

THE POLITICS OF MORALISTS

THE moralist, by dictionary definition, is a man who tries to find out what is right and good in human behavior. Usually, he hopes that other men will listen to him. Sometimes he tries to make other men behave according to rules which, in his opinion, will establish what is right in human affairs. It is plain from experience that he cannot only compel; he must also persuade. Therefore the moralist endeavors to develop a body of doctrine—of arguments from moral principles and judgments from experience—which will win him followers. In order to exact submission he needs public support. The familiar instrument of this support is the organized group—a sect or party.

There is of course a "moral" component in very nearly all party persuasions, but there are important differences in the way in which the force of a moral argument may be generated. For example, you can say that because a proposed course of action will work toward a desirable end—and you give evidence for this—it is a good thing to do. Or, you can argue simply that the program is the right thing to do, and *must*, therefore, be carried out.

This distinction has obvious importance, but might soon lose its objectivity if illustrated in preliminary discussion. To seek objectivity in relation to the *right* thing to do inevitably involves formal questioning of whether it is really right or not. This often means arousing passions which have the effect of destroying the inquiry at the very beginning. To ask a man to question assumptions on which many of his life's activities are based seems an attack on his very identity. There are times when such questions may be necessary, but there are also times when they are cruel, or educationally inexpedient, or when, if pressed, are likely to gain only an angry, nihilist response.

Behind the assumptions and doctrines of the moralist lie the questions of the philosopher. It is not easy to gain assent on the differences between the moralist and the philosopher. Time and again the philosopher is thrust out of the dialogue for daring to question what is believed to be morally right—the correct thing in practice. His questioning is claimed to have a subversive effect. He distracts from the essential righteousness which people need to absorb. For this reason he is accused of not really loving his fellow man. He is said to add to their weakness or appeal to their susceptibility to rebellion. Or he helps them to find excuses for not doing what they ought to do, when everybody *knows* what they ought to do. History is filled with instances of this rejection of the philosopher. It is not of course certain that these persecutions of questioners mean that they were *good* philosophers. We know only that they might have been.

A fairly logical case for the suppression of Galileo's evidence for the heliocentric theory can be made on the ground of its disturbing influence to the existing society. Disorder could be seen as arising out of this threat to the acceptability of the moral assumptions of the time. And if you believe that moral behavior on the basis of established beliefs may be more important than scientific truth about remote physical realities up in the sky—why, then, you may feel that there is a sense in which the Inquisition was, after all, right. Regardless of the truth or falsity of the Copernican theory, Galileo was giving aid and comfort to the enemy. He should have been made to keep still. And he was.

There is also the historical situation to consider. You could say that today it is not necessary to control or suppress the Copernicans. The world has grown up to the heliocentric system, which no longer upsets the basis of moral

belief. We are now more mature and sophisticated. Then, the "realistic" argument could be made that slowing down socially irresponsible people like the early scientists—men who wanted to tear down the medieval cosmology in the name of natural philosophy—was essential to a normal rate of human development. Such far-reaching changes must proceed gradually. Knowledge people can't handle is precocious, perhaps "utopian." A responsible authority must regulate the development of ideas.

Men who take up the burden of managing human society usually have this point of view. People, they are led to argue, are like children. The education of children requires a planned curriculum which gives them new material as they become *ready* for it. Everybody knows this, and you have a similar situation in politics and also in the broad cultural situation on which, in the final analysis, politics depends. In this general outlook, the educator must wear two caps. He is a teacher but he is also a Machiavellian. This situation is the ground of all claims that power corrupts. Before men use ideas to control the people for bad reasons, they do it for good reasons. They start out doing it because they feel they are right, and because, as they explain, the people would fool themselves, anyway, and their gullibility might as well be used for good purposes. That is about all the difference there is between a good politician and a bad one—the way they use the gullibility of the people. A man who tries to reduce or abolish gullibility is not a politician but a teacher.

This is the secret, personal dilemma of the moralist. How will he behave in relation to gullibility? Will he *use* it, or will he try to overcome it? What is the true relation between his moral impatience and the dignity of man?

The question is a bog of ambiguity. *Of course* you protect the child against his own innocence or lack of experience. But when do rules stop being protection and become

manipulation? When do they really start bending the twig the way *you* want it to go?

There is no formal answer to this question. There is little or no open discussion of the problem it represents. Yet everybody who has decisions to make about other people has to answer this question all the time. Probably the only justifiable course is never to stop asking, never to assume the question can be settled on either a short-term or a long-term basis. A genuine educator, you could say, whatever else he may be, is a man who makes the continuous asking of this question the foundation of his life. Teaching is making honest answers—not offhand answers, but answers which are filled with self-search, risk-taking, and faith in man; and filled, also, with lively awareness of weakness, bad propensities, and the plausible excuses of irresponsibility.

All the certainties of the teacher are reached through thickets of ambiguity. He knows and he doesn't know. Sometimes he doesn't know what to say until he says it, and then he may know, right after he says it, that what he said was wrong. Or he may not know; he may have to wait to find out. By self-awareness in experiences like this—and the teacher never stops having them—the teacher gains some wisdom. People learn from him, and the people who know they learn from him follow him around. He acquires *charisma*, which is often a bother. Yet he never stops teaching because that is the only thing he wants to do.

No one with a little experience in teaching needs to have this account of its meaning *proved* to him. Its truth is self-evident. And this growth-process—which could, of course, be described in many other ways—has in it the essentials of being human. Without these subtle values, human life would have no meaning. It is this *becoming* process that lies behind all theories of unrealized human good. Whatever you claim as "right," or "useful," or "good" for human beings, if it doesn't have as its end the protection, fostering, and

encouragement of this growth-process, is not worth considering.

The dialogue is probably the best symbol and practical embodiment of the growth-process. And the Platonic Dialogues are probably the best single historical example of the pursuit of human growth by this means.

Politics is a compromise of the growth process—a compromise made from practical necessity. There are some analogues between education and political theory, since human beings are involved in both, but there are many differences, and these differences are more important than the similarities. Our earlier discussion of the habits and self-justifications of political managers will have sufficiently illustrated these differences for most readers.

Why is politics a compromise? Because it cannot afford to wait for growth. It has to substitute conformity for growth. The political art, then, from the viewpoint of education, is in knowing how to create a scheme of political conformity which interferes *as little as possible* with the processes of human growth. Conformity is never more than a temporary imitation of the fruits of growth.

If this definition of politics is acceptable, it plainly follows that the least desirable form of politics is that devised by angry and impatient men. What sort of angry and impatient men? The serious objection cannot be to those who are merely frustrated personally and self-interested to get what they want. Such men cannot gain followers unless they are also skillful hypocrites and debased demagogues. If such men can gain power, the situation is already so hopeless that we must say that the educational process has been inactive for a very long time in that society. Nothing can help it, then, except disaster—deep trouble, and the slow realizations which come from the experience of failure.

It is the angry and impatient men who proclaim a moral goal that a society with some hope in it must be beware of.

Why are these men dangerous? Because they refuse, even though they have the capacity, to be philosophers. Because they reject the obligation to distinguish, in each little thing that they do, between education and manipulation. They are men who have lost their faith in human growth, and are willing to settle for imitation. Men who believe in the possibilities of growth are not necessarily fools with no recognition of the reality of evil. Their experience of evil is probably more extensive than that of the angry and impatient men, since they understand, probably better than anyone else, how evil must be overcome. They know that evil *cannot* be overcome by manipulating people into forms of behavior which are supposed to shut evil out. They know that letting or encouraging people to believe that evil *can* be overcome through judicious manipulation is a use of not the noble but the ignoble lie. They know that there is no way to systematize the processes of human growth, and that to pretend there is becomes a dull repetition of all the past failures of history. They know that through accidents and coincidences of environment and other external factors, it is sometimes very easy to make it *seem* that manipulation will work for human good, and leave no appreciable residues of failure, but they also know that this "seeming," which comes from circumstance, is too important an educational collaboration by Nature to be exploited as a crutch for ideology. A non-educational program which invokes "Nature" as the *Deus ex machina* of political achievement risks making men distrust nature when the achievement turns sour. What else is the bleak, Existential rejection of Nature but this?

Let us return to the questions of the philosopher A philosopher is a man who refuses to be distracted from his central task, which is to find out what man is, in order to gain some reliable idea of what may be truth and good for human

beings. He is convinced that mistakes in the idea of man will inevitably produce mistakes in ideas of truth and good. He can hardly be wrong in this. But he also knows that self-knowledge, or knowledge of man, is very difficult to obtain. So his position is defined by two assertions: that self-knowledge is difficult, and that it must be had. Some philosophers go further, affirming that it can be had. There is a body of literature in the world which is sometimes offered in evidence of this latter claim. It is said that there is wisdom in this literature, but that it is not complete. It is said that its incompleteness is not intrinsic to the knowledge, but is rather in ourselves. The completion is the task before us. It is said that by assimilating the knowledge which already exists in the world—making it unquestionably and irreducibly our own—we may prepare ourselves for bringing it to completion. The work of the educator is to help men with this preparation.

There are educators who really believe this about the possibility of knowledge. There are others who give the idea lip-service but don't really believe it. And there are still others who utterly disbelieve it and reject any of the obligations flowing from this view of human growth. And then there are men indifferent to all theory about human growth or progress. The differences among men in regard to who or what they think they are and what they should strive after is a central—and largely ignored—problem of the human situation. The neglect of these differences makes it possible for clever men to exploit other men by pretending that the differences do not exist. It is easy, for example, to ruin a generation of young by telling them that all their impulses are good and that they are right in refusing to practice any self-restraint—and by pretending that there is no need to strive because all are already "equal"! This is a moral doctrine which was made without any consultation with philosophy, which ignores the available evidence concerning what man is, and which flouts the lessons of medicine, law, psychology, and social history. It is not a moral doctrine based upon the

difficulties of self-knowledge, but a doctrine based upon ignorance of what it is not difficult at all to know quite well.

A case of majestic proportions could be made for the view that men who refuse to admit their ignorance become literally unable to use to any enduring profit what they know. To ignore as unimportant what we don't know is to reject, essentially, the hope or expectation of growth.

A similar case could be made to show that men who disbelieve in the growth process inevitably admire and devise authoritarian systems of social life. A third such case would show that men who only give lip-service to the growth-process create systems which turn growth and freedom into ritual observances which eventually work against both. This lying sort of system is probably the worst of them all.

But let us get to the subject of the politics of moralists. The moralists are the impatient, angry men, and they have much to provoke them. They do not consult the philosophers. But their neglect of philosophy results not from disbelief in it, or contempt for it, but because of their impatience. They are passionate in their hatred of injustice, and they see injustice wherever they look. They see the ignorance, indecisiveness, selfishness, insincerity, cruelty, and opportunism which the philosopher knows exist in nearly all individuals, but they see these things projected on an enormous social and institutional scale.

These qualities worsen rapidly when they are organized into social systems. They eventually become absolutely intolerable. They are seen as intolerable not alone from hardship but chiefly because they are not what we intended and they do not appear to be necessary. There is no question but that they ought to be changed. There is no question but that we *said* we would change them. So we are cruel, wicked, careless men, and liars by the clock. What age has exceeded ours in its monumental hypocrisy?

Why should not such a society be delivered into the hands of the angry and impatient men? Are not their intentions great and sincere? Is not their indictment supported by all the facts? Are not the sufferings they point to real? Does not the responsibility lie where they say it lies?

Plainly, they are right on all counts. And the ugly course of events, from day to day and year to year, brings incessant and unending confirmation.

So, perhaps this society will be delivered into their hands. It almost certainly will be, unless, among them, there are those who decide that before they make all those grandiose decisions affecting other people they had better consult the philosopher within themselves.

It is not, surely, that nothing can or should be done. Nor is it that no remedies are in order. Remedies are surely needed. But what had better be considered, now, is what can truly be expected of the *desperate* remedies. An angry doctor, who, because of his hate for a wicked disease, treats only symptoms because he likes to see them disappear for a little while, is no real benefactor of the sick. He is a sinner like the rest of us, but a more articulate one, who has the uneasy satisfaction of whipping scapegoats for the common ills of mankind.

The fact is that we belong to a culture which has a scarcity of philosophers. We have always had a dearth of philosophers—which means, in our terms, not enough intelligent men to make things go right in our society. It would be pertinent, here, to consider what happens when the jealousies of institutional religion displace the philosophers and send them into exile—as took place early in Western history—but we have no space for this. We can say only that, lacking philosophers, the Western world suffers from a vast persecution complex. We believe ourselves to be the victims of bad men who have broken their promises.

What is the evidence of broken promises? It lies in our political arrangements. We are forever

improving them and they are forever bad. The whole idea of "progress" has been at issue for a generation. Any claim of modest good can be immediately ridiculed by angry and impatient men. The claims we made have not been fulfilled. We have only token achievements as a humane civilization.

Well, *who made the claims?* The "people" didn't make them. The people listened to them and believed and echoed them, but they didn't make them. The people just bought tickets and have been watching the show. The promises and the claims were made by a previous generation of angry and impatient men—men good at abstractions, skilled in phrases, certain of what is right and what would make everything righter. These men were political moralists. They had forgotten, or never understood, that politics is the compromise practical men make with the slow processes of human growth. We can't wait, they said. Education is too slow, they insisted.

They were right, of course. It *is* too slow. The compromises are necessary. But what is not necessary is the pretense that the compromises of politics are actually a workable substitute for growth. They are not. Politics is a different theatre of action. There may be a free-wheeling, contrapuntal relation between politics and education, but there is no fixed, one-to-one, *dynamic* relation between them. When you pretend that what is done by political fiat takes the place of education—makes things good for man—you turn what was only a compromise into a criminal misrepresentation. Politics may make things good for men's bodies—for their wants, their practical needs—but it does not make them grow. It does not make them into better men.

The angry, impatient men never tell the people this. They need votes. They want power in order to do good. *Afterward*, they say, we'll take care of education. Of course the State isn't as important as the people, they say. *Everybody* knows that, they say, looking bored. But the people don't really believe in themselves any more,

because the angry, impatient men really sound as though they could take care of everything, and they are going to need an all-powerful State to do it.

And that, we submit, is the explanation of the terrible failures of the present. The world is not filled with evil men. The good in human beings has not leaked away into the sewers of history. What has happened is that the wonderful things promised by impatient moralists have not come about.

How could it have been otherwise? Well, it couldn't have been otherwise without politicians who were willing to try to become philosophers, as Plato said. A philosopher is a man who insists on doing good without the exercise of manipulative power. He *does* what the lip-service people claim they know how to do better, and in a hurry. He is, one may say, a poor excuse for a "leader." He is indeed. He is no leader at all. He won't let himself get ahead of the people. He leaves such activities to those who still think it is possible to get ahead of the people with their plans and programs for righteous conformity to produce an imitation of the good. And he knows that since all these anxious pretenses are animated, partly, by genuine good will, by honest service, and heartfelt hope in the interstices of all those political goings-on little, tiny increments of growth nonetheless take place. The growth is real and it continues all the time, even though, by contrast to the great claims made for political action, it is almost impossible to see. That is why it is often quite foolish to argue about "progress." The angry and impatient men always turn away with indifference from genuine growth. "It's not good enough," they say. Maybe so. But it's all there is.

REVIEW

A BEING OF THE WORD

To maintain, after Plato, that ideas rule the world, was once a matter of simple affirmation, but in our sophisticated times this view is successfully defended only by extensive labors. To declare that the essential being of man is in the mind, and that his essential doings are works of the mind, requires both vigor and subtle perception, as well as a thorough knowledge of both literature and history. George Steiner, author of *Language and Silence* (Atheneum), qualifies on all counts.

Anyone of some acquaintance with the cultural riches and tradition of the West will find *Language and Silence* enormously interesting. The author knows both the tradition and its criticism and is able, therefore, to exercise his own convictions with that wonderful combination of surety and tentativeness that marks the work of scholars who have thought their subject-matter through. The book is a collection of essays and reviews, some of them quite recent. It would be difficult, for example, to find a juster estimate of Marshall McLuhan than the one Mr. Steiner provides. As for the view we attributed to him—the Platonic doctrine that ideas rule the world—there is this expression in the essay, "Homer and the Scholars," concerned with the modern appreciation of the myth:

. . . there has occurred a deep change in our understanding of myth. We have come to realize that myths are among the subtlest and most direct languages of experience. They reenact moments of signal truth or crisis in the human condition. But mythology is more than history made memorable; the mythographer—the poet—is the historian of the unconscious. This gives to the great myths their haunting universality. Not since the chiliastic panics of the late tenth century, when men believed that the Second Coming was at hand, moreover, has there been an age more nightmare-ridden by mythical imaginings than our own. Men who have placed the figure of Oedipus at the heart of their psychology, or who have fought for political survival against the myth of the superman and the thousand-year Reich, know that fables are deadly serious. More than our

predecessors, therefore, we approach Homer on his own terms.

This comes at the close of a long passage reviewing scholarly interpretations of Homer—most of them more concerned with who he was and how or if he "wrote," than with what he *meant*. It is of supreme importance, in reading, never to forget that the purpose of reading is to understand, not to "explain away." Scholarship is not without its uses, as Mr. Steiner illustrates beyond dispute, but it may also submerge or make trivial the true work of the mind. Aware of this, yet interested in the by-products or asides of scholarship, Mr. Steiner moves from one learned contention to another, taking none of them too seriously, yet watching for the occasional insight, the revealing phrase. The "trends" in scholarship, and their consequences, are plain to him. There was for example, the mechanistic atomism of the recent past:

In the late nineteenth century, dismemberment was all the rage. Willamowitz, a titan among Homeric scholars, declared that the *Iliad* was at some points "wretched patchwork." In a single chapter of Luke, Germanic analysis revealed five distinct levels of authorship and interpolation. The plays attributed to that illiterate actor Shakespeare appeared to have been compiled by a committee which included Bacon, the Earl of Oxford, Marlowe, recusant Catholics, and printers' devils of extraordinary ingenuity. This fine fury of decomposition lasted well into the 1930's. As late as 1934, Gilbert Murray could discover no reputable scholar ready to defend the view that a single poet had written either or both the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*.

The present is characterized by another spirit:

Today, the wheel has come full turn. In Homeric, Biblical, and Shakespearean scholarship, unitarianism is the dominant trend. To Professor Whitman of Harvard, the central personal vision and "ineradicable unity" of the *Iliad* are beyond doubt. . . . Our entire image of the mind has altered. The higher critics, Willamowitz or Wellhausen, were anatomists; to get at the heart of a thing they took it to pieces. We, like the men of the sixteenth century, incline to regard mental processes as organic and integral. A modern art historian has written of *la vie des formes*, the implication being that in the life of art, as in that

of organic matter, there are complications of design and autonomous energies which cannot be dissected. Whenever possible, we prefer to leave a thing whole.

Mr. Steiner is much more than a critic. To be a helpful critic of works of art—to be, that is, one who illuminates their quality by adding facets and planes of perception out of his own awareness—a man must himself be an artist. The following passage, one of power and depth, while seeming to be political commentary, is rather an artist's vision. It is taken from a chapter called "A Kind of Survivor," the intent of which will grow from what we quote:

Nationalism is the venom of our age. It has brought Europe to the edge of ruin. It drives the new states of Asia and Africa like crazed lemmings. By proclaiming himself a Ghanaean, a Nicaraguan, a Maltese, a man spares himself vexation. He need not ravel out what he is, where his humanity lies. He becomes one of an armed, coherent pack. Every mob impulse in modern politics, every totalitarian design, feeds on nationalism, on the drug of hatred which makes human beings bare their teeth across a wall, across ten yards of waste ground. Even if it be against his harried will, his weariness, the Jew—or some Jews, at least—may have an exemplary role. To show that whereas trees have roots, men have legs and are each other's guests. If the potential of civilization is not to be destroyed, we shall have to develop more complex, more provisional loyalties. There are, as Socrates taught, necessary treasons to make the city freer and more open to man. Even a Great Society is a bounded, transient thing compared to the free play of the mind and the anarchic discipline of its dreams . . .

That is why I have not, until now, been able to accept the notion of going to live in Israel. The State of Israel is, in one sense, a sad miracle. Herzl's Zionist program bore the obvious marks of the rising nationalism of the late nineteenth century. Sprung of inhumanity and the imminence of massacre, Israel has had to make itself a closed fist. No one is more tense with national feeling than an Israeli. He must be if his strip of home is to survive the wolfpack at its doors. Chauvinism is almost the requisite condition of life. But although the strength of Israel reaches deep into the awareness of every Jew, though the survival of the Jewish people may depend on it, the nation-state bristling with arms is a bitter relic, an absurdity in the century of crowded men. And it is

alien to some of the most radical, most humane elements in the Jewish spirit.

So a few may want to stay in the cold, outside the sanctuary of nationalism—even though it is, at last, their own. A man need not be buried in Israel. Highgate or Golders Green or the wind will do.

We should end this brief display of Mr. Steiner's excellences with something on language—on what it signifies for thought about ourselves:

That articulate speech should be the line dividing man from the myriad forms of animate being, that speech should define man's singular eminence above the silence of the plant and the grunt of the beast—stronger more cunning, longer of life than he—is classic doctrine well before Aristotle. We find it in Hesiod's *Theogony*. Man is, to Aristotle, a being of the word. How the word came to him is, as Socrates admonishes in the *Cratylus*, a riddle, a question worth asking so as to goad the mind into play, so as to awake it to the wonder of its communicative genius, but it is not a question to which a certain answer lies in human reach.

Possessed of speech, possessed by it, the word having chosen the grossness and infirmity of man's condition for its own compelling life, the human person has broken free from the great silence of matter. Or, to use Ibsen's image: struck with the hammer, the insensate ore has begun to sing.

COMMENTARY

LEARNING FROM CHILDREN

THE enterprise of child education could be crucially instructive to those concerned with the welfare of adult culture, if they would interrupt their almost obsessive "problem-solving" long enough to consider the values and balances which teachers of children learn to adopt from working with the young.

For one thing, *growth* is the criterion of education, not "productivity," although measurable achievements may often confirm that the growth has taken place. This means that child education maintains a proper balance between being-needs and deficiency-needs. Education finds ways to give scope to awakening and enterprising intelligence. It provides fields for discovery. The child is much more doer than consumer; he needs invitations more than he needs satisfactions, reparations, and repairs.

The school, of course and especially The School in Rose Valley (see "Children")—is a lovingly created ideal environment. But that does not change the fundamental human nature of the children; it rather exhibits the natural balances of their being. Schools, in short, treat children as subjects. Societies, on the other hand, tend to treat people as objects. Instead of relying upon the potentialities of human growth from within, they do almost the opposite. And by not expecting growth, society erects barriers against it. Discounting growth is a way of denying it will happen, and this leads to arrangements which, when growth takes place anyway, make it look like an anarchistic threat to the stability of accepted social processes.

Meanwhile, the "product" of the society which ignores being-needs and genuine human growth tends to degrade. It does not even serve well the requirements of material welfare, and this seems to call for ever more desperate attention to production and to meeting the deficiency-needs of increasingly malnourished lives. But these

measures do not touch the original, now virtually hidden, ill—the "social" conspiracy against the human realities of growth and the being-qualities of all men. The teachers of children know these realities and give their lives to developing them.

Yet good teachers meet deficiency-needs also. Margaret Rawson, spoken of at the end of this week's "Children" article, since 1947 has devoted herself to the work of the Orton Society, which she now heads. Her research study of teaching by the Orton approach will be published by Johns Hopkins Press this winter.

CHILDREN

... and Ourselves

AN EARLY EXPERIMENT WITH READING

[This is another chapter in the story of The School in Rose Valley, Moylan, Pennsylvania, by Grace Rotzel, who was its director for thirty-four years. The material is taken from the Oct. 15 issue of the School's *Parents' Bulletin*.]

AS reading is an important tool in gaining knowledge, schools have traditionally started with books, almost as if knowledge could be passed directly by means of written symbols. But with the concept of education as "leading out," the growth pattern of children had to be considered, and as a result, new schools began to covet the area in which much of the language development occurs, which is before reading begins. In this period the child's instinct for sensory experience, now at its height, leads him into learning by doing and sharing. He meets life directly with first-hand experience. Here he learns to think, to act on his thinking, in the process of discovery of himself and the world about him; here his fundamental attitudes about work, people and the living things in his environment are laid down.

This is the reason for offering in the first years as rich a diet as we could muster, comprising dance, drama, song, shop, art, cooking; activities on horizontal ladders, parallel bars, monkey ropes; explorations of woods, streams and meadows; trips to find sources of bread, water, milk,—and withal daily conversation periods about everything. This kind of experience is sure to bring success in one or many fields, which makes the child feel good about attempting new learning situations; he has a good oral vocabulary and is ready for the world of books.

Since the stages of growth vary remarkably in any six-year-old group there are always some not ready to read; hence it seemed a time-and-energy-saving device to postpone reading until seven. But in the first five years we were living from year to year, sometimes from month to month, and

postponement did not seem advisable. In 1935, however, when we were assured of at least a few years of continuity, we started what we wanted to do. Of course by this time we were considered only a play school anyway—"the children can't be learning anything, they are having too good a time"—so we acknowledged our playful sin and proceeded.

There has been a spate of studies on reading-readiness in pioneer areas (Chicago, Los Angeles, New York), and several schools had postponed the reading program due to the fact that the most common cause of reading failure was found to be immaturity. A 1935 *Parents' Bulletin* laid out all the pros and cons, giving quotations from studies, and answering objections with the convictions we had gained from experience. Briefly, the objections:

1. It is difficult to give a rich curriculum without reading.

Answer: Valid but not insurmountable. It is always difficult to get teachers with a rich enough living experience to insure rich backgrounds for children's work. No reason for not trying.

2. Children miss much by not reading.

Answer: What they miss is not permanent. The supply of good children's books is still very small; many others might just as well remain unread indefinitely, and the best for young children are better read aloud to them anyway. On the other hand, what children miss by starting too early is permanent. The precocious child is all too frequently anti-social, lacking in judgment, undeveloped physically. The damage done in his early years will take a long time to repair.

3. Parents object.

Answer: They do for various reasons but often because they have never given it serious thought and consider custom binding. Sometimes it is "keeping up with the Joneses." "Why can't my Johnny read? Susie, who goes to Such-and-Such School, reads beautifully, and she is only five." This kind of objection came from the time when it was thought the thing to do to skip a grade if you could. As a matter of fact, when a grade means only a certain amount of information to be ingested, the sooner you learn it the better, and in that kind of school the more you skip

the better. But when education is considered as a process of growth, then it becomes understandable that a child cannot skip being five years old. And when the something-to-do follows his organic needs, increases his ability to think, and makes him more secure physically and emotionally, then there is no point in hurrying or skipping.

What this program change meant was that there was more time for creative experience, and because I wanted to work on this, I took the double group of Sixes and Sevens with Lucie Stephens as assistant. In the Sixes' program, math, the symbols of which are less difficult than those of reading, was the starting point of academic work, and because these symbols were obviously connected with the manipulation of tools in shop, laboratory and kitchen, use and understanding were naturally related. Reading material for the Sevens started with dictation from the children about the daily happenings. This was printed on large wall charts, and sometimes illustrated by a child. No effort was made to eliminate big words; if Jimmy's story was about a grasshopper, he was pleased with his big word, and that kept it in use. When one-half of the room became a prehistoric forest, dinosaur was a favorite word, for several huge wire-and-papier-maché reptiles stalked this forest, making the word important. Reading was accompanied with exercises in rhyming, in making picture dictionaries, in recognizing matching words, and in other preliminaries.

After some weeks of reading their own work, the children discovered primers that had been kept on a high shelf; after that the going was fast for most of them. It seemed no time until the library was being used as a source of books to be taken home. We were fortunate that Ann Pennell, an Incorporator, was both the founder and guiding spirit of the library for many years. She gave the first 350 books, got many other books at cost, gave us discounts on parent purchases, let the librarian, Margaret Rawson, read new acquisitions for BOOKWAYS freely, and sometimes asked her to try them out for child reactions. We gathered

many excellent books, some in translation, about children in other countries, a valuable cross-cultural experiment. The outstanding collection of such books, fifty to a hundred of them, beautiful German picture books, was the gift of another Incorporator, Irmgarde Taylor, who was our German teacher for three years. The building of the library to 2,000 volumes in the next fifteen years on a budget of \$50, later raised to \$75, was no mean accomplishment.

The Sevens were seldom advanced two years at the end of one year of reading, but the eagerness was great. They were usually caught up by the end of the second year, and way ahead after that. When a child had to transfer to another school at six or seven, there was concern at first that he had had so little reading. But after the first few weeks the message usually came from the new teacher: "Send us more like this. The eagerness to learn is remarkable." We, too, felt that eagerness, and continued the plan for ten years because it seemed sensible, and because the achievement scores of these children were as high in reading as of those who had begun at six, and roughly at the level of their intellectual maturity.

However, in 1945, we felt it no longer necessary to be arbitrary about beginning age. Teachers had been learning, too. Now we knew we could preserve the gains and teach reading to those ready at six, without making the unready face failure, because now there were so many standards for success; reading was not the only criterion. So we changed. It was at about this time that we stopped naming groups by ages and called them groups 1, 2, 3, etc. to lessen the emphasis on chronological age.

But not all reading problems are solved by teaching at the right time. Studies of reading and spelling failures, made in the early Thirties, brought out a specific language disability in a small percentage of children. These children were not intellectually inferior; they were often gifted; neither were they careless or indifferent by nature. Sherwood Norman, teacher of Tens and Elevens,

recognized the problem and suggested the Orton approach as the most appropriate for diagnosis and treatment. Margaret Rawson became very much interested in these children, studied Orton's theories, and those of other reading experts, in medical libraries, clinics, and wherever she could find them. She was particularly helped by Dr. Paul Dozier of the Pennsylvania Hospital. An article in a *Parents' Bulletin* of this period describes the nature of the disability:

Dr. Samuel Orton, an American neurologist, beginning in 1925, proposed a hypothesis that reversals, mirror writing and reading and spelling difficulties result from a failure to develop a distinct dominance of one cerebral hemisphere over the other. He believes that the image of the word is stored in one hemisphere, and in the other hemisphere a mirror image is (or may be) stored, and so, those individuals who have not developed a dominance of one hemisphere over the other may occasionally recall words or letters which are the mirror images of the original impression. Hence the delays and confusion. This hypothesis does not intimate any deficiency of the brain or necessarily refer to left-handedness, but ambidexterity does seem to occur more often in families with language disabilities. Teaching methods to overcome this must be designed to impress and reimpress visual, auditory and kinesthetic memories of letters, syllables and words upon one hemisphere so that these records will be vivid and dominant.

This Orton point of view (which Margaret Rawson tells me has evolved into more sophisticated complexity, but is still partly hypothetical) enabled her to work very successfully in teaching, at The School in Rose Valley, what are now called dyslexic children, both those who grew up in the school and a few who came in just because of the language program.

GRACE ROTZEL

FRONTIERS

Voice from a Small Olympus

A LONG review in the London *Times Literary Supplement* for Nov. 9 illustrates both the task and the problem of the true man of letters—one in whose work the moral imagination finds primary expression. In a time of crisis moral intelligence presses to the front in men of a certain quality. They find themselves unable to write except as aroused human beings, even as inspired prophets, with the result that literary people not moved by a similar urgency tend to categorize them with a complacency that is more concerned with form than with substance.

What else can be expected of the cult of "literature," devoted to formal fashions of the written word? One who writes to embody a moral emotion breaks rules which exist mainly from neglect of the deeper intentions of the human spirit. He shapes his thought by another canon, and when, as sometimes happens, he not only breaks the mold of contemporary practice but from an intrinsic power is able to command wide attention, the critics practice on him the ambivalence they feel within themselves: they condescend, they grudgingly admire; they, after all, are human, too.

This practice is more the fault of an entire age than of individuals. The vocabulary of the moral emotions loses force and pertinence when it is not used, and in a time of general neglect of moral realities the man who pushes insistently into this area is like a pioneer who must invent his tools as he goes along. Often his work seems rude and incomplete, a make-do of his compelling passion. Obviously, he cannot be made to bear all the blame for this. Why should he be held accountable for the barrenness of the abysses he sets out to span?

The book under review is Lewis Mumford's *The Myth of the Machine*. It gets its share of praise; the importance of what Mr. Mumford says is admitted. Yet one is moved—while shortly

noticing his enormous sophistication—to wish that the reviewer would add to Mr. Mumford's thesis, fill it out, strengthen it, instead of typing it in a frame of historical criticism. After quoting one of Mr. Mumford's generalizations, the reviewer says:

Here is the characteristic note, at once Emersonian and revivalist. We glimpse the mocking radiance of the lost promised land: our sinews are bent toward the future. There is unity in Mr. Mumford's opus—"each book modifies and deepens the others"—there is contradiction such as Whitman prized, there is the harsh yet exultant monotone of the frontier sermon. Mr. Mumford is an angry man, but are we not at the very gates to a new blackness in which human beings will "become a passive, purposeless, machine-conditioned animal"? Cf. Emerson: "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members." *Everywhere, every one*. The universal is a part of the distinctive inflexion. Amen, brother, and what say you?

Obviously, there has been no disturbance, here, of academic aplomb.

Well, how *ought* such a book to be welcomed? By ignoring its "defects"? It is the critic's business to notice defects, whatever his enthusiasm for the main drive of the writer under inspection. But one could advertise the fact that these are small matters in relation to what Mr. Mumford is contending, in whatever way he can. That might be a very useful thing to say. The reviewer might also add that a man's loneliness may be sufficient reason for the pitch of his voice.

But Mr. Mumford, we learn, has other faults. He fails to give credit to Hegel for his primary theme:

History, urges Mr. Mumford, is evolving consciousness, dialectical self-awareness: "The critical moment, I suggest, was man's discovery of his own many-faceted mind, and his fascination with what he found there. . . . Man had to learn to be human." From which Mr. Mumford proceeds to a paradoxical possibility, namely, that consciousness may have been promoted by the strange disparity between man's inner environment . . . and the outer scene to which he awakened."

This entire focus, the treatment of history as evolving psychic awareness and the notion of consciousness as consequent on dialectical antagonism is, of course, a paraphrase of Hegel and of the *Phenomenology*. It is Hegel simplified, somewhat vulgarized and shorn of his tragic bias, of that radical Hegelian engagement with the "otherness" of the world and of rival human consciousness. But none the less it is Hegel through and through. Yet Hegel appears neither in Mr. Mumford's text nor in his copious bibliography.

So it is all Hegel, while we in our innocence thought it was merely the truth emerging, spontaneously, in the mind of an intelligent, searching man!

But the reviewer generously frees Mr. Mumford of any suspicion of plagiarism, arguing that his "omnivorous, passionate reading" led him to borrow widely and then to reproduce "crucial ideas" as if they were "novel." This would apply, one supposes, to all in whom is born the conviction that to be truly human is to become increasingly self-conscious, and who then pursue self-knowledge as the breath of their lives. To give evidence of the Logos within them is not sufficient; they ought to supply footnotes identifying a more familiar source.

Yet even the *Times Literary Supplement* writer becomes a little infected and undertakes to reach out for "the very crux avoided by Mr. Mumford":

The whole damnable point is this: mechanistic criteria of human progress may be folly, the pursuit of the technological eldorado may indeed spell the end of the human community. But these forces, these grave threats, are *no less* a product of human sensibility, of human design and symbolic projection than are the ideals of art, brotherhood and spontaneity which Mr. Mumford so rightly and nobly propounds. The constructs for violence, the widespread acquiescence in political terror which this book deplores are themselves aspects of the evolution and potential of man's consciousness.

One might think from this that Mr. Mumford had suggested that our failures resulted from an invasion by Mars.

Suppose Mr. Mumford does lack a nice Hegelian symmetry in his argument; suppose he is undeniably one of the all-too-American tribe of "populist sage" or "cracker-barrel Socrates"; and suppose he does "over-simplify" in writing his strenuous appeal—these small offenses could not possibly uncivilize anyone, nor lead another human being to become less of a man, and they might have helped make way for a kind of perception which the times require. But I *said* that, reviewer could rejoin. And so he did. "Mr. Mumford's voice is one of the most needed if the lineage of free feeling, if the Emersonian notes are to survive and be quickened in a great sad land." Yes he did say it, and if he had said only that, or had made his other points with a less condescending feeling-tone, it might have come out loud and clear.