty years, and the vast irrelevance of mechanistic protest to this restoration of human dignity, now that the "facts" of an old psychological methodology, seen in another light, are recognized as having a very different meaning.

Already, in fact, the pendulum is beginning to swing the other way, and we see the ill-effects of so long a period in which there has been no acknowledged discipline of the imagination. Who

would have thought, thirty years ago, that a Harvard professor of psychology would within a generation found a church based upon chemical stimulation of whatever faculties lie behind the human capacity to hallucinate?

We seem to be in the presence of a vast and sweeping change in the opinions of men about "reality." Because the disciplined use of the imagination has had no credit in our culture, the brave-new-world iconoclasts having classed metaphysics with religion, and, until recently, mysticism as "neurosis," it now seems legitimate to "imagine" anything at all, and to invent theories of meaning as easily as whims of fashion, simply because science has lost its infallibility and the controlling influence of "facts" has fallen to a nerveless play of value-free relativities.

To what in man is the use of the imagination responsible? How shall we measure the excellence of its structures? These are not really new questions, but they sound new enough to us.

## *REVIEW*

### ON SACRED CONSTRUCTIONS

THE ancient Greeks, a thorough scholarship declares, had no word for "art" or for "artist." The Balinese announce a similar innocence: "We have no art; we just do everything as well as possible." Marco Pallis, in *Peaks and Lamas* (Cassell, London, 1939), reports the same difficulty in relation to the modern Tibetans. After long contact with the Tibetans who carry on the tradition of embodying Buddhist teaching in wall paintings, he wrote:

. . . the language used [by these Tibetan artists] has a curiously utilitarian ring, that gives no inkling of the existence of any theory of aesthetics; it is doubtful whether such does indeed exist consciously, even in the background, so that the translation of many of those terms which are the stock-in-trade of criticism among us, is no light task. For instance "Art" itself has no equivalent term. They do not group all the arts under one head as we do. The nearest word that I can find is "Science of Construction," which can be made to cover all the applied arts, including architecture, but hardly takes in painting. Genius, originality, inventive power—though we know the Tibetans to possess all these unconsciously—are words foreign to them. . . .

The metaphor of "Creation" is one which they do not use not even in respect of the world itself: applied on the cosmic scale, they think of it as "manifestation in form," never in the sense of making something from nothing. As to originality and invention, most artists, but especially painters and sculptors, might even feel rather hurt at being suspected, as they would think, of irreverent self-assertion. They always conceive of everything that they value, including ethics and art, under the guise of knowledge, which is susceptible of being communicated through a chain of teachers and pupils. What the latter learn they adapt capably or incapably, that is all. The former are often the ones to whom we, viewing only the results, apply the term "original", but, whether they really deserve it or not—many certainly do, though they do not know it—they one and all maintain that they are simply carrying out, not inventing, designs prescribed by the tradition handed down to them.

The role of a painting in Tibetan life came home to Mr. Pallis when, attempting to buy a fine *t'hanka* (painting on cloth), he was told the owner was not then available, but that he could purchase at once a *Lamrim* (book) containing basic Buddhist doctrine which was "just the same as the picture." The lamas saw no difference between a painting and a book. The Tibetan expression for a painter made this doubly plain: rendered literally it is "Writer of Gods."

The sole purpose of such paintings is to conduct the viewer to the threshold of metaphysical realization: "Once it has helped to pilot the mind up to the frontier between form and the next stage, the world of Non-form, its task is over—he who penetrates to the beyond has no more use for art."

A broadly similar use of art was made by the ancient Egyptians. In *Geometry in Egyptian Art* (London: Tiranti, 1955), Else Kielland presents extraordinary evidence to support the claim that Egyptian wall paintings and sculpture were precise executions of mathematical models which governed all the basic relationships to be shown. The author sees in this method an important lesson for contemporary artists, who often seek to differentiate themselves from everyone else in a struggle to be "original." Herself a painter, Miss Kielland says in her Preface:

It is not improbable that this out-and-out individualistic attitude has affected the very basic relationship between law and freedom in a fatal way. Does any freedom really exist which is not seen in relation to its contrary—law?

She continues:

If we turn to the ancient Egyptians we find an art where an entirely different relationship exists between law and freedom. Face to face with the works of Egyptian art, we feel unconsciously that they are not primarily individual manifestations. They contain a message of common knowledge, and we can only understand the individual artist in relation to this common fund of knowledge. Plato, who lived in an age when individualism threatened to carry all before it, mentions the Egyptians and emphasizes that their art was bound by laws and rules. They were

forbidden to do anything new, anything which their ancestors had not done before them. Egyptian works of art resemble one another over a period of several thousand years, and we are led to believe that they were produced on the basis of a clearly formulated method, or what we should call artistic technique. A high standard was consistently maintained, reaching great heights whenever a strong personality was present.

Miss Kielland's book is a study of this technique, which sought a revelation of sacred meaning through geometry based upon astronomical ratios. Egyptian art, Miss Kielland says—

is an expression of the Egyptian's ideas of Existence and Man of Life and Death. The object of the Egyptian sculptor at work was not primarily to make a piece of sculpture which would satisfy the aesthetic demands of himself and his fellows, i.e., be beautiful; the whole process was infinitely more serious, and belonged to a constant and eternal cult. It is not until we modern students of Egyptian culture break in and disturb the peace, that all this is regarded and admired exclusively as art.

*Geometry in Egyptian Art* is filled with plates demonstrating the mathematical principles which guided the Egyptian painters and craftsmen.

Many years ago, in a monograph published by the Council of Learned Societies (No. 28), W. Norman Brown, the Sanscrit scholar and Indologist, wrote of Indian sculpture in the same terms:

Sculpture was not meant to be a reminder of a human being or of an apotheosis of man, but of something abstract, spiritual in its reality beyond apprehension by the senses, an ocular reference to universal knowledge that might somehow become comprehensible to humanity.

Actually, it was recollection of this passage in Mr. Brown's monograph on Indian art that caused us to ask for a review copy of his just published *Man in the Universe* (University of California Press, 1966, \$4.00) to which we now turn. This is a small but valuable book concerned with the continuing themes of cultural life in India. Prof. Brown starts out by asking what it is that gives Indian thought its essential quality, and finds the

answer to be as obscure—although as promising—as the replies of the sage Nagasena to the persistent questions of King Milinda. The king wants to know who or what man is.

This Indian version of the "quest for identity" presents the paradox of self-knowledge in purer form than it is found in Western religion, doubtless because Eastern religion is more plainly philosophical inquiry. That is, while the religions of India, like every other religion, are filled with beliefs, it is a lot easier to recognize in them the basic philosophical issues behind the beliefs. It seems clear, for example, that popular Southern Buddhism seeks to avoid the theological extravagances that always grow up around the idea of "soul" by denying the soul altogether. The skepticism is an educational safeguard; it has a rational ground. Yet the safeguard has its price, since the splendor of Bodhisattvic achievement is lost. On the other hand, even in Southern Buddhism, admission of a *thread* of continuity from life to life seems to be admitted—a thread called *consciousness*. In the *Mahanidanasutta*, the Buddha is represented as saying:

Verily this individuality coupled with consciousness is all there is to be born, or to grow old, or to die, or to leave existence, or to spring up in another. It is all that is meant by any affirmation, prediction, or declaration we make concerning anybody. It constitutes knowledge's field of action. And it is all that is reborn to appear in its present shape.

Prof. Brown comments: "In short, we can see that consciousness is the only invariable, the one unalterable element, in the Pali Buddhist doctrine of rebirth." And he finds in this "consciousness" the analogue of the essential spirit he is looking for in Indian culture. Its moving principle is expressed by the title of his first chapter, "The Search for the Real." The keynote of this search, Prof. Brown suggests, is sounded in the *Rig Veda* hymn, 10.128, concerned with primeval origins. Before the beginning, there was neither being nor non-being, neither death nor immortality. Then,

by the heat of self-incubation within itself, the One was born:

In the beginning desire grew in That [One], which became the first seed of mind. The sages by their pious insight in their heart (i.e., by introspection), found the relation of the Existent with the Non-existent. . . .

Who is there who knows, who here can tell whence was the origin, and whence this creation. Who knows, then, whence it came into being?

This creation, whence it came into being, whether spontaneously or not—he who is its highest overseer in heaven, he surely knows, or perhaps he knows not.

There is a delighting absence of talk about "God" in this book. The chapters which follow are, in order, The Unity of Life, Time Is a Noose, and The Conquerors. They deal mainly with the doctrines of Karma and Rebirth, as expounded in the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*. The final chapter, The Conquerors, tells the story of those who triumph over the delusions of Maya and become teachers, exemplars of the freedom that may be gained by every human being. In Prof. Brown's words: "Men relied upon those teachers as Conquerors and Saviors and followed them as trusted leaders to the victory and reward which they now could see ahead. This was for them the Real and they could hope to attain it.'

## COMMENTARY

### THE ART OF THE PHILOSOPHER

To support Coleridge's claim that the Imagination is "the living power and prime agent of all human perception," we need recognition that philosophic truth embodies *insight*, and that insight is not the result of observation but of reflection. High philosophizing, as in Emerson, grips the mind through Emerson's imaginative power, sustained by his will. Philosophers such as Plato, poets such as Shelley, poet-philosophers like Emerson, by producing out of reflection great works of the imagination, supply material for the reflection of others.

Concerning the conditions of philosophical reflection, Leonard Nelson observes (in *Socratic Method and Critical Philosophy*):

Socrates was the first to combine with confidence in the ability of the human mind to recognize philosophical truth the conviction that this truth is not arrived at through occasional bright ideas or mechanical teaching but that only planned, unremitting, and consistent thinking leads us from darkness into its light. Therein lies Socrates' greatness as a philosopher. His greatness as a pedagogue is based on another innovation: he made his pupils do their own thinking and introduced the interchange of ideas as a safeguard against self-deception.

Nelson also says:

We must bear in mind that instruction in philosophy is not concerned with heaping solution upon solution, nor indeed with establishing results, but solely with learning the method of reaching solutions.

Works of the imagination are a crucial stimulus to recognition that the philosophical undertaking is worth while. A man of imagination who philosophizes well gives color, substance, and transcendent reality to the fruits of his reflection. By generating corresponding feelings in his reader, he shares his insight with others. If it is a philosophical insight, it results from the capacity of the artist to repeat, as Coleridge says, some aspect "of the eternal act of creation."

Ringing verity, one may think, comes in this way. And the poet may also, like Coleridge, have disciplined his mind with that philosophical instruction which, according to Nelson, "fulfills its task when it systematically: weakens the influences that obstruct the growth of philosophical comprehension and reinforces those that promote it." (See *Biographia Literaria*, Chap. XII.)

Great works of the imagination obtain intuitive confirmation from the reader. That in all but naive enthusiasts they also generate doubts and questions is inevitable, but this leads to independent investigation. The fundamental consideration is the fact that all human progress—even the progress of science and invention—arises from acts of the imagination, after which the critical and practical faculties go to work.

The great mistake in the criticism of philosophy has been the expectation of being able to check its conclusions by some authority outside the realm of philosophical insight. Only the *values* of philosophy can judge philosophy; for this reason philosophy survives all blundering attempts to dispose of its claims, and since these values are given in the human heart, they cannot be suppressed.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

### POEMS BY CHILDREN

RICHARD LEWIS, who teaches at the Walden School and the New School for Social Research, both in New York, has put together a book of poems by children. He had the help of UNESCO, which gave him contact with schools in eighteen countries, and from the more than 3,000 poems he collected on a tour of these lands he chose the ones in this book, called *Miracles* (Simon and Schuster, 1966, \$4.95). The contributors, who are between the ages of five and thirteen years, live throughout the English-speaking world—in the United States, New Zealand, Kenya, Uganda, Canada, England, Australia, India, and the Philippines. Save for corrections in spelling, the children's work is untouched. In an introductory note, Mr. Lewis says:

Some of these poems were written in school or in extracurricular meetings with interested teachers. Some were written out of school by children who had the encouragement of their parents; others by children who kept their secret notebooks hidden away. Some were dictated to parents or teachers by five- and six-year-olds who had not yet learned to write; in some, adult or literary influences begin to be felt.

In his selection, however, Mr. Lewis made every effort to eliminate work that adults might have tampered with or had been consciously or unconsciously plagiarized by a child. His general conclusion, after completing the book, was this:

I found that, given the right encouragement and understanding, children could and did write poems that invited serious attention as *poetry*. Indeed, the very limitations of vocabulary and grammar served very much the same function as the deliberate restriction of form that the adult poet uses to concentrate his vision.

He also says:

[*Miracles*] is a book intended to be read as poetry, not as a sampling of precociousness. . . . I hope this book will demonstrate the artistry of which children are capable when they are given the opportunity; that it will serve as a testament to the

power and value of the poetic vision that is an integral part of childhood; and finally that, as all real poetry does, it will give delight.

The book has twelve sections, illustrating the themes most frequently chosen by children. In the first section, titled Poetry, are verses called "Poems," by an eleven-year-old Australian boy, Peter Kelso:

In poems, our earth's wonders  
Are windowed through  
Words

A good poem must haunt the heart  
And be heeded by the head of the  
Hearer

With a wave of words, a poet can  
Change his feelings into cool, magical,  
mysterious  
Mirages

Without poetry our world would be  
Locked within itself—no longer enchanted by  
the poet's  
Spell

In the last section, which has "Night" for its subject, there is this poem by another Australian child, Linda, who is eight:

It was midnight  
The sky was dark black  
The stars were threepenny bits  
The sea was making a sound  
Like a silk dress.

A ten-year-old girl in Uganda, Annabel Laurance, wrote "My Brain":

I have a little brain  
Tucked safely in my head  
And another little brain  
Which is in the air instead  
This follows me, and plays with me  
And talks to me in bed  
The other one confuses me,  
The one that's in my head.

And a ten-year-old boy in the United States, Marc Duskin, wrote:

Grownups are silly,  
They never drink coffee  
When it's served  
To them.

They just talk  
 And never drink it  
 Until it's cold.  
 Isn't that silly?

I haven't grown  
 Since I was five  
 I haven't grown at all—  
 Grownups are just getting shorter.

A child in New Zealand, S. Kershaw, ten,  
 describes what he sees:

I saw a green beetle climb crippled grass.  
 I saw the white speck of a dying butterfly.  
 I saw grass tops and seedy heads chatter and  
 rustle.  
 I saw crippled grass bend oldly forward.  
 I saw yellow flowers in a buttercup wind.  
 I saw tinker-tailor grass bending in a greasy  
 wind.

These poems are enough—and the others in *Miracles* are of similar quality—to show that there is something of a finished artist in the child. The reader soon gains that enormous respect for children that made Bronson Alcott wax elegiac in their praise and use all his power to resist the common tendency to turn them into something like ourselves. *Miracles* is an inspiration to return to Alcott for basic doctrines on which to found reform in education. There is far more agreement and testimony, today, on the fact that we often ruin our children with "education." The testimony comes mainly from artists and from a few others who recognize the mutilations imposed by excessive intellectuality, but these critics speak a language which lacks the muscular strength of Alcott's philosophic intelligence. So, from *Miracles*, one might turn to Odell Shepard's compilation, *The Journals of Bronson Alcott* (Little, Brown, 1938), to see what Alcott learned from the capacities he found in children.

## *FRONTIERS* An Exploiters' Creed?

A PAPER by Lynn White, Jr., who teaches history at the University of California in Los Angeles, holds the Christian religion responsible for "the problem of ecologic backlash"—the destructive effects of the practice of scientific technology on the environment of mankind. (Titled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," this paper was delivered as a lecture last December at the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and it appears in the March 10, 1967, issue of the weekly, *Science*.)

Prof. White dates the causes of the ecological backlash from about the middle of the last century, when, he says, the potentialities of science were joined with technology, resulting in an enormous acceleration of industrial progress. Recognition of the impact of technology on the natural environment led to formulation of "the novel concept of ecology," a term which first appeared in 1873. Prof. White summarizes the broad consequences of arming technology with science:

Today, less than a century later, the impact of our race upon the environment has so increased in force that it has changed in essence. When the first cannons were fired, in the early 14th century, they affected ecology by sending workers scrambling to the forests and mountains for more potash, sulfur, iron ore, and charcoal, with some resulting erosion and deforestation. Hydrogen bombs are of a different order: a war fought with them might alter the genetics of all life on this planet. By 1285 London had a smog problem arising from the burning of soft coal, but our present combustion of fossil fuels threatens to change the chemistry of the globe's atmosphere as a whole, with consequences which we are only beginning to guess. With the population explosion, the carcinoma of planless urbanism, the now geological deposits of sewage and garbage, surely no creature other than man has ever managed to foul its nest in such short order.

But what has Christianity to do with this? A very great deal, Prof. White maintains. The idea that the Christian God planned the entirety of

natural creation for no reason except to serve man's purposes lies at the root of Christian belief. "In absolute contrast," he says, "to ancient paganism and Asia's religions," Christianity "insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends." No longer was there any reverence for nature. "By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects." Prof. White finds this mood illustrated in a current event:

The newly elected Governor of California, like myself a churchman, but less troubled than I, spoke for the Christian tradition when he said (as is alleged), "when you've seen one redwood, you've seen them all." To a Christian a tree can be no more than a physical fact. The whole concept of the sacred grove is alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the West. For nearly 2 millennia Christian missionaries have been chopping down sacred groves, which are idolatrous because they assume spirit in nature.

The dying out of serious Christian belief—the present is called the "post-Christian age"—has hardly changed the thinking of Western man:

Our daily habits of action, for example, are dominated by an implicit faith in perpetual progress which was unknown either to Greco-Roman antiquity or to the Orient. It is rooted in, and is indefensible apart from, Judeo-Christian teleology. The fact that Communists share it merely helps to show what can be demonstrated on many other grounds: that Marxism, like Islam, is a Judeo-Christian heresy. We continue today to live, as we have lived for about 1700 years, very largely in a context of Christian axioms.

Prof. White sees science as "an extrapolation of natural theology" (finding out God's will by studying nature, as many early scientists claimed they were doing), and technology as embodying the activist belief that man is meant to *use* what God provided for him—the result being that when these two (science and technology) united their efforts about a century ago, they produced powers which today, "to judge by many of the ecological effects, are out of control." "If so," Prof. White comments, "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt."

He doubts that more science and technology can get us out of the ecological crisis, unless, first, "we find a new religion, or rethink our old one." He recognizes the beatniks as "the basic revolutionaries of our time," and regards their affinity for Zen Buddhism as sound, but questions whether it can be made viable in the West. As a Christian, Prof. White favors a revival of the pan-psychism of St. Francis, the lover of wild things, who "tried to substitute the idea of the equality of all creatures, including man, for the idea of man's limitless rule of creation." Francis failed in his time, but Prof. White thinks we must try again:

Both our present science and our present technology are so tinctured with orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature that no solution for our ecological crisis can be expected from them alone. Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious. We must rethink and refeel our nature and destiny.

All that seems lacking in this criticism is some attention to the self-righteousness of orthodox Christians, which tends to make them immune to self-examination. It is of course an inheritance, now somewhat innocently indulged, from distant if long centuries during which Christian apologists indoctrinated the entire Western world with contempt for all other religions, clinching their claim to exclusive truth with the argument that to see any decisive good in other religions would undermine the only *saving* faith. Self-righteousness restricts all notions of morality to one's own affairs and encourages policies of arrogance, self-assertion and violence toward those who, cherishing other beliefs and pursuing other ends, can deserve little else. A passage from Stringfellow Barr's paper, *Consulting the Romans*, contains an interesting parallel to Prof. White's contentions:

In America the centuries of violence that cheapened human life saw the Americans burn off forest land, rape the soil that could have been husbanded, tear open grasslands to destructive winds, plow up hillsides from which rain promptly washed away the topsoil, convert the enormous capital of a young nation into quick private profits. In the

process the American learned, or thought he learned, not only that competition of private interests was the quickest route to the general welfare, but that ecology and a sense of context could be safely ignored and that when tough-minded men could no longer shoot or hire gangsters to shoot, legislators could be bought. . . . our swift, successful rise to world power confirms . . . that our diplomacy should be "total," rather than intelligible to the opinion of mankind, or anyhow to that of our best friends; that outside the government the art of deliberation is not possible and that therefore the knowledgeable manipulation of opinion and of popular passions must save us; that, if force fails to rout foreign foes and to quell domestic riots, we can certainly win by increasing the dosage of what has failed to date.

Are the catastrophic agonies of their final breakdown in practice the only persuasion that can shake the self-righteousness behind these beliefs?