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ALONZO AND THE INSURANCE MAN

THAT was the only time in all the years I've known Alonzo that he acted a little like a pixie. It was a hot day and we were driving up through the Valley on the way to Berkeley. We stopped in for lunch at this hotel—it looked like the only place in town where you could get something besides hamburgers or ham and eggs—and we ate at a table near where the Rotary Club was having its weekly meeting.

This fellow was about forty-two, with glasses—I mean the fellow who sat at the table with us—and like all good Rotarians, he introduced himself with a big smile. I guess he thought we were attending the luncheon meeting, along with the rest of them.

Well, after the dessert was over and most of the Rotaries had left, we sat there drinking coffee, and the guy with the glasses said to Alonzo, "I'm in the insurance business; what's your line?"

Now Alonzo is one of those guys you can't tell much about by looking at him. He's dark enough to be an Italian or a Mexican, and light enough to be almost anything else. He's not very big, and kind of quiet, and doesn't go pushing his way around with a lot of Personal Power. He looks about forty-two, too, but that doesn't count for much. Nobody ever got anywhere trying to figure out Alonzo from studying him. It's what he says and the way he says it, and the way he means it—that's how Alonzo gives people problems.

Well, this insurance character is waiting with his big smile, and Alonzo looks off in the distance and says, "Insurance, eh? I used to be in that business."

"Whereabouts?" the guy asks. "Oh, in Las Vegas," Alonzo told him. "Yup," he said, still looking off in the distance, "I had a piece of a casino."

"Whaddiya *mean?"* said the guy with the glasses. "What has that got to do with the insurance business?"

"Same thing," said Alonzo, stretching out his legs and putting them up on a chair. "Same thing," he said. "You bet against the field, don't you?"

"Oh," said the insurance agent, like he was relieved that Alonzo was only kidding. "There is a kind of parallel, I guess," he said.

"That's what *I* thought," said Alonzo. "In fact," he said, "it got so I couldn't see much difference at all, so I quit the casino business."

I could see the guy with the glasses was getting a little upset. He didn't know how to take Alonzo. He began to pull himself together like he was going to say, "Well, it's nice seeing you," or something like that, and take off, but instead he decided to give his pitch a workout. "It may sound silly," he said, "but let's give this thing some attention.

"I think," he said, "that insurance is a real service to the community. It gives stability to business and security to the individual."

"Maybe so," said Alonzo. "But," he went on, "Let's look at it from *your* point of view. "You get paid for this 'service' you give, don't you?" The character said yes. "And," said Alonzo, "if you could make more money in some other kind of business, you'd go in that business, wouldn't you?"

"Well," said the guy, "I guess so." "But," he said, *like* the insurance business."

"Okay," said Alonzo. "You're in the insurance business because you make money at it and because you like it. Let's leave out that stuff about service for a while.

"A man comes to you and he says he wants some life insurance. You look at him and you try to figure out if he is what you call a 'good risk.' You get a doctor to look at him and all that. You want to be sure that the odds on him are going to be the same as what the actuaries tell you they ought to be for a man of his age. And when you convince yourself and your company that they are, then you sell him a policy. You don't *know* when he is going to die, of course, but you bet it will be when the actuaries tell you he is supposed to die, according to statistics. And you get enough from him in premiums to pay off at that time, and then some for yourself and the company's overhead and the stockholders. That's right isn't it?

"Then," said Alonzo, "you bet with a lot of other people on the same basis, until you are as close as you can get to having a sure thing. If you didn't have practically a sure thing, the insurance company would go out of business pretty quick, wouldn't it?"

The guy with the glasses sort of nodded, twisting up his mouth. Alonzo went on.

"That's the way it was in the gambling casino. We had a sure thing, the boys and I. Or it was the next best thing to a sure thing. You get two or three hundred players in a night, you're bound to come out ahead. We did. Just like the insurance business. We played against the field, and we set the odds ourselves, just like the insurance business."

"But," said the guy with the glasses, "gambling is *morally* different. People who gamble want to get something for nothing, and you people who run casinos exploit that human weakness. . . . You talk about the boys. What kind of 'boys'! A bunch of hoods and gangsters, that's what!"

Alonzo didn't answer that one right away. "You know," he said, "I always happen to like people who don't like to buy insurance. Seems like such people don't want any special protection against fate. They'd rather live the best they can and take their chances. They don't want to blur their relations with the rest of the world with some kind of big 'average,' getting their chances all mixed up with other people's chances. You take a gambler, now; he takes his chances all by himself. He's got more nerve than the guy who buys insurance. Sure, most gamblers lose in the long run, just as the man who buys insurance loses in the long run. And don't you take advantage of human weakness when you tell a prospect that buying insurance is a great way to save money? After all, if a man makes up his mind to save, he ought to be able to do it without buying some kind of insurance policy."

The guy with the glasses was looking like he just couldn't stand it any longer. Alonzo was *serious* about this. The guy started in about the widows and orphans, and how insurance was a great thing for them.

"Yes," said Alonzo, "but so is a winning sweepstakes ticket, and the man who wins can enjoy it with his family; he doesn't have to die." He had a point there.

"Tell me," said Alonzo, "if you think insurance is such a great business, why don't you start a company of your own instead of letting the big outfits make all that gravy?"

The insurance agent didn't like the language, but he answered right quick: "I don't have enough capital. It takes a lot of money to go into the insurance business. You have to prove your ability to pay off."

"Um," said Alonzo. "Just like the gambling business. Only it isn't the banking laws that get after you if you don't pay off. It's 'the boys.' But what I don't understand is why people who have a lot of money should be able to make a lot more just by setting the odds and betting against the field. What's moral about that?"

"Well," said the guy with glasses, "that's the capitalist system. You're not against *that*, are you?"

"I don't know," said Alonzo, playing it kind of cagey "but it seems to me that for some people with money to be able to put their money in a bank and then set up a big betting system and get a fine income from the take, jus because some people are liable to die young or have fires or get robbed—it seems to me that this is no way to make an honest living."

Now the guy with the glasses began to get red in the face. "Honest living!" he yelled. "*You* were a *gambler!"*

"Yup," said Alonzo. "I was a gambler. And as I said it looked too much like the insurance business, so I quit.'

"But the insurance business is *decent,"* said the guy with glasses.

"Well," said Alonzo, "I didn't see it that way. O course, it *looks* decent. It's about as decent as anything else in the part of our system which relates to money—you know—things which have to do with exchange. Bankers and insurance people don't *make* anything. They get a ride on the system. If you have enough money and know how to manage it, you can make a lot more. Like now, the people with a lot of money can work it out so they keep on getting richer just by playing around with the tax laws. They don't add to the wealth of the society; they just use the system. I don't think much of a system like that, do you?"

This was getting a little deep for the guy with glasses. So he went back to the gangsters and the hoodlums. "Look," he said, "at the kind of people who go in for gambling. They're *underworld* people. And the women . . . you know what kind of women they are."

"Yes," said Alonzo. "I know." He didn't say anything for a while. He took a drink of coffee and then said, "It's a funny thing, but those people—the gamblers and their friends, and their girl-friends—they didn't used to try to fool anybody. They didn't pretend to perform a 'social service.' They were just after a buck. They enjoyed life because they weren't trying to kid the public. They didn't have a system to defend or make excuses for. And the girls—some of them were just doing without any pretense what some of the 'nice' girls were doing. Up to a point, it's just a question of what league you want to play in. I got sick of it because I found that too many of the gamblers and their girl-friends were getting so "acceptable" that they were beginning to worry about their 'status,' and that was when I decided that the system was mixing us all up—even us gamblers who knew better. So, as I say, it was getting too much like the insurance business and I got out."

The guy with glasses just looked at Alonzo with his mouth open. Alonzo had lost him. He shook his head slowly. The argument *had* got kind of messy and I felt a little sorry for him. Then Alonzo started off again.

"You know," he said, " I always try to figure what would happen if I was really perfect at what I am trying to do. You take gambling; a gambler is always trying to guess what cards the other players hold. Well, you know, the real reason I got out of the gambling business is that one night I found I could *tell* what cards the other players were holding. Yup," said Alonzo. "That did it. It wasn't gambling any more. It was plain stealing; no, not plain stealing; it was fancy stealing. All I had to do was keep still and win whenever I wanted to. So I got out. You know, to be able to have whatever you want—that's a bad thing.

"Take the insurance business. A perfect set-up for the insurance business would be to have a guy like me. Somebody who could tell just when people are going to die. Or have a fire. Or when stocks are going up, so that you know which ones to buy and which ones to sell. Insurance companies have to figure out what to do with their money.

"Now a guy who is perfect at building houses or growing food—he'd be a pretty good guy to have around. But a man who knows how to do perfect betting against the field—he'd wreck everything and you'd have to run him out of town.

Well," said Alonzo, "that's what happened to me." And he looked kind of sad.

Now the guy with glasses was sure he'd run up against a looney or something like that. Things had quieted down some for Alonzo and I guess this guy hadn't heard about him, and what he *could* do, if he wanted to.

"Ha, ha," he said, "that's a good one." Then he said, "Well, I guess I better be getting back to the office. I sold a policy to a man the other day and I've got to write up the contract. Real nice business," he said. "You don't write a hundred thousand dollars worth of life insurance every day." He looked out of the window and pointed at a big store. "It's Mr. Josephs," he said.

"Josephs?" said Alonzo. "Yes, Josephs," said the guy.

"You know," said Alonzo, "I don't think you need to make out that policy. You see," he said, "Mr. Josephs was killed about ten minutes ago. In a plane accident. It hit his house."

The guy turned a little pale. "How do you know?" he asked. Alonzo just said, "I know," and we got up and walked out. This time the guy really did take off. We were getting into the car when we saw him go into the newspaper office across the street.

We left. We were coming into the desert and I said to Alonzo, "What did you *really* do at Vegas?" Alonzo looked at me like I should know better. "I had a piece of a gambling casino," he said. "There's more than one way to get some sense," he said.

"Look, Alonzo," I said, "why did you give that joker such a bad time? He looked like he might be a pretty good guy."

"He *is* a pretty good guy," Alonzo said. "Well," I said, "why didn't you leave him be? Now he'll go home and worry—especially after he finds out Josephs is dead."

"It won't hurt him to worry," said Alonzo. "Worrying about things like that got me where I am."

"And where is that?" I asked him. Alonzo didn't answer, of course. But he did say that a man ought to be able to take some tough ribbing on the way he makes his living. After all, almost any way of making a living is messed up, these days. One way isn't much different from another; they're all pretty bad. But the really bad thing is when people get to thinking that the jobs they have are all pretty good, because they've got nothing to compare them with that is really good—nothing, that is, except what seems really screwball to them.

So that was why Alonzo had a field day on the insurance business. He was trying to get this guy to figure things out for himself. Sometimes, if you can get a guy a little mad, or defensive, he'll figure things out better when he gets alone.

I asked Alonzo why he picked on this guy.

"Well," he said, "I might be able to tell how he'll turn out. I knew how Josephs turned out, didn't I?" He had me there. But I had him, too. I said to him, "Okay, Alonzo, you know. So tell *me*, why do you let me hang around you?"

I had him good on that one. He just laughed. "Rack 'em up in the next alley, Joe," he said.

As I say, this was the only time I ever saw Alonzo act like a pixie. I wish I could figure this guy out.

REVIEW
LAST SALUTE TO THE WARRIORS?

IT often happens that the effective arguments against war occur in books, both fiction and otherwise, which are not written with an obvious pacifist intent. This was certainly true of John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, and applies, also, to Major Willy-Charles Brou's *Combat Beneath the Sea* (Crowell, 1957). Translated from the French by Edward Fitzgerald, this book is introduced by its publisher: "A new and exciting chapter in the history of war is set forth in this first full-scale account of underwater operations in World War II—the frogmen, human torpedoes, and midget submarines working in darkness to destroy enemy vessels.

The daring exploits of frogmen and operators of midget "human torpedoes" added to modern war an element of individual combat which one associates with the days of chivalry or with the frontier days of the United States. While most of World War II was a matter of technological prowess, with bombardiers or artillery-men pushing buttons according to slide-rule calculations, the men under the sea were pitting their personal strength, agility and daring *against* the military mathematicians. When two or three Italian divers, in desperate patriotism, succeeded in destroying some ten thousand tons of allied shipping in one night, they were enacting the role of warriors of the old school. And what is most interesting, even the victims of these operations displayed a warm appreciation of the heroism which was involved.

Our initial quotation from *Combat Beneath the Sea* describes results of operations by some British frogmen against the German battleship *Tirpitz.* After four days and four nights of submerged navigation, the tiny British crew penetrated the mechanical German defenses in the Norwegian fjords. Mr. Brou sums up the action:

> The great battleship *Tirpitz* was put out of action for many months by these midget submarine attacks and the repairs, which were carried out on the spot, lasted until April 1944, Then she was sufficiently restored to leave Kaal Fjord and Norwegian waters on what proved to be her last cruise. Two months after that she was heavily damaged by air attack, and later on further air attack destroyed her completely.
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> The six survivors of the midget submarine attack were well treated by the Germans, who greatly admired their audacity and heroism. Subsequently they were sent to prisoner-of-war camps, where they remained until the end of the war.

The Italians seem to have been the pioneers in this form of under-water combat. Fighting what already appeared to be a losing battle, they invented devices which would enable single men or crews of two or three to attack hostile shipping worth many millions of dollars. The penetration by six men of Alexandria Harbor in an effort to sink or demolished two important British battleships was an extraordinary military achievement. Major Brou writes:

> The six men had ten hours of darkness in which to do their work. One hour later, having kept close together while passing underwater through the area in which destroyers were dropping depth charges, they surfaced without incident just in time to see two warships steaming through the channel to enter the harbor. The antisubmarine net must therefore be down. They seized the opportunity, and arranging to surface again twenty-five minutes later, the three Sea-Swine submerged and followed the two ships into harbor, thus passing the last obstacle without the slightest difficulty. They were the first hostile craft in World War II to get into the harbor of Alexandria.
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> At ten fifteen at night, the three Sea-Swine surfaced again, and the crews looked around Alexandria harbor. They spotted their objectives without trouble and their leader, de la Penne, gave the order to attack.
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> De la Penne and his companion Bianci quickly reached the hull of the *Valiant* and dived below her keel, which was only a few feet above the muddy bottom of the harbor. They fixed a 600-pound charge of high explosive to her bottom and set the delayed action fuse. Then they filled the tanks of their Sea-Swine and let her sink to the bottom while they swam to the surface and had a well-earned breather clinging to the great steel caisson to which the *Valiant* was moored. Bianci had had trouble with his breathing

apparatus and he was in some distress. De la Penne was unwilling to abandon his companion, who was obviously unable to make his escape, so he let himself be captured with him by the crew of a British patrol craft. Made suspicious by the presence of the two frogmen in the harbor the British sounded the alarm, but the interrogation of the two prisoners produced no results.

The mystery was not solved until three fifty-five in the morning of December 21, when a dull underwater explosion shook the *Valiant* from stem to stern. One hour later the battleship was resting on the bottom with her hull torn open. A little later a similar explosion shook the *Queen Elizabeth* and she settled on the bottom in the same way.

The other two underwater men, Martelotta and Marino, swam ashore and took off their diving equipment, under which they were wearing Italian naval uniforms. Both sides had a short way with suspected spies in wartime whereas uniformed men were protected by the Geneva Convention and were sent to prisoner of war camps. They did not get very far in Italian naval uniform and within a few hours they were captured and sent to rejoin their comrades. The six Italians had every reason to be proud of their extraordinary exploit.

We remember news reports of a startled British Admiral who was called upon to pin a medal upon an Italian frogman who had bravely fought against the German and Japanese navies after Italy had been forced to join with the allies. In reading the Italian's navy record, the Admiral noted that this man had been responsible, some few years before, for blowing a battleship out from under his own feet. But the medal was placed where it belonged none the less, to the credit of the British Admiralty, just as it is to the credit of the Germans that they treated the destroyers of the *Tirpitz* with respect and honor.

One last quotation from *Combat Beneath the Sea* may serve as a final memorial to personal valiancy in war—now made virtually obsolete by the introduction of nuclear weapons. A Japanese Lieutenant-Commander, named Katsurayama, had served his country with the same distinction as that displayed by the Italian and British frogmen. Many of his crewmen had been blown to bits during attempts to dispose of the underwater mines dropped in Japanese waters by British aircraft, but Katsurayama had persevered in his task until he was successful. The story of how he came to die is sufficient justification for the title chosen for this brief review:

Lieutenant-Commander Katsurayama, who had in the meantime been promoted to Captain, was one of the first to be sent to Hiroshima to investigate the causes of the terrible disaster which devastated the town on August 6, 1945. With his usual courage, devotion and conscientiousness, he searched the site of the actual explosion very thoroughly in the hope of funding some vestiges of the terrible engine of destruction which had wrought the desolation. A few days later he was sent to Nagasaki with the same mission, and once again he searched the center of the devastated area very thoroughly for any trace of the cause of the disaster. Little or nothing was known at the time about the atomic bomb or the radiation sickness it caused, and Captain Katsurayama soon fell ill. Everything possible was done to save him, but two years later he died in great agony—a victim, like so many others, of the radioactivity the explosion of the atomic bombs had left behind at the scene of the disaster; and he too joined the great company of those who had sacrificed their lives for their country.

COMMENTARY
PROBLEMS OF POLITICS

ALONZO is the Invulnerable Man. Nobody, as the first Alonzo story (MANAS, May 13, 1953) made clear, can hurt him. Most of the Alonzo stories have been about the frustrations of the "authorities" in having to deal with somebody on whom threats can have no effect. They can't touch him, the bullets go around him. Alonzo is the Secret Weapon of mankind's-dream of peace.

There have been five Alonzo stories (including this week's) and one inquiry from a reader who wondered if Alonzo were "real." Well, he seems quite real to us at times.

Alonzo can see as well as the next man and better than most what's wrong with the world. But Alonzo, the Invulnerable Man, the Psychic of no mean ability, can't do much about it except go around talking to the people who will listen to him. Can you imagine Alonzo in politics? He'd know just what to do, what to say. Nobody could beat him, if he wanted to win in politics.

Alonzo won't go into politics because whatever Alonzo goes into becomes a sure thing. So Alonzo, being a fair-minded man, goes into nothing at all. Nothing, that is, at which he could be more successful than other people because of his special capacities.

But an Alonzo, if we could get one, would be a useful sort of man to have around,

As a critic, Alonzo is beyond suspicion. Alonzo can say anything he likes about our "Way of Life" without having the slightest intention of trying to change it through some kind of political action.

An Alonzo-type would be useful for the reason that most intelligent criticism of the things we do and the way we live is stifled by the suspicion that the critic has some kind of political ax to grind. We are so political-minded, these days, that we find it difficult to believe that a man may honestly object to something simply because he thinks it is wrong. Instead, we wonder what nefarious political enterprise he has up his sleeve.

It is true enough that we shall probably have to have, and get, some political changes, one of these days. But we shall certainly not get them so long as we have such a horrid fear of political change, as though it were some kind of fate worse than death. We seem to be a little insane about politics.

So a man like Alonzo, who looks at our society and finds lots of things wrong with it is a valuable man. He is not arguing for some other system. The trouble with arguing for some other system is that there will be things wrong with that system, too, and while people are arguing about the systems and which is the best they usually ignore what is wrong with *both* or *all* systems. They can't talk about right or wrong, but only about which system is best, or which one is the Lesser of Two Evils. You can't really get anywhere that way.

The curse of politics is power. The curse of being apolitical is that you do not seek, do not want, power, and wouldn't do anything with it if you had power.

Can there be a politics without power? The man who made a half-way answer to this question, becoming, there by the Man of the Century, was M. K. Gandhi. Gandhi's answer was a half-way answer because his politics was not without power; it was only without *violent* power. All over the world, today, are evidences of the use of the power of non-violence. You see it in Africa, you see it in Montgomery, you see it in Koinonia, you see it out in the Pacific, where four men in a 30-foot ketch have been protesting nuclear test explosions, and you see it in demonstrations in London and New York.

Non-violence, however, as we are experiencing or witnessing it, is non-violent *resistance.* It is what men who do not wish to harm their fellows do in last-ditch situations. This

may be politics, but it is the politics of desperation.

The non-violent politics of desperation involves acts in which you expose yourself to danger or to punishment. How do you turn this sort of politics into positive instruments of social good? There is a catch, here. Doing positive social good is not an act of desperation. It requires another kind of moral energy. Positive social good does not involve the extreme situations in which non-violent resistance is indicated. The drama is in idea and ideals, not in physical situations. The man who would do positive social good, or any kind of good involving the cooperation of other people, finds himself up against the general apathy of which men interested in the good have so long complained.

The non-violent politics of construction is obviously a much more difficult undertaking than the non-violent politics of resistance. It involves a species of inspiration seldom found in politics or out of it—the inspiration which moves men to action without any thought of getting power or the threat of power.

It is true, of course, that *moral* power has two effects on human beings. It spurs them to action; or, it makes them ashamed of themselves, thus becoming another kind of spur to action. It is a question, however, whether the word "power" should be used in this context. Power is a means of getting people to do things. And people may be caused to do things for either right or wrong or indifferent reasons.

Power, it seems to us, is a word that should be reserved for the means of getting people to do things for less than the best of reasons. When people do things for the best of reasons, they do them because they want to do them, because they *believe* in them. *This is not the result of power wielded by somebody else.* The chain of action may have been begun by the *influence* of somebody else, but this, we submit, is an educational influence and not a function of any sort of "power."

There is doubtless a place, and will be a place in our society for a long time, for the use of power. Short of anarchism, it is difficult to imagine any kind of society which can do without the exercise of some form of power. The elimination of the power of violence will obviously be a great advance in the affairs of the world and the nations—if, indeed, there can be anything like "nations" in a world which has renounced violence.

But in a world without violence, the role of education will greatly increase, while the role of power, any kind of power, will surely wane.

Meanwhile, the mechanisms of non-violent politics remain obscure. Not the mechanisms of non-violent resistance—these are far from obscure—but the mechanisms of non-violent politics for positive social good. These, it seems to us, are likely to become indistinguishable from educational influence, except for the elements of "social pressure" and the "moral power" exerted by extraordinary individuals.

But the beginning of a change for the better, whether by political or by educational means, or by both, can hardly come until people look at themselves and what they are doing simply in terms of right and wrong, in terms of justice and injustice. When people no longer fear to do this, there will be some hope of intelligent politics. Today, we imagine that the politics must come first, and, as a result, very little that is good gets done, while things generally get worse and worse.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

CORRESPONDENCE AND NOTES

Editors, "Children . . . and Ourselves": Your column of Jan. 29 gave some interesting portions from a letter by a Chicago high school teacher. He used the expression "philosophical vacuum," to my mind an apt expression of the state of affairs in education. Is there a philosophy of education? So far as average parents are concerned, I'm convinced they consider that what is taught and how it is taught is strictly the teacher's business, and as long as the children are occupied away from home, everything is fine.

Robert Hutchins evidently doesn't believe that education is doing any cultivating. "It cannot be said that the sort of popular education now prevalent in America, and destined to spread over the West, has raised the level of mass cultivation or been engaged in cultivation of any kind." If the aim of most current education is not to make cultured men, but, as I believe, "to fit the individual into society," then perhaps the sufficiency of that aim should be questioned. Let's consider honorable aims. "Know thyself," would be an honorable aim, or in another expression, to become "aware" of oneself. However, as there seem to be so few teachers capable of leading minds in such honorable directions, I believe we have lowered our aims. Perhaps if we attack the situation as it is and fling out some of the more gross attitudes, that would be doing something. Such things as competition and ambition are honored in this country and education has such a backbone. These qualities are in exact opposition to the delicate and subtle quality of "awareness." Competition and ambition as a backbone for intellectual studies add to the hard husk of the ego, rather than relax the individual into an intuitive frame of mind, with a sensitivity to all of life. How is it we never hear spoken of such things as intuition, tenderness, and spontaneity in regard to education? Erich Fromm, however, speaks of the suppression of spontaneity. "The suppression of spontaneous feelings, and thereby of the genuine individuality, starts very early, as a matter of fact, with the earliest training of a child. This is not to say that training must inevitably lead to suppression of spontaneity if the real aim of education is to further the inner independence and individuality of the child, its growth and integrity. In our culture, education too often results in the elimination of spontaneity and in the substitution of original psychic acts by superimposed feelings, thoughts and wishes."

I am going to suggest a program. The first thing would be to eliminate the "compulsory" element in education. The second would be to abandon the "merit system." Then I would abandon all State-supported elementary schools. High school requirements would simply be that the child should be able to read and write and do elementary arithmetic. If the parents could not accomplish this, then they could send their children to a private school. The main requirement of the child entering high school would be his serious desire to learn. The subjects the students studied would be entirely of their own choice. Each class would have a maximum of ten students. Only serious subjects would be undertaken. Subjects such as ball-playing and dancing, etc., would have to be pursued at parents' expense. The classes would be based on discussion and criticism.

Today, by the time a child reaches high school, his individuality has been so thwarted, and he has been "guided," directed and supervised so much, that he no longer has much feeling for his natural inclinations. By being left alone until he has gathered some experiences on his own, he would probably be able to follow the subjects closest to his own tendencies and talents. Let me say here that I think the worst thing we are doing is taking all the child's time so that he has no time to gather experience of his own, on his own. I even dare to say that delinquency is due in part to the long school hours, so that the rebellious child finds his only outlet in deviltry.

I don't think the world would come to an end if we did away with compulsory education. After all, it has been in existence for less than a hundred years, and the world managed to get along without it before. I believe that compulsory education has the wrong approach. To learn should be both a privilege and a pleasure. Instead of State-supported elementary schools, I would have State-supported colleges, also without merit or diploma. My contention is that childhood is the time for gathering individual experience and that adulthood is the time for studying serious subjects. In the State-supported college, I would have no frivolous subjects and no vocational subjects, with, again, a maximum of ten students to the class, also based on discussion and criticism. The aim of it should be to make the subjects a fascination of a lifetime instead of "courses" to be completed.

I wish Voltaire would send his "Simple Soul" into the school system, beginning with the lower

> grades, to ask the children if and why they like school, then asking the teachers if and why they like to teach, and what they think is the aim of it all, including college professors, supervisors and administrators. I expect they would all look as bewildered as the soldiers, officers and king were at being asked a direct question such as, "For what are you fighting?"

While this correspondent starts out in a number of different directions and seems inconsistent in various ways, she may stir up some further comment from readers. At the outset, we should note that neither Robert Hutchins nor Erich Fromm would be in favor of an *entirely* self-directed curriculum for the young. Especially does Hutchins stand for a transmission of intellectual disciplines from those who have gained them to those who need them. The spontaneity favored by Hutchins is the spontaneity of creative or original thinking which is able to challenge the status quo *intelligently*. The "democratic" election of professors by students would not be likely to result in the best faculty and young people need to study something more than the things which captivate them at the moment.

It is also necessary to point out that much of the criticism of elementary education, stemming from the faculty and administrators of universities, centers on the discrepancy between the frankly competitive grade system of the colleges and the *non-competitive* rating of the lower grades. While the extremes of experimental approach begun by the cult of "Progressive Education" have disappeared, we do find that most elementary school teachers have a lot more to say about "sensitivity" and spontaneity" than do college professors. On this point, it seems to us that it is not so much a matter of getting rid of the psychology of competition altogether, as it is a matter of limiting the areas to which it applies, and then of de-emphasizing those areas. "Graduation with honors" from a university, for instance, should depend very little on a grade average. Honors should be reserved for those who have conceived and carried out a creative work of genuine interest to the faculty. Nor do we think that "honor rolls" in high school do as much good for the students as they do harm. In any case, if one advocates an even further reduction of "competition" in the early grades, one should also be in favor of university recognition that the amount one learns in the "taking of courses" cannot be adequately measured by anyone save the student himself—and that it is right and proper that this should be so.

When our correspondent writes that "by the time a child reaches high school, his individuality has been so thwarted, and he has been 'guided,' directed and supervised so much that he no longer has any or little feeling for his natural inclinations," she seems to be placing most of the responsibility for this situation on the schools. However, according to Robert Hall Smith (author of *Where Did You Go.; . . . Out)*, the modern parent's "psychological" approach to the lives of young children has a great deal to do with subverting their natural development. In an article in *Life*, "Let Your Kids Alone," Mr. Smith warmly criticizes the tendency of parents to manage *all* their children's activities. This is a "Big Brother" cult, he says, and Big Brother is apt to reach into every moment of the child's time. But Mr. Smith deserves more space than we can furnish this time around, so, more later.

FRONTIERS

How Touchy Can You Get?

A NATION editorial (April 5) reports that the New York producers of Bernard Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* (written in 1921) suffered a minor tizzy in trying to decide whether to cut out Shaw's line to the effect that there is more to running a country than playing a good game of golf. Reason? They feared that President Eisenhower might get his feelings hurt if the line was left in the text! The *Nation's* comment is pertinent:

> This squeamishness is grotesque, but it is only a straw in the wind of what is now wrong with us as a people. We have become altogether too polite for our own good, we are adopting the fudgy manners of television quiz masters and have forgotten that kidding and the more serious device of lampoon are indispensable weapons of democracy. It is notorious of dictators that they can dish it out, but they can't take it—American leaders have always taken it or have soon lost leadership.

The President, the *Nation* suggests, would hardly be bothered by the line; it is the caretakers of the legend of his "sensitivity" who are responsible.

A more serious evidence of touchiness and timidity is provided in the *American Library Association Bulletin* for March. Reporting for the ALA Committee on Intellectual Freedom, Robert B. Downs writes:

> On Nov. 19 the educational television station WCBS-TV in New York presented a show, *The Faces of War*, with dramatic readings from famous authors illustrating the horrors of war and the futility of this means of solving man's difficulties. The day before the program was scheduled to go on the air one of the sponsoring organizations, the New York Public Library, withdrew its support. The ground for this action, according to Morris Hadley, then chairman of the library's trustees, was that the show ran counter to the library's established policy of not taking a position in "sensitive areas" because the library wanted to be free to stock books reflecting all sides of controversial issues.
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> Obviously a fundamental question of policy is raised by this incident, one that concerns every library with public responsibilities. Many of us who are alumni of the great New York Public system will regret the library's stand, and it is to be hoped that upon further reflection the policy will be modified. We would agree instead with the views expressed by Archibald MacLeish in his eloquent manifesto, "A Tower which Will Not Yield," printed in the November 1956 issue of the *ALA Bulletin.* There Mr. MacLeish stated: "Librarians should be encouraged to despise objectivity when objectivity means neutrality and when neutrality interferes with the performance of their duties as librarians. They should be encouraged to believe positively and combatively in those principles of a free society in which they must believe to keep their libraries whole and sane."

The question, here, is a far-reaching one. It has to do with the issue of the Nuremburg Trials—of what rule or principle a man is responsible to for his behavior. Should he change his principles or basis of action with his job?

If you are a carpenter, you follow the blueprints supplied by the contractor; and the contractor, in turn, obeys the drawings of the architect, the man who designed the building. But does this rule apply to a librarian? A librarian—a public librarian, at any rate—is employed by the government, whether local or national. Why should not the librarian, then, follow the policies of his employers? If his employers fear the spread of a certain kind of ideas, what reason has he to act independently of his employers? Are there, in short, any assumptions implicit in the simple fact of becoming a librarian that may stand in legitimate opposition to the decisions of the employers of librarians?

Dozens of arguments could grow out of this question. Many of them are arguments which will never be finally settled—never settled, that is, so long as Government takes responsibility for "security." A really free society, it seems quite evident, will be possible only when Government is quite powerless, and this, we at once recognize, would be a practical contradiction in terms. For is not the Government the only guarantee we have of maintaining a free society?

Why should an anti-war television show be regarded as invading a "sensitive area"? The reasoning is simple enough. If people are moved to despise war, they may not respond to measures for national defense. If the people cannot be mobilized for national defense, they may lose a war, and thereby their freedom. So, thinking about the horrors of war could easily become a threat to freedom.

But what, on the other hand, is a library? It is a building with books in it. It is also a symbol of the conviction of men of intelligence that a better life may arise from the reading of books. And since no one has yet been able to work out a yardstick which will infallibly measure the excellence of books, librarians endeavor to have as many books as possible, on the theory that when people decide for themselves which are the good books, they have opportunity to grow in wisdom. A library which decides which are the "good" books is not really a library, but an institution for propaganda.

A librarian is a man who believes that people need to decide for themselves about what is important to read. He believes that books contain in themselves the means to wise decision about them. It is his job to safeguard the principle of freedom to read.

Now the freedom to read is not a cold, statistical rule. This principle can be served best by people of imagination, people with hungry minds, people who are themselves curious about knowledge and the possibilities inherent in diverse reading. To have a good library, therefore, it is necessary to turn such people loose to run the libraries. Believing in libraries is the same as believing in human intelligence. If you slight the principle of the freedom to read, you slight human intelligence. How can you slight human intelligence in the name of freedom?

A librarian, then, is a man who cannot change his principles with his job. The principle of the freedom to read has nothing to do with a particular job in a particular library. The principle of the freedom to read cannot take any notice of the anxieties of government. And the librarian must take the view that a government which interferes with the freedom to read, or to imbibe freely of any point of view—such as an anti-war television program—is a bad government which is undermining its own foundations. To participate in censorship in libraries makes the librarian a conspirator against good government.

What is at issue in all such questions is whether to be a good human being or a good nationalist. If you cannot be a good human being without being a bad nationalist, then it is time for a revolution.

The Baptists are having the same kind of trouble. In the *Christian Century* for April 9, Phyllis Sapp tells the story of her book, *The Long Bridge*, and how it was censored, withdrawn, but finally released for distribution in the South by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. Mrs. Sapp's book is about the work of Guy Bellamy, secretary of Negro work for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. Dr. Bellamy, she explains, "believes that he can work with Negroes best by accepting them as individuals. He goes into their churches, schools and homes, he attends their Baptist conventions and visits their colleges." Certain aspects of these activities were cut from *The Long Bridge.* This book had been written as a "study book" for Baptists, and its descriptions of Dr. Bellamy's "eating with Negroes" were eliminated as too much for the Southern Baptists to bear. Mrs. Sapp explains: "These episodes were described in the original draft not to flaunt Dr. Bellamy's tolerance but because he considered them key incidents in establishing himself with the Negroes." But even with these cuts, the book was withdrawn. "I was told," Mrs. Sapp relates, "that some people feared study of the book would provoke discussion!"

"Discussion" seems to be the chief fear of the Baptists. All reference to a pamphlet on integration was also eliminated from the book. The "powers that be," Mrs. Sapp says, "decided

that the quotations would provoke discussion and even prompt people to send for the pamphlet."

On March 15 the book was again released for distribution, and its author hopes for a wider audience. Meanwhile, Mrs. Sapp asks for some definitions—from, one may assume, "the powers that be." She writes:

> Censorship and the choking off of discussion are for ecclesiastical groups that do not claim a democratic form of government. In Protestant ranks there is a new crying out for information. We want to know the Christian position. We are hungry to be informed so that we may influence moral issues in a Christlike manner.

Not all Baptists, however, are "timid." MANAS readers would almost all enjoy listening to a talk by Clarence Jordan, the Baptist minister who, with an associate, fifteen years ago founded the Koinonia Community of Americus, Georgia, an interracial farming enterprise in the deep South. A long-playing record of this talk is available by mail ($3.00) from the Friends of Koinonia, 901 Findlay Street, Cincinnati, Ohio. We can think of no more exciting evidence of the courage of Southern Americans than this dramatic voice of a Southern Baptist on the side of racial equality.