

THE  
FOURTH  
WISE MAN

*A Quest for Reasonable Certainties*

*by*  
*Howard Matson*



1907-1993

# ORIGINAL BOOK JACKET -

## THE FOURTH WISE MAN

### BY HOWARD MATSON

Matson feels that each of us is confronted with the same problem. We want to press on to new adventure, but at the same time we need to hold on to familiar landmarks. "Those who never listen for the sound of a distant flute and never risks searching out the strange new music is as good as dead. The capacity to dream, to dare, and even to make mistakes and repent, is of the stuff and yeast of life." Aware of this searching restlessness, pervading all, Matson uses both science and art to propose dependable answers.

There is the certainty of beauty. "It is the most personal and elusive of values and at the same time the most universal and widespread. Beauty is a goddess who stretches out her arms for the world to see." And there is freedom. "Life is so varied and complex, so multiple and yet so unified, so bewilderingly and delightfully filled with many nations and peoples, races and cultures, ideas and systems of thought that the one over arching manifold that can pull all these things together is freedom." There is the certainty that is humanity's intelligence. "This ability to suspend ideas in the air and walk around and look at them from many angles is the key to scientific method."

Matson feels that since we live in a changing world, we need a new kind of human being, unfettered by our old prejudices. "When a code fails to serve humanity, we need to change it. Let us know the moral person when we see them. We are not ones to beat our breast with the constant burden of sin. This would be neurotic.... If we define religion as a quest for certainty, we should be as concrete and exact as life itself.... When a religion or a nation feels chosen to impose its will upon others, humans are divided into the haves and the have-nots.... Organized religion is on trial before the bar of humanity." But Matson feels hopeful. "Perhaps at this very moment of humanity's hard winter, a faint trembling can be heard. Perhaps a quickening is in the air as though some stirring were seeking to break through our rigid ways of living."

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Howard Matson was born in the Bronx in 1907. He received a B.S. degree in education from New York University and an S.T.B. degree from Harvard Divinity School. He was ordained as a Unitarian minister in 1933 and served Unitarian churches in Houlton, Maine; South Natick, Massachusetts; Sherborn, Massachusetts; Santa Monica, California; and San Francisco, California. In 1942 he entered the U.S. Army as a private, completed officer candidate school, and served as captain in the Air Corps as flight control officer. He watched Lindbergh fly his plane a day before his solo flight across the Atlantic, and from a distance of 160 miles he saw the flash of the first atomic explosion at Alamogordo, New Mexico. "In both instances," Matson says, "I feel I saw history being made."

To Rosemary and Bee

# THE FOURTH WISE MAN — A SEARCH FOR REASONABLE CERTAINTIES

BY HOWARD MATSON

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+++ Chapter Opening Drawings by Elizabeth Whipple

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# INTRODUCTION

Rosemary Matson

A few years before his death -- when times were less hectic for us — Howard and I began to work on a task very important to both of us. He wanted to republish his first book *The Fourth Wise Man*, editing out the sexist language that permeated its pages. It had been written more than forty years ago, before the feminist movement taught us the importance of inclusive language. I was eager to do this because it is a fine book full of poetic wisdom and humor and it should be shared. The contents are as relevant to today's troubled world as it was when it was published in 1954.

As his wife Bee helped Howard put the words to print in *The Fourth Wise Man*, I was the guiding hand in *A Walk to the Village* (1980) and this revised edition of *The Fourth Wise Man*.

I want to thank Elizabeth and Robert Fisher, friends of ours since the 1980's when we met through our mutual interest in social justice, women's issues and ethical social policy, for asking "whatever happened to Howard's book?"

After looking over the manuscript, they took charge of the publishing process. Liz oversaw the document preparation, made editorial decisions, and arranged for printing. Bob prepared all chapter art, the cover, replacement pages, and corrections.

I am also deeply grateful to Sue Guist who retyped the entire manuscript so many years ago and Janet Cole who scanned the art and carefully reproduced the book.

# FOREWORD

*I have sent forth my prayers.  
Our children,  
Even those who have erected their shelters  
At the edge of the wilderness,  
May their roads come in safely,  
May the forests  
And the brush  
Stretch out their water-filled arms  
To shield their hearts'  
May their roads come in safely;  
May their roads all be fulfilled  
May it not somehow become difficult for them  
When they have gone but a little way.  
May all the little boys,  
All the little girls,  
and those whose roads are ahead,  
May they have powerful hearts,  
Strong spirits'  
On roads reaching to Dawn Lake  
May you grow old;  
May your roads be fulfilled;  
May you be blessed with life.  
Where the life-giving road of your sun father comes out,  
May your roads reach;  
may your roads be fulfilled.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Zuni Prayer

from *Patterns of Culture* by Ruth Benedict, 1938

The following chapters are moments on the road of my life. Perhaps Highway 66 from New York to California is as good a road as any to symbolize this journeying. This is the main route that led to the places mentioned in these pages. Railroads, bridges, and rivers are also connecting links that moved my life along from ocean to ocean.

However, I have not attempted here to tell the story of my life. The ensuing pages merely raise questions I asked myself as I stood on some high place and looked out over the countryside, or peered around some new turn in the road. The discerning reader will detect in the style of this writing something of the spoken word. This is because the material was: originally written for teaching, preaching, and the public platform.

I should like to acknowledge the permission of the following publishers to quote from books under their copyright: William Morrow & Co., New York, for *Black Elk Speaks* by John G. Neihardt; University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, New Mexico, for *Traders to the Navajos* by Frances Gillmor and Louisa Wade Wetherill; Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, for *General Theory of Value* by Ralph Barton Perry; the Macmillan Company, New York, for *Adventures of Ideas* by Alfred North Whitehead; Viking Press, New York, for *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti* by Bartolomeo Vanzetti; and Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, for *Patterns of Culture* by Ruth Benedict. I also want to thank Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. of New York, for permission to quote from the *New Century Dictionary*; and the William Alanson White Psychiatric Foundation of Washington, D. C., publishers of the *Quarterly Psychiatry*, for permission to quote from that journal.

HOWARD MATSON  
Santa Monica, California

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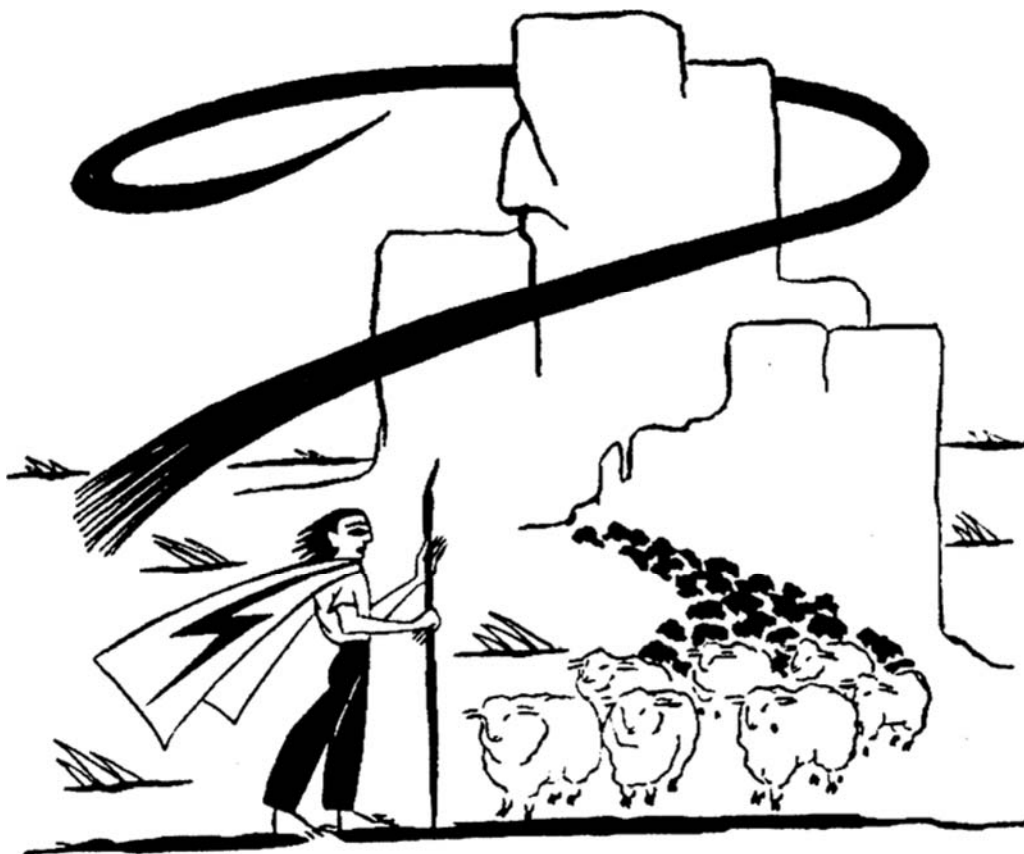
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# FACING THE WIND

*January*

# 1 FACING THE WIND

As I rode down from Colorado into New Mexico I seemed to hear the words Abraham heard as he journeyed into the land of Canaan. "Lift up your eyes and look northward, southward, eastward, and westward." Traveling south of Trinidad, Colorado, over the Raton Pass, a moment comes when the great New Mexico mesa lands open before you. You lift your eyes over vast spaces, then plunge down into the length and breadth of the land. A sweep of feeling comes to match the endless terrain, and you discover a lightening of heart like the lifting of the eyes.

I was on my way to the Sky City of the Acoma Indians during war days on a precious leave from duty. At Albuquerque I turned west on Highway 66, passing the beautiful Laguna pueblo poised along the way. About sixty miles from Albuquerque, I turned off into a rolling and peaceful valley where modern civilization seems to drop away, and great quiet creeps over you. The road follows a valley floor, winding around undulating hills where the coloring undergoes continual subtle change. Touches of green dot the hills where junipers grow. Red sandstone competes with brown desert, and both are merged in the ever changing drama of blue sky and clouds. Where the sandstone is heaviest, a rosy hue hangs over the land, and elsewhere the blue lends clarity to every rock and tree. Each object seems fraught with significance, so distinct and clear is its outline.

Suddenly I heard the tinkle of a bell. An old Indian in a cloak of flaming color with a long staff in his hand was herding a flock of sheep. He peered at me tense and motionless as my car disturbed the placidity of that ancient landscape. The bell tinkled again, accenting the silence, and I drove on feeling very much the intruder.

A few minutes later I saw the long line of Acoma rock ahead of me, rising almost four hundred feet off the valley floor about 6500 feet above sea level. On the level top of this seventy-five acre crag of grey limestone is the Sky City. Each piece of heavy timber for church and house in the pueblo had to be hauled across the desert floor and up laborious paths to the top. The original foot trail cuts up perpendicularly through the rock which was chipped by hand to make a stone ladder. Indians and Spaniards engaged in death struggle here during the days of the Spanish invasions and the Acoma revolts. There is a reason why the Indians set their village upon this mesa top. Acoma is a fortress and a citadel.

I parked my car on the valley floor and began to climb. Every now and then I paused for breath. Each new turn unfolded a stretch of wonderful land with a rosy mist over it all.

The horizon and sky seemed intermingled in great stretches. It was a strange country but not hostile, friendly yet remote. Somehow it became my land, not possessed

by anyone. It existed for itself alone out of its own past and beauty. Above all, it was a place to stop and lift your eyes.

On the mesa top I was met by a lovely little Indian girl, accompanied by her dog who was named Miss Trowbridge in honor of her teacher in the Indian School. This child was the caretaker's daughter. She showed me through the village and proudly displayed some of the Acoma pottery made by the villagers. She introduced me to the only other person I saw at Acoma—an old Indian cutting rock out of the mesa top. It seemed that a housing shortage was being anticipated, and he was gathering rock for a building project.

I stopped to talk with him. I suppose it was conversation, for between comments there were long pauses as we looked out over the countryside. It is of the nature of Acoma to look outward. Far below was the old shepherd herding his sheep. A biting wind had come up. It was bitter cold, which was not surprising since it was the first day of January.

"It is a new year," I said to the old man in the way of conversation.

"Yes, it is a new year," he said in return.

I moved a bit to get out of the wind which was increasingly discomforting. A big rock at the trail entrance gave improvised shelter. I could see the sheep below setting their backs to the wind. The shepherd did not move, however, nor did the old Indian beside me.

"It is a new year," repeated the old Indian thoughtfully, as though now realizing the formality of the occasion.

"I wish you good health," I said. "And I wish the people of Acoma good health too." Perhaps my uniform made this sound somewhat official. I felt like an ambassador of good will. The old man inclined his head gravely. Then he drew himself erect in great dignity and imparted wisdom in the spirit of the occasion. He pointed down to the shepherd below and to the sheep.

"Look!" he said. "It is good. It is good to face the wind."

I looked down and saw what I had seen before, but now I looked at it in a new way. I saw sheep huddling together with their backs to the wind. I saw a shepherd facing his sheep and facing the wind. And in a moment of keen vision I saw the true difference between people and sheep. What is it about Acoma that makes life so basic? What is it about Indian teaching that makes complicated problems become simple? Certainly the truths to be found at Acoma are simple truths. They are as simple and as profound as the facing of the wind.

There was nothing original in what the old man said, for it is common in Indian philosophy. Their prayers often teach this lesson. "Hear me, four quarters of the world.... With your power only can I face the winds." [2] Indian stories are also designed to teach

children this lesson. When an old Indian grandfather found his two grandchildren neglecting the sheep in order to climb down a wash out of the wind, he said to them:

“This life you complain about is better than the old days. These sheep give you food and clothing. It is all good. In all of it there is beauty. But you will not see it unless you follow the path of light. You cannot have anything as long as you sit lazily in the hogan. You have to give something. You have to leave the hogan fire and face the wind.” [3]

It was at Acoma, however, that this insight reached me deeply. Here I discovered a philosophy of life. I was stepping out of my own fears when I looked at the old man and stepped out from my shelter. At Acoma, I too faced the wind and now found it bracing.

We shook hands on it, and slowly I let myself down the ladder stair, stopping now and then to look back at my benefactor who worked upon the mesa top. The wind blew hard and the air was bitter cold. It was a good wind and I faced it.

As I drove away from Sky City, I thought about the implications in the old man’s philosophy. It is something that cuts across belief and creed, race and nation. It is a life posture that is antidote to all defeatism and carries within itself the guarantee of life victory. When contemporary social winds blow with almost hurricane force, shall we huddle from them as I saw the sheep huddle? Of course not! We surmount these winds by facing them. The winds of life are broad and deep, yet they blow into our personal lives with special force. Some gusts seem made just for us, but we surmount them by facing them.

I thought about this as I passed the Enchanted Mesa and left the valley of juniper trees behind me. The first stars were becoming visible over Mt. Taylor in the distance. I looked up at them and thought about the philosophic winds that also blow upon the cosmic sweep. The old man’s philosophy seemed even more valid. Shall we huddle from these cosmic blasts, I thought, in tearful hiding behind guaranteed salvation? Or shall we go out into the open land and let the winds of human thought blow upon us? No, it seemed to me it is better than we assume a cosmic posture, native to the kind of creatures we are – a posture of dignity, creativity, and hard effort. In our modern jargon we would say a good way of life sets its face to problems. True, as winds blow around an object and as trees learn to bend with winds, it is sometimes necessary to solve a problem by indirection. But in doing this, the basic truth remains. The only way to cope with an issue is to cope with it. The only way to solve a problem is to solve it. The only way to surmount an obstacle is to surmount it. The facing of the winds of life makes us *human*.

At every moment of our life, then, we possess the capacity to face the winds. But in planning our life journey it is also wise to take account of the blowing of the trades. Thor Heyerdahl’s book, *Kon Tiki*, made me think of this. It tells about the six men who crossed the Pacific Ocean on a raft to test a theory that the South Sea Islands were

peopled from Peru. They accomplished the 4000 mile journey in 101 days. Although a primitive sail helped push the raft along, it was really the trade winds and ocean currents that moved it westward. And in the final analysis, it was the motion of the earth around its axis that established the prevailing westerly currents.

We cannot help but think of life today as a journey, swift and daring. We laugh at the birds – the slow pokes! – as we zoom by in our modern jet-propelled engines.

We make faces at the fish from our atom-powered submarines. So it may seem a little pedestrian to focus attention upon a raft as though it had something important to teach about journeying, but I think it has something symbolic to tell us. It reminds us of the elemental motion in life's journey. It makes us aware again of the trade winds and ocean currents that undergird all else. Our modern speedboat is wonderful, but underneath is the life process itself. Beneath the surface activity of our lives, is the perennial movement of life's deep current. This recognition can be a refreshing and heartening experience. It enables us to relax, confident that if we place our life craft rightly on the waters, the elemental currents will help carry it along. If we allow this realization to make us lazy, we may not travel very far. Yet there is worth in knowing that trade winds blow and ocean currents flow. If this knowledge gives us confidence to work hard with the flow of it, there is no limit to the horizons of accomplishment that lie ahead.

I believe there is a progress in history. The trade winds of civilization have moved from the primitivism of the past to our more technologically advanced life. Somehow we have stumbled along to keep pace with it. When those farsighted in our country, for instance, first advocated building public roads and public schools, there were others who bitterly opposed these dreams. Yet because the need was great, the public roads and public schools came into existence. When old-age pension plans were first introduced, there were dire predictions that our economy would collapse if they were adopted. But out of human need, they became an accepted and welcome part of life. Life has a way of moving on under its own momentum. The increased complexity of modern civilization, the increase in population, the development of world trade and industry, and the onset of new technologies are but some of the trade winds of human existence that made inevitable such social services as public roads and public schools. So the ocean currents of life bear on all the decisive problems of our epoch.

These currents will ultimately decide, for instance, whether or not we are to have world peace. They may not always be visible on the surface of the waters, but sound the depths and see which way the ocean flows! The need for trade and industrial development, the expanding needs of world markets, pressing against the limiting frontiers of national states, the speed of modern transportation and communication, and the incredible destructiveness of modern weapons are a few of the untold number of pressures that mold the ocean floor and lay the compelling need of human survival. These deep winds affect us all whether white or black, brown or yellow, and East or

West. These elemental currents of life move us all regardless of race, religion, and nation. These fundamental forces flow steadily, consistently, and inevitably toward the conditioning for world peace and fellowship. They may not always be visible, but they are there. It remains for the rest of us to pitch in and help along the elemental process.

When the men on the Kon Tiki raft wanted to get a bearing on their progress, they would throw something overboard to determine how long a time elapsed before it would drift the length of the boat. In this way they would get clues about their rate of progress. So it is on the sea of our contemporary life. Here we are also able to obtain clues about the direction in which life moves. There is, for instance, the increasing conviction in many peoples' minds that recurring depressions are not necessary. There is a growing awareness that nation states must evolve a world order as a necessity for world survival. Colonial people say justice and independence should also be extended to them, and colored peoples say white peoples must share and not rule. These and a myriad other signs, large and small, wise and foolish, are indications on humanity's waters about the direction in which modern life flows. The trade winds of life blow from simple civilization to advanced civilization, from social immaturity to social maturity, from national community toward world community, and from poverty to abundance. In short, the trade winds blow toward the conditions of world stability and integration.

Within our minds the trades are also to be discerned. We feel them in such deep emotions as the desire for fatherhood and motherhood. This is more than surface emotion and is deeply connected with ongoing life. We feel the trade winds in ethics, in love, and in all the human values that have in them the potential of growth; for our life is like a voyage on an ocean deep. Each of us is captain of our own ship. Some of us steam wildly in all directions. Others are pirates living off stolen treasure. Some are phantom ships looking especially trim because they are not weather-beaten with reality. Alongside such varied and splendid scurrying vessels, it may seem odd to extol a battered raft that looks like a shipwreck. To the contrary! A ship or raft placed squarely upon life's waters so it moves along with the elemental roll and current is pointed in the right direction. Fast or slow, this craft moves toward the Isles of Progress.

Yes, the winds of life are broad and deep. At any moment of our life journey we may choose to face them. In this we will find strength and exhilaration. At every moment of our life journey we may also note the direction in which the winds generally blow. Out of this knowledge we may chart our course. We need not be disturbed if going with the tide and facing the wind seem to confront us with contradiction. Knowing and doing both is living.



## MIND AND SHADOW

*February*

## 2 MIND AND SHADOW

A bridge is symbolic of the connectedness in life's journeying. A bridge states how we are all interrelated. On one side of a river people are spread out over the land in many homes and places of occupation. They come together on a bridge in a moment of intimate awareness of their common movement. After crossing, they spread out again over the land in all directions. And what beauty is found in a bridge! The way it soars into the sky raises the human spirit. Several years of my life were spent crossing Whitestone Bridge over Flushing Bay in Long Island twice each day. Never did I approach without the thrilling anticipation of seeing that delicate silvery span floating out across the sky. Never did the actual fact fail to measure up to my expectation. Somehow a beautiful bridge reflects more of the mystery of life than does the icon of an ancient saint.

It was on a bridge over the Mississippi I first thought deeply about freedom. The Mississippi River in itself is fascinating. Apart from its length, it holds a unique place in American life because of its strategic position. Situated deep inland and cutting through our country, it has become a symbol of its unity. Travelers always ask how soon they may expect to reach and cross the Mississippi. Few indeed fail to watch, fascinated and reflective, as they pass over its sluggish waters. I remember well how I pressed my face to the dirty window pane when I first crossed it as a boy. I was on the Rock Island, I believe, and I sat entranced as the train lumbered over the trestle.

Later in life I walked over the Mississippi on a bridge at Quincy, Illinois. This is but twenty miles above Hannibal, Missouri, and the sight of the river here always brings to mind the adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. How often in my mind's eye I have floated between these banks with Huck and Tom! And now on a winter's day I was walking over the river through the kindly offices of a bridge. It was relatively warm and clear. The sky was blue, and the sun came over from the south. The river was frozen and the ice covered with a fine layer of snow that reflected the bridge in unbroken pattern. I looked down and saw a perfect reflection of a man and realized with a slight shock that the shadow walking below was I! There I was in hat and overcoat with hands thrust in pockets walking over the Mississippi ice.

Just what process of ego makes one watch this shadow I do not know, but as always the case when unobserved, I found pleasure in controlling my shadow's movements. I stopped walking. The shadow stopped walking too. I walked ahead briskly, then stopped again. The shadow walked briskly and stopped the same as I. I waved at the stranger and the shadow waved too. Then I walked on over the bridge, keeping one eye cocked on the figure that walked along with me. I walked, content I had supreme power over it. There was nothing it could do without me. True, I could not make it jump through a hole in the ice without grave risk to myself, but by and large I was its master, and it was my slave.



“Good heavens!” I thought suddenly. “Am I too but a shadow? Am I walking through life just as my shadow is walking across this bridge? Am I being operated by some sort of remote control?”

I looked down at my shadow more seriously.

“He walks along,” I mused, “under the illusion he moves of his own volition. Actually, he walks because I will that he walk. He stops under the illusion he has stopped himself. But I stopped him. He waves his arm thinking he has the impulse to wave. Actually, I waved it for him. Suppose despite my feeling of inner choice, much the same is happening to me!”

Since the day was mild, I decided to sit down and mull this over. It was most important. I decided, for the moment at least, to accept the premise that I too was a shadow.

“O.K.” I said to myself. “I am now a shadow. I will sit down and write a poem dedicated to Huck Finn.”

I began to gather my thoughts and to arrange them in lyrical fashion.

“But wait!” I cried. “I am not doing this. I must wipe that satisfied smile off my face. I am not writing a thing. I am but a shadow! Someone else by remote control is thinking these thoughts and writing them for me.”

I sat back depressed. My creativity had immediately disappeared. Somehow nothing seemed worth the doing. However, the broad friendly river appeased me and the sound of cracking ice below gave me an idea for the opening theme of a symphony. I always carry a notebook for such emergency and began to compose furiously. Bang! bang! bang! I wrote in my musical notebook to the sound of the breaking ice.

“But wait again!” I cried. “I am not doing this at all. I am a shadow. Anyway the music isn’t very good. And good or bad, someone else is actually composing for me.”

Obviously, I wasn’t going to accomplish anything under such conditions. I’d have to convince myself I was not a shadow if I was to accomplish anything at all. And this was easy, for I could give my shadow its place in the sun and keep my own identity intact. I turned back again across the bridge in a new frame of mind. Immediately, I became convinced of my inner freedom. Of course, I argued, people are not completely free. The history of all civilization was necessary to build the bridge before I could walk over it. The development of human thought was a prerequisite to my writing a poem. Nor was I free to fly like a bird without mechanical aid. But within these restrictions, as soon as I started to

walk, I had awareness of inner freedom. I walked because I chose to do so. I turned back because I wanted to turn back. I leaned over a parapet and waved at my shadow because I so willed it.

“Hello, old fellow!” I called down to my shadow. “I’ve got news for you. If I write a poem, I’ll do it. If I compose a symphony, I’ll compose it.”

And, as the travelogue is fond of doing, I waved a final good-bye to it, walked off the bridge, and let it disintegrate among the tracks of the Burlington and Quincy Railroad.

\* \* \* \* \*

The consciousness of inner freedom does not mean we can drop stitches of cause and effect in our effort to understand the universe. I am thinking of stitches because I have just received a new sweater from my mother. How often, as a child, did I hold the yarn for winding, and how often did I commiserate with her when she dropped a stitch. How insistent she was that the stitch be picked up again! Nor may stitches be dropped from the fabric of nature. We are products of a civilization that relies on science. The scientific method in exploring life is to look consistently for the relation between cause and effect.

We like to explore nature by looking at it through microscope and telescope to see how its fabric is knit together in a series of causal stitches. If we hit a nail with a hammer with a certain force, we like to feel sure the nail will go so far and no further. We like to predict what will happen in order to feel secure. If we come to a place in the universe where a stitch is dropped and we don't quite see why the universe behaves as it does, we are unhappy until we understand it.

One way of looking at life is through the process of evolution. Life is a building process, moving from lower to higher form. The garment of evolution is impressive, and the pattern discloses movement upward, from the inorganic to the organic, from vegetable to human. When we come to a place where a stitch is missing in this pattern, we may approach it in two ways. We may deny the stitch is missing by saying God jumped the gap and explanations are unnecessary. Or, we may say our knowledge is incomplete and attempt to search for the dropped stitch. The latter view, I think, offers the greater promise both to humankind and to progress. It also most deeply satisfies human nature. Wherever stitches in nature's fabric are missing it is to be assumed the story is incomplete and not final. When cause and effect sequences break down, the scientist should get as excited as mother did when she dropped a stitch. The scientist should not rest until it is picked up again. The garment of science has strength when each part is thoroughly knit together in rigorous cause and effect relationship.

This, I feel, is the proper attitude for people in general to hold about life and nature. It is always helpful to search out cause and effect in all human endeavor. Not only is this true within individual disciplines like psychology, economics, morality, and medicine but also between these scientific fields. It is necessary to see how politics are related to emotion, how emotion is related to economics, and how ethics and aesthetics are connected with all these things. Not only does such an approach to life satisfy the

mind but it satisfies the emotion as well. The Greek idea of particular things being imbedded in universal law is in its deepest sense an appeal to beauty.

There is an idea abroad that we may drop a stitch in our scientific understanding of life if we thereby gain in religious feeling. Nothing could be further from the truth. Religion is not lack of understanding. We do not have more religion but less when we decrease in knowledge. Religion (from religare, meaning to bind) is the binding of all of us to our universe. When we know why life behaves as it does, we have greater mastery over it. Life has greater meaning when it is not arbitrary and capricious. The same is true when we understand ourselves, for this gives opportunity for greater personal self-control and poise. The ability to understand, and even to predict events, adds to our appreciation of nature and to greater happiness. We would do well to say at all times—“No stitch dropped!”

And insistence upon the scientific method as the most honest way of discovering modern truth, however, does not deny the importance of legend and poetry in life. The ancient myths especially were great and majestic creations. They were a sort of pre-scientific science attempting to account for natural phenomena of whose processes early humans were ignorant. They were especially important in our childhood when, like me on the bridge, they found it puzzling to know which was reality and which reflection.

How rapidly legends grow! I once talked to a group of youngsters and described to them a visit I made to an Indian village. I had met the chief of the tribe who gave me a message which by implication was also intended for these youngsters.

“Tell them,” said the chief,” that all people are related.”

It was reported to me later by a parent that his five-year-old son had rushed home from school to deliver the message to his mother.

“Momma!” he cried. “The teacher brought us a message from an Indian chief who said that everyone should go to the circus this afternoon.”

Out of such ingredients are myths created!

Then there was the little boy, aged four, who rang my doorbell one day. He carried a dirty piece of wire in his hand and gave it to me as a peace offering.

“I couldn’t come to school this morning,” he said, “because I had the measles. I’m feeling better now because I stopped off by the river and washed the measles away.”

When I asked this youngster how long he had suffered with the measles, it seemed he had been afflicted for seventeen years. He also had a friend who had measles for a hundred years! Then after some further talk about gold fishes and a river of ice water to put fishes into on a hot day, he left with his mission accomplished.

The boy with the message from the chief that everyone should go to the circus was expressing a desire, a wish-fulfillment. The Indian chief, being very old and wise, would surely recognize the merit of going to the circus! Somehow the chief got mixed

up with this boy's desire. The other youngster who had measles was attempting to explain a course of behavior.

His myths involved a system of thought that was quite complex.

The essential feature was explanation. So with all mythology whether of the simple child or the childhood of the race! It attempts to explain behavior or create something desirable. Mythology was an ancient method of seeking truth by those who were ignorant of the laws of nature, and of seeking abundant life by those who lived by back-breaking work. The myths were dreams about Golden Ages.

Such is the great legend of the Garden of Eden. This story has so profoundly influenced Christian theology that its effect is still felt today. In origin it was primitive humans' attempt to explain how evil and suffering came into the world. Growing up among the peoples of the Arabian desert, it is set in the classic framework of a Golden Age that supposedly existed in the past. As the desert nomad struggled to eke out a living from the barren land, he dreamed of the day when life had been a beautiful garden. To a desert wanderer, a garden is a wonderful place. It contains water which is a precious commodity, and shade. Visualize the blessing to be found in shade if you are a wanderer in the hot Arabian desert. "A man shall be as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." A garden also has food and this mythological one was a place "where every tree was pleasant to behold and good for food." It was food to be had for the mere plucking from tree and bush. As the desert nomad sat around his fire at night after a hard day's work grazing sheep, he mused and asked, "How then did evil and suffering come into the world?"

Somehow the Eden legend grew to answer these questions. In the Garden there was a tree forbidden to humans. This was a tree of knowledge but not of mere ordinary information. It was a tree of philosophic knowledge that contained the distinction between good and evil. If you possessed this secret of the gods you became godlike. Could the gods permit such invasion into their domain? Naturally not. As in the case of the Tower of Babel legend, they'd have to do something about it. So they forbade anyone to eat this fruit.

"Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

Why then did the people dare challenge this? One answer is simple and the other complex. The simple answer is that the serpent tempted them. The serpent is underhanded. You need but watch it crawl along the ground to know this. The shepherd knows how unexpectedly the serpent strikes, lurking in the bushes! The serpent tempts...

"Eat thereof . . . for in the day ye eat, then shall your eyes be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

Eve succumbs to this.

“When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took the fruit thereof, and did eat. . .”

The reason Eve responded, however, is more complex than this simple imagery. She symbolizes the restlessness and curiosity which enabled primitive man to risk the anger of the gods. She symbolizes their heroic effort to go out into the Unknown and explore.

In the legend, the gods protect themselves and first take care of the serpent.

“Upon thy belly thou shalt go and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.”

Next they limit the woman.

“I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception in sorrow.”

This explains childbirth and its pain. The creation of family also burdens the woman so she has less time to compete with divinity. Then the gods also hamper the man.

“Because thou hast eaten of the tree; . . . cursed is the ground for thy sake, in sorrow thou shalt eat of it, all the days of thy life.”

Man has to work hard now and does not have the time to challenge the gods’ sovereignty. By the sweat of his brow he shall now eat. So the curse of an unbearable work came into the world. Thus mused the desert wanderer sitting around a campfire at night and pondering the beginnings of things.

Finally, death is decreed. This is the negation of everything—garden, shade, water, fruit, and berry.

“Return thou into the ground for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return.”

This is the final punishment.

Yet had they failed to eat of the fruit of knowledge, this would have been the greater error. This courageous thing these primitive people did to fathom the distinction between good and evil was a sort of primitive declaration of independence. At one stage of their history, they conquered their fear and reached out into the unknown. Somewhere, some ancient one dared to penetrate beyond the fire-circle. It is very difficult for us to understand the heroism in this. To the primitive, the unknown was palpable and real. They were confronted with it at every turn. They saw it in fire that hung in the sky and heard it in voices of thunder. It was frightening. They saw it in wrath that spilled out of volcanoes and in great tidal angers on seacoasts. They felt the awesomeness that crumbled the ground in earthquakes and saw it in meteors that dropped at night as they sat around the campfire. Truly, it seemed as though the anger of the gods was too great.

What a tremendous drive to conservatism existed in those early days! How much easier to huddle around the fire and avoid the great unknown! Of course, necessity had its place in driving primitives outward, but then as now, there were brave spirits and weak ones. In the dim recesses of history there were the first ones to take the initial halting steps down some canyon wall and out into the great Beyond. These were the first to penetrate the forbidden realms by following out the inner call of curiosity and necessity.

They set in motion processes that have come to fruition in history. Eve was supposedly cursed with the pain of childbirth as punishment for seeking knowledge. Today knowledge permits us to alleviate the pains of childbirth as well as its risks. Adam was supposedly cursed with the evil of work as punishment. Today work and knowledge are interrelated and have produced a technical civilization that heightens our well-being. This technical advance brings us to the threshold of an abundance dwarfing any concept of the Garden of Eden. So has the cycle turned. We honor the heroes of this tale by jealously guarding the right of access to the tree of knowledge. We cannot fence it in with signs of "Thou Shalt Not!" We cannot take the tree of life and turn it into a museum piece without forcing the roots to rot away.

Thou shalt not think. Thou shalt not speak. Thou shalt not assemble. Thou shalt not write. Thou shalt not read. Thou shalt not create. Thou shalt not criticize. Thou shalt not advocate. How often we hear this refrain today! As of old, we need go back to the ancient tradition of dissent, and affirm our right to seek and satisfy divine curiosity. Today, as yesterday, the refusal to eat of the forbidden tree would be the greater error!

Yes, the legends of the past were often marvelous creations, and testimony of the desire to probe and explore. They were not consciously created but grew and were built up out of primitive experiences. Ancients did not know them as myth but as truth. And this makes a great difference! We now know them for what they are. They have now lost any scientific content and meaning. They are shadows of our thoughts. We call these stories by their proper name and put them in their place in history. We drink deeply of their aesthetic waters, but we do not accept them as a way of life. Today the method of science has become the habitual climate for discovery of new truth. The laws of logic and reason have legitimately conquered mythology as a way of life.



# THE DEAD END STREET OF HISTORY

*March*

### 3 THE DEAD-END STREET OF HISTORY

There is another place that catches the traveler's imagination. It is the Continental Divide. The Mississippi is the crossing of a nation, but the Divide is the turning point of a continent. Whether in the northern reaches of Canoga or the stretches of Mexico, the high rim cuts jaggedly northward to southward dividing the watersheds and water flow. It is a symbol of nature itself.

I've crossed the Divide in many places. While it is most remote and beautiful for me at Wolf Creek Pass in the woods of Colorado, it is most sharply etched in my consciousness while going over on Highway 66 west toward Gallup. The wide New Mexico mesa lands stretch out in a gentle swell, and the Divide looms across the road at a sharp right angle like a turreted wall winding higher and higher. There is no mistaking the Divide, for it has a razor edge. On the other side is the long declining ground swell into Arizona. If you fly over the Divide in a parallel air route, about 60 miles south of the highway you cross remote and mountainous country around El Morro. Pilots need not be told they are in the divide's vicinity, for the weather-changes tell the story, and if they fly at night, they may see fires burning on the ground below. These are ceremonial fires of Indians who come to the foothills to dance. They too evidently know they are at a dividing point in nature.

Why does the Continental Rim so appeal to us? Part of this is due to the excitement of attaining height. If you have come up from the Atlantic beaches, crossed the Alleghenies, and then gone over the Mississippi to the Divide itself, you experience a pattern of achievement relating back over the long journey. The Divide, conceived as part of a land mass, is the high point for the continental traveler. But this is not the essence of the exhilaration, for it is not the highest point that may be reached on our continent. There are many places that reach higher. The secret of the divide's appeal is something else again.

It is the pivotal and basic nature of the rim. It is the recognition that at this point a little difference goes a long, long way. Stand here and throw a leaf into the waters, and it will float out into the broad Pacific. Throw it a few feet this way or that, and it will flow out into the Gulf or the turbulent Atlantic. At least this is what happens to the waters of the deep underground streams. And it is this recognition of the small difference that goes a long way which gives the traveler the specific flavor of the experience at the Divide. It is the excitement of reaching a point where you can visualize the waters dividing in two directions, and each flowing into opposite oceans.

Something like this also happens to the flow of our own life, though perhaps more subtly. There are pivotal human experiences that determine which way our life shall go.



These often have to do with elusive words like value, quality, and worth. These experiences are not to be defined in quantity alone. We cannot estimate value in the same way we estimate mileage on a speedometer. It is more akin to standing upon a Continental Divide and throwing a leaf into the waters. A few feet of shading this way or that may seem a small difference, but it becomes the great difference when judged by the direction in which a life is flowing. A difference in value, quality, or worth, may end in opposite oceans.

Here are two women we shall name Mrs. A and Mrs. B. They are fond of the same movie stars and have many tastes in common. They voted for the same President and play the same bridge system. Their only difference is about divorce. Mrs. A is opposed to divorce under all circumstances. Mrs. B favors divorce if the couple is incompatible. But this difference may be of the nature of a Continental Divide as far as marriage is concerned. The waters washed down by the flavor of that difference go into opposite seas.

Here are two men we shall name Mr. Y and Mr. Z. They are of similar age and hold identical jobs. They hold similar beliefs in truth, beauty, goodness, and the appeal to reason. They only differ in evaluating the United Nations. Mr. Y believes the United Nations should be given a chance to fulfill the stated purpose of its Charter. Mr. Z believes the United Nations is a failure and should be abolished. They differ only on the specific matter of the United Nations. But this difference is that of a Continental Divide. The waters washed down by the flavor of that difference go into diametrically opposed oceans.

Two youngsters play on the same playground. They come from similar homes and go to the same school. As pals they chum together and share the mutual admiration so typical of adolescents. They only differ about another boy named Manuel.

“Let’s get Manuel to play on our team,” says the first boy with enthusiasm. “He’s wonderful and the best basketball player in the league.”

“Have Manuel?” exclaims the second. “I should say not. He’s a Mexican!”

Two boys with but one small difference between them. However, it is one that may grow to the proportions of a range of mountains dividing a nation. The waters washed down by the flavor of that difference go to opposite ends of the world.

So it is with human personality in general. The Continental Divide within us is less a voice of thunder speaking down from a mountain than a leaf falling at a pivotal place where the waters of life divide. A fluttering breeze of quality at this point may blow the leaf a trifle this way or that but enough to determine which underground flow of water shall carry it out to sea. With the passage of time a shading of difference at a pivotal place may widen into opposite ways of life and into opposite ends of the world.

Who then can say with certainty that any specific person or specific culture will not contribute to the treasure chest of tomorrow’s world? As the entire continent is a

prerequisite for the high point of the Divide, so humanity is necessary for the high point of the individual spirit. Few have been so aware of this happy inconsistency and unpredictability in human nature as was Jesus of Nazareth. Few men have so delighted in etching the paradoxes of human personality. The tax gatherer turns out to be the humble one, and the demonstrably religious one the prude. The priest passes by on the other side of the road while the outcast Samaritan performs the good deed. The elder son should have reaped the filial reward, but the prodigal one eats the fatted calf. Jesus delighted in our ability to confound ourselves and our critics. All this paradox was directed toward one end – avoiding static concepts about life. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and a little change of direction alters the whole flow of the underground stream.

I thought about these things one day in March when I stood near the top of the Divide and tried to throw a leaf into the Atlantic Ocean.

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It was near the Continental Divide that I discovered the dead-end street of history.

I had been at Mesa Verde in lower Colorado. Mesa Verde is a high flat tableland covered with green bush. To get to the top one motors up and up a winding, precipitous road that unfolds spectacular views. There are canyons at the top and in these canyons are cave dwellings. Indians inhabited these caves when Europe was in the dark ages. A thousand years have passed since people lived in these caves. So striking is their setting, so dramatic the climb to the top, so well preserved are these hidden dwellings, and so quiet are these monuments to a civilization that has come and gone that one almost expects to see a sudden fire take flame in a fireplace, or hear the chopping of an axe upon a tree. You naturally wonder: “Who were these people? Where did they come from? What happened to them? Where did they go?” The answers disclose a dead-end street of history.

These Indians had not always lived in the caves. Originally they came from the South and inhabited the plateaus surrounding the foot of Mesa Verde. They farmed beans and corn for sustenance. They lived in widely separated villages and developed fine pottery and cotton weaving. They grew in stature, strength, and civilization. When conflict developed between hunting and agricultural Indians, the Mesa Verde people sought protection by banding together upon the mesa top. But now their farming was more limited. Perhaps they had better military security, but diet was not as adequate, and closer living spread disease. They began their march down history’s dead-end. As the Indian conflicts continued, the Mesa Verde people increasingly withdrew into themselves, trading the life of the open land for the seeming security of the mesa top.

First they fortified their cities. Aztec National Park is one such place. Finally they built homes inside the caves and retreated to the almost inaccessible places. Inadequate diet, disease, and a twelve-year drought finished them off. They lacked mobility to cope with these things. The survivors left Mesa Verde carrying scant belongings by hand to other places. These few survivors are probably the ancestors of today's Pueblo Indians. As far as the Mesa Verde civilization was concerned, however, it had reached the dead-end with the plunge into the caves.

I thought about these things the day after I glimpsed the pitiful history of Mesa Verde. I had gone on to Puye Cliffs in northern New Mexico. These cliffs are in the foothills of the Jemez Mountains and have caves similar to Mesa Verde. Everywhere the Puye earth disclosed the remains of a fine civilization. But here too the Indians had sought military security by plunging into the earth and in consequence had lost vitality and life itself.

"Must this be the fate of all civilization?" I asked the silent caves. "Is there no other way to security than to retreat upon oneself? Is the only way open to us to build caverns and caves away from health-giving air and sunlight? Have we moderns learned from the primitives that there is no real security in such a thing and no real promise in such a dead-end?"

I seemed far away from modern life as I stood in the cradle of that ancient land, looking into the great silent caves. The only sound was the gentle swaying of juniper trees and the hum of a solitary insect. The sun, which was sinking in the west, shone upon a companion mesa in the distance. I looked again at that mesa and a sudden thought occurred to me. I hurried to the map and traced my route. Here was Espanola and there the fork to the right. Here was the ascent into the foothills and there the turn to the place upon which I stood. Now I traced another route. Here was Espanola and there Frijole. Here the turn to the left and there to the right. Yes, I was correct!

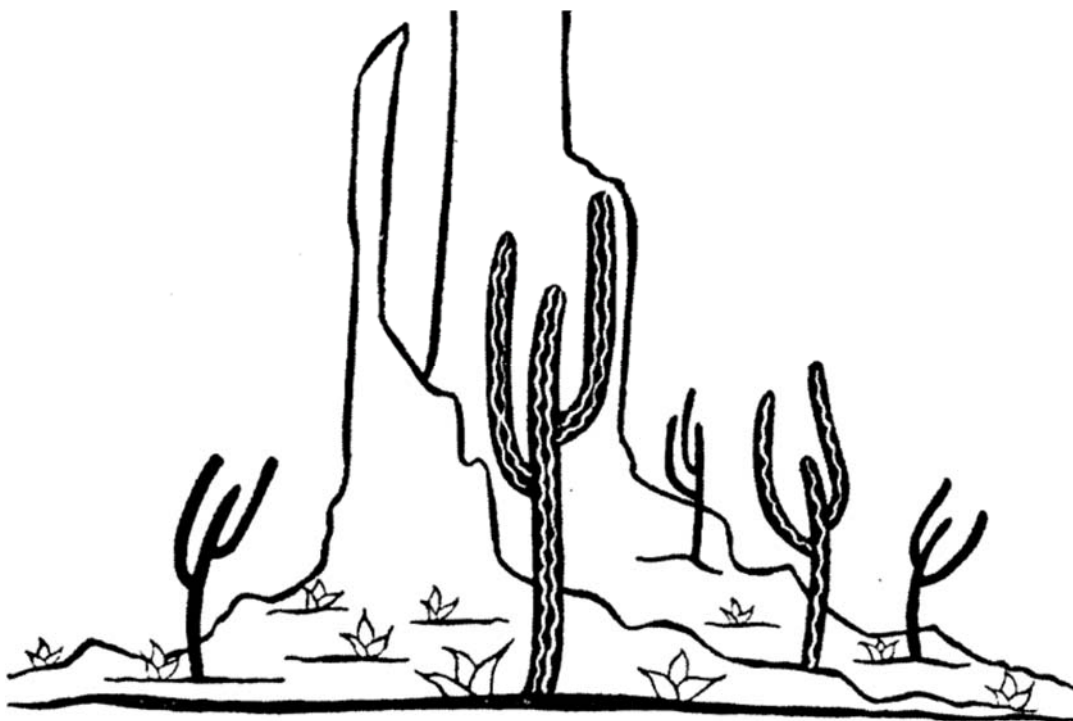
Hidden within the folds of the mesa across the canyon was Los Alamos, the modern forbidden city. Across the canyon was the town of modern destiny possessing the secret of the atom bomb. In the recesses of the mesa beyond and built upon a civilization that had perished, was a town of modern destiny symbolizing the problem that enshrouds our epoch. In that quiet juniper land from whose soil one digs bows and arrowheads and the pottery of a vanished time, was this modern throbbing city whose every dynamo seems to hum, "Which way, which way, which way?" The gods some say, are whimsical.

As I stood at Puye it seemed very clear to me we must decide once and for all the road of our destiny. Shall it be the broad, open plains of coping with the problems of a real security which is world-wide and full of sunlight, vitality, and promise? Or as in Puye and Mesa Verde shall we start to build the modern caves? I was seriously convinced that if we chose the latter, we had reentered the dead-end street of history.

This is not an academic question. There are those who arise today in council chambers, as in Mesa Verde of old, and advocate the return to the cave. They talk about subterranean shelters and cities underground. They become absorbed with ways of flinging themselves behind concrete pillar and post to avert the effect of atomic blast and radiancy. Such absorption alone is but primitive vision, like the perspective of plunging into the cave. Only a new vision, a new perspective, is adequate to place them upon the sunny avenues of history. There is no real security in the return to the cave mentality and the caves. Instead, the avenues today must be built outward toward broad world settlement. The rooting out of the caves of the mind is a prelude toward opening up the sunny world of the future.

To avoid the dead-end street of history, it is first necessary to hew to the guiding line of a rational world outlook. We must resist becoming lost in the maze of current events, which paralyzes and immobilizes clear thinking, and instead hold fast to basic principle and broad perspective. A rational world outlook for our time needs proclaim peace, world unity, and world fellowship as the necessary world values. The opposite outlook of inevitable war, disunity, and world-hate threatens atomic collapse of the universe. A rational world outlook proclaims arbitration, conciliation, and world community as the important world values. The opposite view of monopoly, aggressive nationalism, and aggressive imperialism leads to disaster. A rational world outlook affirms the universality of human nature. It is a belief in reason as something more than self-interest, and the affirming of reason's dignity as something more than the mere rationalization of what one does. The antidote to the disunity of today is to affirm community.

As I stood at Puye Cliffs in New Mexico and looked into the caves below, I seemed to see human beings a thousand years hence coming to the place upon which I stood looking at the mesa that stretched beyond. I wondered what they would see. Would they stoop to earth to pick up some remnant of our civilization? Some bow and arrow, as Einstein said. Or would they see a shining city with great new discoveries and great new people? It's an interesting question. We will probably make the initial answer in our time. It all depends upon how successful we are and how much faith we possess in ourselves. It all depends upon how much imagination we exercise in avoiding history's potential dead-end.



THE UNIVERSE AND  
EDDIE QUINN

*April*

## 4 THE UNIVERSE AND EDDIE QUINN

Two little boys helped me most in suggesting ways of avoiding the dead-end street of history. It was Eddie Quinn who taught me about the universe.

I was a teacher in a small school in California, and Eddie was a student in one of the younger classes. On the day he taught me about the universe, I had come early to turn up the gas heaters to warm the classrooms. The morning was foggy and gray and the building was dark. Eddie had also arrived early.

“What do you think of it?” he asked.

“Think of what?” I inquired.

“Think of my ring,” he replied proudly, holding his hand out for me to see. There it was, bright and shining. It had a gold band of scroll design and a stone, clear as glass.

“My father gave me the money and I bought it in a five and ten cent store,” Eddie continued in a tone I usually reserve for Saks Fifth Avenue.

“A fifteen cent ring from a five and ten cent store!” I exclaimed in proper appreciation of its special value. And so we stood in quiet admiration as the stone sparkled in the semi-darkness. Indeed, for a moment I forgot my chores. It seemed as though we were in church.

“Do you think it’s worth it?” Eddie asked again. I felt he was speaking of more than monetary terms. I assured him it was worth it and moved to turn on the lights. But Eddie stopped me again.

“You wanna see the box?” he asked commandingly. Before I could reply he whipped out a jewelry box from his jacket. The inside was like a Hollywood movie set — purple with satin-like lining. Reverently he laid the ring in its proper place, and the box set off the ring as Cinderella set off the glass slippers. Resting against the lush interior, its tapering slender lines and intricate scroll work showed to advantage. The jewelry box had another special feature. It would open and shut with a real click. Eddie demonstrated. When the box clicked open, the ring appeared as though accompanied by special announcement. It was like a trumpet fanfare for a king or an overture for a leading lady. No, it was more like a litany for a bishop upon an altar. With a click, you immediately recognized that a fifteen cent ring deserved a fifteen cent box to do it artistic justice.

At this point the other youngsters began to arrive, and the spell was broken. I turned up the lights, and Eddie put his box away. It chanced I was giving an examination that day, so after handing out the questions I went down into the main auditorium. It felt good to sit in the quiet room and relax. In the background I could hear a hum of voices and every now and then Eddie’s voice floating down from a class in the balcony. I would hear a click! click! click! followed by a voice asking “Do you think it’s worth it?”

That is how I found myself thinking that day about the universe. Eddie Quinn and his jewel box had set me thinking.

What is a jewel box? I thought. It is a place for a ring between adventures, a resting place between wearings. It has to do with romance and intrigue. When a jewel is in proper use, it is connected with life's experience. A hand, a ring, and a jewel box are active life companions. A ring without a hand is a museum piece, a sterile thing. But a ring and jewel box connected with a hand is something else again. In this strange turn of mind I found myself thinking as I rested and listened to the hum of the classrooms, while somewhere in the background came the sound of a click! click! click!

Is not Eddie something of a jewel? I thought. Does he not need the universe to give him a proper setting? For when Eddie held up his hand to show me his treasure, there was a sparkle in his eye like the sparkle of a ring. All the cosmos seemed necessary to give proper background to his shining eyes and face. Such was my reverie as I rested. The universe seemed like a great jewel box for Eddie Quinn to shine within.

Yet Eddie is also completely dependent upon his universe, I thought. And all of it was necessary to produce his ring. The minerals came out of the ground and the glass was manufactured in a factory. The machine tools came from other plants while the workmanship came from human hands. The cloth in the jewel box came from the South, the dye from Europe, and the leather from Argentina. And how old is the universe? It's hard to tell. Millions of years beyond human comprehension went into it. I could almost hear it whirring behind me, though it seemed to slip a cog now and then in a click! click! click!

Now a second thought occurred to me. Are we also aware how dependent the universe is upon Eddie Quinn?

I was not thinking of the Eddies who take the earth's minerals and fashion rings out of them, or fabricate glass, or grow cotton to make cloth, nor of the Quinns who make jewelry boxes. I was thinking of something else again. It had to do with a unique question the youngster had asked.

"It's a fifteen cent ring," he had said. "Do you think it's worth it?"

Here is where the universe is completely dependent upon Eddie Quinn. Here is Quinn distinctive in the universe. Only he could ask the profound question, "Do you think it's worth it?" Who else will ask it if Eddie does not? Who will care? Where else will worth and meaning be fashioned out? The universe needs Eddie Quinn to talk about itself. Without him, the celestial spheres would not know they possessed value and would merely roll along distant, endless, remote, and cold. With Eddie, however, the whole situation is transformed. Now inside the whirr of the spheres comes the warm and intimate sound of a click! click! click!

Yes, I mused, Eddie Quinn is necessary to appreciate fifteen cent rings and jewelry boxes. If you had to choose between him and an indifferent universe, would

there be any doubt which choice to make? Fortunately, there is no need to so choose, as Eddie and his universe are partners. They are each dependent upon the other. Eddie needs his universe to live. Through Eddie the universe is freed from slavery. And Eddie pioneers this new field of value. When he asks about worth he enters an area only human beings can enter, for only they have reached the evolutionary level necessary to penetrate these far reaches.

We are very recent upon the earth and we have just flickered upon the evolutionary cinema screen. Away up front is Eddie Quinn, the pioneer, asking the profoundest of all modern questions, "Do you think it's worth it?"

How much is Eddie and his universe worth? We are asking this question very seriously in our time. We now have the power to turn our world into an empty jewel case if we will. Our valuing of Eddie and his universe will depend upon what we do to preserve them. In a way we are all Eddies, for we are in this contemporary crisis together.

We Eddies of the world are infant prodigies and we have learned a few of nature's secrets. Not the least of these is the secret of the atom. We can do the universe irremediable harm and cut off our cosmic noses to spite our cosmic faces. We need to ask, "What is the universe worth?" For value cuts across Eddie Quinn and his universe. They are one, intermingled and intertwined.

These were my strange reflections as I sat in the darkened auditorium and listened to the hum of the classrooms. These were my thoughts as I heard the sound of a click! click! click! walking up to me in the person of Eddie Quinn. In my speculative vein, I almost expected him to rub the ring as they do in Arabian Nights stories. But there was no Aladdin. Only Eddie himself.

"It's a fifteen cent ring," he said to me taking out the jewel box and opening it with a resounding click. "Do you think it's worth it?"

"It's worth it," I said to Eddie Quinn.

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But it was Stevie who suggested how we might preserve our universe. He came into our house one morning attired in a sort of cowboy suit with blue jeans and shirt, a flaming red kerchief loosely knotted around his neck, and horseshoes stitched into his hip pocket.

Although only four-and-a-half years old, he approached me on this occasion with a somewhat furtive expression. After a desultory greeting, he leaned forward with a quiet intentness and said curtly. "Reach for the sky!"



Well, I thought rather surprised, here is a bright youngster already interested in philosophy. He has noticed the relationship between ideal and the heavens and is advising me to reach out to them with the same adventurous spirit one looks out upon an expanding universe. How remarkable such maturity should come from a child so young!

“Reach for the sky,” my little friend repeated again with the same calm detachment.

Proudly (and perhaps somewhat patronizingly) I reached forward to pat his little head. This is where I made my mistake. At that moment he became transformed into a grim and relentless killer. In a flash—with a half turn and a half whirl—he produced two guns from the hidden holsters of his cowboy suit. He shot me dead! That is, he would have, had they been real guns. In fact, as far as he was concerned, I was as good as dead, and the performance ranked with Billy the Kid and the desperadoes of Red River.

Having been so brilliantly annihilated and having staggered back the appropriate number of steps to indicate my appreciation of the performance, I inquired posthumously what had called forth the drastic action. And then I learned what you probably already know. I had made an error in semantics. “Reach for the Sky” was not a discussion in philosophy. It had nothing to do with an appreciation of the universe or of an expanding spirit. Indeed, it was an entirely practical admonition to put my hands up and to indicate they were empty. This was necessary to guarantee I did not intend to shoot him. Just why I should be thinking of shooting him was not quite clear, but it was mixed up with horses named Thunder and Trigger and a Hi Ho Silver.

This incident was a mistake in communication between my little friend and myself. I should never have reached out to pat his head. It was when I reached forward that he shot me dead.

Now it is terrible to contemplate that one will shoot another dead because of an error in semantics. I realized the importance of the exact understanding of words like “Reach for the sky!” I decided we cannot underestimate the importance of defining words and searching out their common identity of meaning. Misunderstanding so often arises between people and nations because of a differing evaluation of similar words. To a Jew, for instance, the vulgar phrase “to Jew one down” is filled with ugly anti-Semitic meaning, although possibly not ill-intentioned as uttered by ignorant lips. To a sensitive person such canard has overtones uglier than banalities like “all Scotch are tightwads” or “all Yankees are shrewd bargainers.” The thoughtless words “That’s white of you” may be used innocently but have harsh connotation to a Negro who suffers from discrimination. The words “Indian-giver” might seem inoffensive to the non-Indian but to the Indian, fighting against a stereotype that all Indians are shiftless wards of the government, such a phrase has hurtful meaning. Cultured people are aware of these things and try to be exact and liberal in their language.

In the case of my little friend, however, our difficulty was not entirely a matter of semantics. Something else was involved. This something else was the fact that he had a

gun and was itching to use it. I had misunderstood what he meant by reaching for the sky, and this was slender enough excuse to whip out his gun and to shoot me.

Not unknown to my little adversary, on a nearby table I too had a gun, disguised as a paper cutter. At the time my problem seemed simple. How could I get to where it was and surreptitiously appropriate it? To do this I must first divert his attention. Recalling Realpolitik, I thought I'd try economic temptation. I offered him a cookie, and his attention wandered as he ate it. Next I decided to try diplomacy. Remembering the scare headlines in the press about flying saucers, spy rings, submarines off shore, and the like, I talked to him about sabre-toothed tigers and dinosaurs while I eased my way to where my gun lay. Soon we each had a gun. Then with the same quiet, calm detachment and with a slight drawl not usual in my voice I said ominously, "Reach for the sky!" There was an instant's hesitation when he tried to decide whether or not to comply, but with an impulsive confidence in his skill and his gun he plunged for his holster. And I shot him dead.

You would have thought this should end it. Unfortunately, however, now we both had guns and the killings did not seem decisive enough. Somehow it seemed unmanly to give in or to give up. The future did not stretch out so rosily, and I had lost my desire to pat him on the head. We circled each other, warily watching to see whether the other would make the first move. I thought I'd appeal to his idealism, for I remembered the power of the spoken word.

"Steve," I said, "let's be brothers. Why should we kill each other? You put down your gun and I'll put down mine. Surely you don't think I'll use my gun on you."

My little antagonist seemed unimpressed.

"Steve," I continued, "this is not getting us anywhere. I've got some writing to do and if I don't write, I don't earn enough to eat. Then what will happen to my wife?"

Since I knew he was fond of my wife, I thought I'd play upon his emotions. But as so often happens in any war, one begins to believe one's own propaganda. The thought of losing my job seemed to affect me more than it did him. I was the one carried away by this sad possibility. As I brushed aside a tear, I carelessly let my guard slip and—presto!

"Reach for the sky!" he said.

And I reached.

Out of personal experience, I can tell you that staying in one place with arms extended is not a happy experience. It is neither conducive to an optimistic view about life, nor does it develop an appreciation of the other fellow. Your view becomes narrow and limited to the perspective which looks at the world down the barrel of a gun and sees only a cold, calculating eye on the other end. Nor is conversation likely to be fruitful and buoyant. It becomes monotonously limited to unproductive themes like

“Don’t shoot!”... “Why don’t you put down that gun!”... “My father can lick your father!” (sometimes known as statesmanship), or “Just keep reaching for the sky!” There is little tendency to talk about medical research, philosophy, and government, or to exchange ideas on art, music, and poetry. Indeed a point is reached when you no longer even share a cookie. Who can either give or receive a cookie while engrossed in aiming a gun or reaching for the sky?

It was at this point Steve himself taught me the lesson about avoiding the dead-end street of history. There evidently lurked within him some better sense that came out of the memory of another kind of relationship that had once existed between us; or perhaps he grew tired of the game since he’s on the way to becoming a five-year-old. At any rate my release came suddenly and unexpectedly.

“Let’s put away our guns and recite our ABCs,” he said.

I agreed heartily and with haste.

“Let’s hold our guns ahead of us and put them down together on the table,” he ordered.

I was enthusiastic, and together we laid our guns to rest.

It seems he had recently learned to recite the alphabet, so we turned with zest to our new enterprise. He began with the letter A and worked through Z with just a short pause somewhere between the M and the N to buck himself up with a muttered “O.K.” At last we were on a theme which made sense. When he said A, I knew exactly what he meant and could say A too. When he said Q, I took him at his word. When he said Z I was at the goal post with him. There were no arguments between us as though he had said peace but really meant war, or said war but really meant peace. Instead, we worked along the alphabet together. In our excitement we even forgot to take time out to knock chips off each other’s shoulders. Shortly after this, he left with a pocketful of cookies and an expression of good will. I must be honest and confess that he did open the door again and shoot me dead as a parting shot. But this, I felt, was an afterthought.

After he had gone, I was much shaken and sat down to think over the stirring events that had just occurred. Few people have been shot down as often as I had. I concluded that the catastrophe could be traced to the availability of our guns. I decided that without these, nothing would have happened. Neither of us would have been shot dead, and the long period spent with hands in air could have been utilized more productively. It was easy to see how a whole chain of evil events flowed from this obsession with shooting one another merely because the weapons were at hand.

One thing, however, bothered me. As I remembered the bandit who held me against the wall reaching for the sky, I had to confess the little desperado had a certain charm and devil-may-care manliness. I suffered by comparison. Since I certainly felt no fruitful purpose would be achieved by going about shooting people, what was the explanation for my agitation? Then I realized that in this instance, as in everything else,

you must place a tradition in history. My little desperado in his colorful attire reflected a time that is past and a way of life that is gone, when man fought the solitary elements, and the man behind the six-shooter exercised a certain equalitarian democracy with his opponent. I was experiencing a fragmentary nostalgia for the epoch of man against man, gun against gun, nerve against nerve, and “when you call me *that*, smile!” But today in the era of mass slaughter and pushbutton warfare, all this romance is forever gone. A battleship today is like the production line of a breakfast cereal plant in Niagara Falls. This is the epoch of the test tube and the engineered bomb. When our gallant desperado takes the plunge today, he presses a button, releases a rocket, plays a phonograph record, or inserts his “Reach for the Sky!” speech into the record. The day of the Three Musketeers is irretrievably gone. To survive, we must bring our mental age into harmony with this historic fact.

We must return to our ABCs if we are to avoid the dead-end street of history. We must find ways of reversing the world’s mounting armaments’ unproductivity, and put our labor instead into producing true economic wealth such as food, clothing, shelter. We need to find ways of laying our guns down upon the table together and turning our attention to the more fruitful themes. Certainly frightened men should not fool around with explosives; and leaving pistols outside world conference chambers will make for talk more composed. My little friend gave me much to think about when he said, “Let’s put away our guns and recite our ABCs.”

“Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings,” Jesus said.



BEAUTY IS A GODDESS

*May*

## 5 BEAUTY IS A GODDESS

In spring we feel hopeful that justice can replace injustice. Everything seems possible in springtime. It is hard to deny the growth process, for it takes place in nature without our consent. We are likely to relax and acknowledge the onward thrust of life. The very ground trembles and the earth blushes with a strange color—green—but on Mother Nature it looks good. She has tricks in her own inner beauty parlor.

We watch life course through the sap of trees, seeming to jump from tree to tree. Spring even leaps into our hearts, outjumping, I dare say, our good friend Tarzan. In the very midst of lush nature come the individual miracles. There is, for instance, the mustard seed Jesus talked about. Out of this microscopic seed came trees large enough for birds to nest in. There are also the traditional acorns from which big oaks grow, and the beginnings of cherry trees George Washington did not chop down. Nature in springtime, like the Prodigal Son, seems to waste its substance in riotous living. We love it all the more for this abandon.

I read somewhere that even a daisy is a colony of flowers. Each little pinpoint in the yellow center is an individual flower but without enough yellow to attract the bee and spread its pollen. By banding together in a colony, the daisy was able to make enough yellow splash in the scheme of things to attract the bee. Of course the little white arms around the yellow center are always stretched outward and upward in silent supplication. What a story for tomorrow's headlines—a cooperative movement going on in the pastures under our very noses. All of it based on the principles of beauty and immortality!

Spring has a sound track as well as Technicolor. If I were to give an Academy Award for "sound in spring," I'd give it to the breaking of the ice in rivers. Like a trumpet call, this booming sound announces the power of springtime. This power is diffused as a gentle caress in nature. Spring is a giant with a heart full of love. But the voice is there too in the breaking of the ice as well as in the crackling of growth, the twittering of birds, and the lowing of animals. Apuleius tells of one of the spring festivals in the ancient Greek seacoast cities which is very attractive and imaginative. When the harbor ice breaks and a passage opens to the sea, a great Mardi Gras is held. The populace gathers around the broken ice, and the priests bless a little toy ship which is placed upon the waters.

Everyone reverently watches as the little vessel drifts to sea until it is lost to sight. For all they know, it may circle the earth.

When "it's springtime in the Rockies," the tears are washed down to desert flowers. There is a comparable feeling in the human heart at springtime. The attainment of justice seems very possible. It seems easier to love and to think well of people. And so humanity needs spring today! Humanity needs this new spirit more than anything on earth. Perhaps at this very moment of humanity's hard winter, a faint trembling can be

heard. Perhaps a quickening is in the air as though some stirring were seeking to break through our rigid ways of living. There is a growing desire everywhere that life shall continue. It is a real and deep desire. All people and all nations require it. The situation in which humanity stands today in the atomic age requires it. This desire may have in it the power of the breaking of the ice. The yearning for peace and world stability is renewed at every point where children discover the first green shoots of springtime. The hope of a humanity, united and plowing that hope deep into human hearts so the harvest comes out rich and full, requires greatness. But nature states in her own way at spring that all things are possible.

In the Indian country, I once visited a fiesta at San Felipe at the time of the traditional dance for rain. The event took place in the great pueblo square. A carnival spirit prevailed everywhere except among the dancers themselves, who were engaged in the serious business of enticing rain out of the heavens. All over the pueblo there was a stir and excitement akin to our country fairs except that the items for sale were not jams and jellies but Indian jewelry, baskets, rugs, and pottery. There is something attractive about such trading, and people love the color and excitement of this easy way of outdoor merchandising. The bargaining is only partially related to economic gain, for a good part of the fun is pleasure in human relationships and in the bringing of diverse people together around communal performance and sale. Properly conducted trade has community in it. People like to speak and match wits so that, for a moment at least, they feel part of a larger whole.

The trading mart has always been something more than the earning of a living. The bazaar and fiesta are social occasions as well as business ventures. People are as likely to huddle around a speaker as a product. The boys around the cracker barrel in the old country store spent more time trading viewpoint than product. The Greek philosophers went to the Greek games to trade ideas and to purchase cloth. The prophets of Israel went to the bazaars to shout their woes at unrepentant sinners in addition to purchasing plumb lines. Jesus stood in the market outside the synagogue debating the Kingdom of Heaven. Eastern sages went to the Oriental bazaars to gather converts as well as rice bowls. Yes, fiesta is a place of community mixing of commodities, ideas, and people.

In this background, color and pageantry add value to the product. The purchase of a bit of pottery becomes more than a sale and is also the working out of a drama. The cast in this play is the buyer and the seller. It does not seem fitting in such circumstance to conclude trade too easily. A certain ceremony is called for, and it seems right to linger a moment to give appropriate dramatic worth to the transaction. It is as though we say: "This bit of pottery we negotiate about is a most precious thing. It has a value which transcends our bargaining. It possesses a priceless aspect that cannot be purchased." The reluctance of the seller to let go is not just desire for money but also dramatic testimony about the priceless element in the object. In the ceremonial bargaining both buyer and seller implicitly state this. For who can purchase beauty? It can only be created. When

you buy pottery at a fiesta, the beauty in it is a free gift. Even the potter does not know where all the beauty poured into it came from. Wherever it came from, it was not out of purchase.

On the day I visited the Indian fiesta at San Felipe, most of the sellers were seated in the shade with their backs to the pueblo walls. Jewelry, pottery, rugs, trinkets, and small dolls of dancing gods were set out before them. I noticed one woman sitting a bit off from the others with one item of pottery on display. It was a vase whose lovely lines seemed to sing off the very ground. The movement of the entire piece was upward. It seemed to me the artist had somehow succeeded in arresting motion and storing it into this simple vase. I tried to fathom the secret of its beauty. It was not perfection, for the lines were not in harmony and there were flaws in the casting. Yet, curiously, this imperfection seemed to add to the beauty of the piece. This beauty had a striving that was somehow beyond perfection. The little vase seemed to be able to transcend itself.

Humankind has long thought of the potter and the weaver as symbolic of life-building. The taking of clay and molding shape, the taking of fabric and implanting design, the potter's wheel and the weaver's loom have symbolized nature's work. There seems to be kinship between the community of creation and the community of work. Beauty and community both have the magic of ensemble in them.

So humankind has beauty when it possesses true community. When we think of living in mutual relationships of common good, we need not argue about the validity of the ideal. The very thought has harmony and form like the words that describe it, togetherness and wholeness. The vision of community is primarily an aesthetic vision, and it carries with it its own immediate assent.

As I looked at the vase at San Felipe, I felt its beauty both as an immediate experience and as a touch of yearning. In some ways, yearning is the most wonderful part of an aesthetic experience. You seem to say: "This object which is so beautiful makes me appreciate all the other loveliness beyond it." Or to state this in more personal terms: "I want this thing and more."

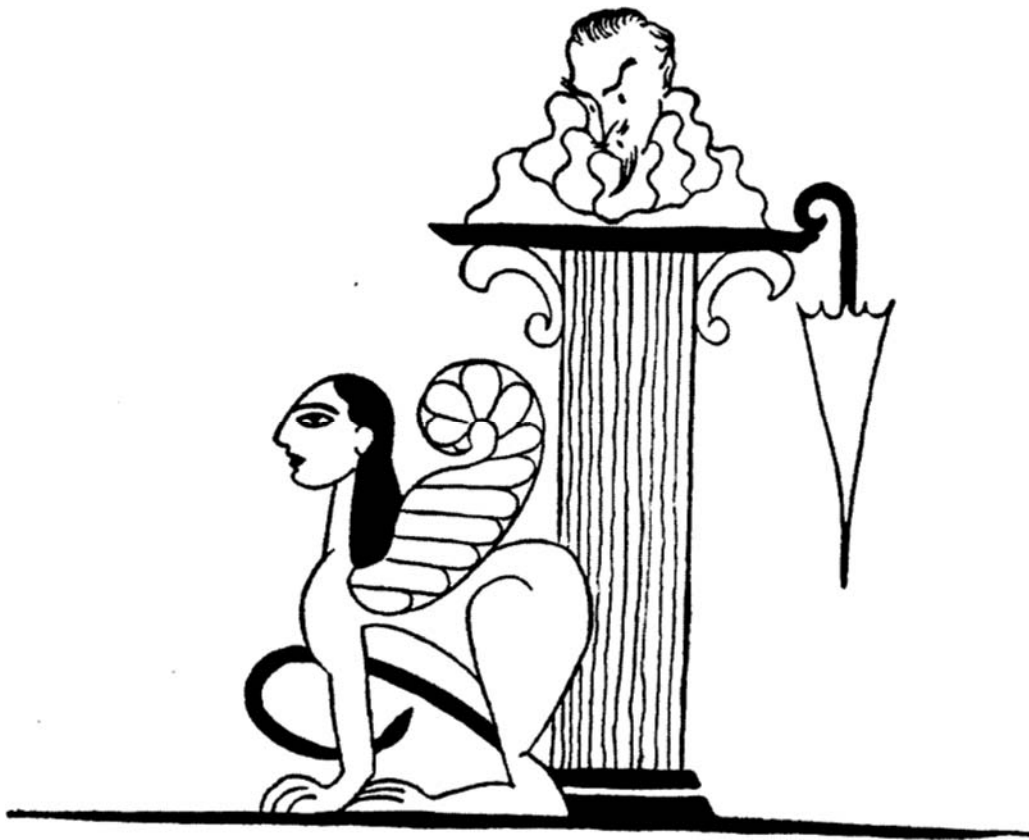
Beyond the vase at San Felipe, I discerned the heart of the potter who put on the glaze. Even as the potter finished it, some new vision must have captured the imagination. This I seemed to see in the finished object, in its striving to transcend itself.

We who enjoy beauty do not enjoy it fully alone. By its very nature, beauty serves everyone. It is the most personal and elusive of values and at the same time the most universal and widespread. Beauty is a goddess who stretches out her arms for the world to see. In her presence every person is humble, feeling instinctively like standing on holy ground. The impact of beauty upon the observer is a most solitary experience, yet belonging at the same time to others more than to the viewer.

We will create a new world beauty when we create one human family. I shall never forget the World's Fair held in New York City just before the outbreak of World



War II. What a harbinger of new world beauty was in that fair — not only in the display but in the purpose behind it all. How wonderful it would be were the United Nations to sponsor another such world fiesta. It could be a sort of pilot project, anticipating the day when the world is one. Such oneness does not mean losing individual identity. The world needs all sorts of customs and uniqueness of people and personality in order to achieve rich and varied beauty. The striving toward oneness on a worldwide scale is the reaching out to common objectives such as abundance of goods, health, and security. Common objective is the world-form of beauty. The striving for these global lines and relationships can bring new world harmony and perspective. Within this world form of beauty will be the rich and varied achievements of our common life. Like Eddie Quinn, they will have a proper background for their shining.



# THE SMÖRGÅSBORD INTELLECTUAL

*June*

## 6 THE SMORGASBORD INTELLECTUAL

Without a proper relational background, ideas and objects are but part of the rummage of life. This occurred to me one day when I went to a rummage sale with a friend. We had arrived early and had listened to a discussion of the fine, delicate difference between white elephants and rummage. I gather rummage is of the plebeian stuff of bazaarism. It is the raw material of the bargain hunter. It also possesses “the hope of things to come.” It takes a sharp eye to sift through rummage and detect the priceless object almost obliterated by the wasteland around it. And it requires optimism to persist in the hope that underneath the soiled wrapping paper is the lost masterpiece of art. In rummage, life is not arranged in an attractive display. The wash boiler and the Maxfield Parrish calendar are neighbors by accident and not by choice. It’s harder to evaluate the intrinsic worth of each object as it suffers by meaningless comparison with all others. And so it is with any rummaging approach to life whether through objects or ideas.

Now there are a lot of ideas floating around that are like rummage objects in bargain counters. I’m thinking of disconnected ideas like crossword puzzles or sixty-four dollar radio questions or panels of experts who tell you what Eusebius the historian said and when he said it, apropos of nothing at all. At the risk of seeming obscurantist and deprecating knowledge (which I don’t), I must say there is a similarity between rummaging through ideas and rummaging through objects. Tasting ideas in this “Smorgasbord” way is a sort of bargain basement kind of intellectual life. Developing the habit of looking at all mental activity in this fashion is like spending one’s life in a rummage store. And it’s harder to evaluate an idea when it is separated from its natural environment.

What seven-letter word defines a people in Palestine contemporary with the early Israelites? The answer is Hittite. So place your little Hittite object at the end of the idea table—over there. Who wrote the following line? “All that glitters is not gold.” Why, Shakespeare! So put your little Shakespeare object over here in the cluttered table of your mind. That Hittites and Shakespeare are accidentally placed this way with little relation to each other is secondary to the rummage mentality. And now for the jackpot question. Who said this? “Give me liberty or give me death.” I’ll give you two hours to answer it. What a learned reader! So now the entire rummage table is yours and mine (for I was able to answer the jackpot question too) and we clutter up our minds with these playthings of the intellect, these separate unrelated ideas, these mental wash boilers and Maxfield Parrishes.

This accumulation of mental odds and ends as a substitute for reasoned thought is becoming more prevalent today, encouraged by all the media of communication. It is the believe-it-or-not approach to knowledge. People weaned on this sort of thing lose the habit and taste for organizing thought in a consistent way intended to make sensible change in life. The substitution of mental odds and ends in place of reasoned thought can become dangerous today. One becomes lost and bewildered coping with the trash of

knowledge. Sheer information is useful only when it is digested and integrated into personal and social philosophy. We need to walk through life in an integrated way. Some may change their outlook because of increased knowledge. This is good. Some may become dogmatic and never change. This is bad. But in general the integrated person is the happier and more effective person. In order to achieve effectiveness, all information acquired must be subordinated to a working philosophy.

The scientific method is our most adequate working philosophy today. Science is a general standard for separating true ideas from false and righting their worth. It is the word general that I want to emphasize. Without this varied and general knowledge, even expertness leads to mere rummaging through ideas. For the exaggeration of the expert, as though one possessed general knowledge and authority outside a given field, is part of the rummage theory of intellect. True, a mind disciplined in any one field has some carry over into related ones. But the accumulation of expert knowledge in itself is like the accumulation of odds and ends. Its only importance is as a tool in working out the larger pattern of one's purpose. When expert knowledge becomes the private possession of a limited group and is not allowed to flow out into the stream of ideas in general, then such experience becomes rummage. It does not add to the total design for living or to the total wealth of humanity.

The important need of our time is to develop expertness without sacrificing comprehensiveness. We need skill latched on to human sympathy. We need people capable of partnering with nature. In short, we need well-rounded people, so they will take expert knowledge and integrate it into a common plan. They will use knowledge to make sweeping generalizations about life. They will be capable of developing policy out of knowledge because they will possess the skill of thinking in broad and related terms. This is the capacity of seeing things as aesthetically as Plato looked at them. Plato conceived ideas as things of form and beauty. It was like setting them out in a fine mosaic, rather than tossing them about carelessly as rummage.

If we'd set out our contemporary ideas aesthetically, I think we'd have fewer contradictory ones. Beauty tends toward harmony, and we need this today. Our world is filed with the confused chatter of competing voices. Mothers try to raise their children on diametrically opposite advice from experts in child care. Militarists differ among themselves as to the relative merit of air power or naval power. This may not be too significant in itself, but we are developing habits of accepting such confusion as a normal pattern. We hardly stop to ask whether there is anything odd in all this. We are becoming a people that tend to rummage through ideas and values, content with knowing "what's on the table." A better way would be to set out our ideas and values aesthetically in a harmonious display. Then we'd see the relationship between them.

It is not enough to take catchword and slogan and cast them carelessly about, thinking we are thereby paying homage to them. Even if we take great ideals like truth, beauty, and goodness, faith, hope, and charity, we have rummage if we place them about

haphazardly. It is when we take these and place them in relationship to one another in a reasoned display that they add to the artistry of our living. Words like freedom, unity, and human dignity become rummage words if we merely throw them carelessly about. When we match them up with life and give them a conscious design, they are something else again, and worthwhile. We have then cultivated the habit of thinking relatedly so we cannot say human dignity in one breath and call others rats or monsters in the next. We will then possess the habit of thinking deeply so we will not say reason and immediately be swept away on torrents of emotional hate. In short, if we are serious in saying life can be arranged in a harmonious display, we will recognize this involves consistency and design. I am not suggesting rigidity in thought, for this is not the nature of life which is in constant flux and flow. I am only saying life possesses a fluid beauty, which means we can give this flux and flow harmonious form.

But let me not be too hard on rummage itself in castigating the “rummage mentality.” I have a friend who once went to an auction sale and purchased an item for several hundred dollars which he later sold for several thousand. I confess this has affected my outlook on such sales and I acknowledge that sometimes valuable things are to be found there, if one has the eye to pick them out. I suppose this is also true in the world of ideas. When we rummage in the idea marts of the past, we may be lucky enough to come across a “sleeper” idea that is still valid, even though it has been lost in the shuffle of history.

So let us take another glance at the idea world of Plato. He was the one who pioneered the habit of looking at thought aesthetically. Yet we also find a very curious thing when we rummage about in Plato’s idea world. We find he completely missed what seems to us a very simple fact. He missed the ugliness implicit in the concept of human slavery. Alfred North Whitehead discussed this in his book *Adventures in Ideas* and had this to say about it:

“Think of the differences between Pericles and Clean, Plato and Alexander the Great, Marius and Sulla, Cicero and Caesar. Yet they all agreed in one fundamental notion which lies at the base of all political theory. Throughout the Hellenic and the Hellenistic Roman civilizations - those civilizations which we term ‘classical’ - it was universally assumed that a large slave population was required to perform services which were unworthy to engage the activities of a fully civilized man.” [footnote 4]

Now Plato wrote extensively on political theory. His books are masterpieces. I am not criticizing him for his assumption that slavery was the presupposition of all political theory, for Plato was a creature of his time. But I dare say there were those in his day who had ideas that were critical of slavery. These were the slaves themselves. Their ideas about slavery were often embryonic in form and hardly more than yearnings and feelings that slave conditions were somehow out of joint with truly happy life. They were powerful ideas, however, and led to the later democratic and equalitarian views about humanity. In short, the slave possessed an insight into human nature that Plato

with all his genius did not possess. The slave had personal knowledge that Plato missed completely.

These slaves were the plebeians of their day and the human rummage of their time. Except for the few advanced thinkers concerned with the wider human problem, Plato's contemporaries hardly thought about the slaves. Yet the challenge to the slave institution began to appear as ideas in the bazaars of human thought. Eventually, the concept of slavery was seen to be clearly out of joint with the harmonious view human beings wanted to hold about themselves. The main impetus for this came from those who insisted they be transformed from property into human beings, from slaves into being free.

So it is always worthwhile to look at our abstract ideas in concrete terms. Do we cherish freedom? To answer this general question we must be specific and ask a very concrete one. Are we free? Can we say what we think and join what we want to join without fear of any reprisal? Are we free to act the heretic, or is conformity the price of our employment? Are we censored in any way from without, or do we act as our own censor from within, because we want to live? In short, in asking an abstract question like "Do we cherish freedom?" we reply adequately only by being specific. We must then inquire, "Are we really free?" A society that answers the specific question in the affirmative implicitly affirms the larger question about cherishing freedom.

The thing that overarches all else in the history of ideas is that they are never closed and that systems of thought are never complete. Intellectual freedom is necessary to meet the complicated demands of life. We need opportunity to range the whole gamut of intellectual life, including the discovery of new ideas and the rediscovery of old ones. And there are no barriers to great ideas — neither national nor racial. These may originate wherever they please and carry their own stamp of authority as passport. The beauty in a great idea is something that shames selfish interest and personal prejudice. It would be a sad day for society if our great idea of freedom, for instance, were limited to our own personal problem in freedom. If every citizen were only willing to affirm the right of freedom up to the point where his job is endangered — what a sad day that would be for the ideal of freedom!

In the history of ideas, the key to all else is intellectual freedom. Life is so varied and complex, so simple and beautiful, so full of both harmony and strife, so multiple and yet so unified, so bewilderingly and delightfully filled with many nations and peoples, races and cultures, ideas and systems of thought — that the one overarching manifold that can pull all these things together is freedom. We might call this the right of searching out the past and experimenting into the future. The result of such a searching out and experimenting will be the product produced — the abundant life actually enjoyed by all of us and the real freedom we exercise. I suppose there are things some of us take for granted today the way Plato took slavery for granted in his time. But if we have the freedom to probe about in our idea world, we will then have a better chance to

discover what is out of joint with our deepest selves. Then we will be better able to reshuffle our ideas into more perfect harmony.



# THE CASE OF THE MISPLACED FAITH

*July*



## 7 THE CASE OF THE MISPLACED FAITH

“Elementary, my dear Watson!”

— Sherlock Holmes

One rainy July evening, unseasonably cold, when I was still at University, I fell asleep in front of the fireplace while reading Sherlock Holmes. This is how I encountered The Case of the Misplaced Faith.

In those earlier years I had achieved quite a reputation as a local sleuth. There were several medical instructors quartered in the dormitory in which I resided, and one of these — a Dr. Swanson — had a high regard for my detective powers. Accompanied by the other, a Dr. Soames, they would often come into my rooms at night for a spot of coffee before retiring. It was as a result of one of these nocturnal sessions that I was plunged into The Case of the Misplaced Faith.

On the particular night in question, Swanson and Soames entered for one of our little chats. I took the kettle off the stove, threw a log upon the fire, and we settled back into comfort. It was a rainy, dreary evening but quite cozy inside.

“Swanson,” I said to my friend as it so often amused me to do, “I see you’ve something on your mind of late.”

“Good Gad, Matson!” he exclaimed. “How the deuce can you tell that?”

“Elementary, my dear Swanson,” I continued. “It’s quite obvious. By looking at the shiny knees of your trousers, I see you’ve been engaged in prayer.”

“Amazing,” Swanson cried. “It always seems so simple when you explain these things, and yet I am confounded when you first produce your observations.”

And in this pleasant way we began our evening.

I ought to say that Swanson has accompanied me on some of my more interesting cases. He was with me, for example, at the time of the exposure of the crime that later became known as The Case of the Cosmic Blackmail. This was a religious fraud that developed into an elaborate blackmail scheme. The perpetrators of this ghastly crime would threaten their victims with special damnation if they did not comply with the demands of the blackmail ring. Seldom has crime been waged on such a gigantic scale or conceived on so large a canvas. The exposure of this ring brought me to the highest places and into the game of international intrigue.

Swanson was also with me in The Case of the Creeping Creeps. Some of you may recall this case of mass poisoning of unsuspecting victims. The poison was injected by the tongue and once it had taken effect, symptoms of human delusion appeared and the stricken ones felt they were somehow superior and especially anointed. They considered they were selected out from the rest and endowed with a national

exclusiveness. The exposure of this toxic crime brought me more satisfaction than any other case that has come into the ken of my experience.

However, enough of that. I started to tell you of The Case of the Misplaced Faith.

We were plunged into this nefarious crime upon the very night of which I am speaking when Swanson and Soames were seated in my quarters. The rain was thundering upon the roof, and we little dreamt that in a few minutes we would plunge out into the night on a strange adventure whose meaning even now brings shivers to my spine.

It came about when one of Swanson's undergraduates – a youth named Snodgrass – rushed into the room.

"Dr. Swanson!" he shouted in great excitement. "They're at it now! If you come at once you can watch the group at worship!"

Snodgrass was a somewhat callow youth with an over-intense expression. His eyes shone with great excitement.

"Oh, come now, Snodgrass!" expostulated Swanson. "Not on a night like this. Good heavens, man! Listen to the rain upon the roof!"

Certainly it did not seem a fit night for an outing except for a most necessary errand.

"But you promised, Dr. Swanson," young Snodgrass said. "You promised you'd come the very next time they were meeting."

He stood within the doorway looking about him with a petulant persistency.

"What is it, Swanson?" the good Soames inquired. "What group is this our friend would have us seek out on such a night?"

"It is a new religion," Swanson explained. "They meet in the east end of town on Monday nights, and young Snodgrass here is of the belief that once I see the group in action I shall regain my faith."

Soames waved his hand in deprecating silence.

"They call themselves the Nameless Ones," Swanson continued, throwing a log upon the fire. "It is part of their religion that religion should have no name."

I now looked up with interest for I had heard of this sect, the Nameless Ones.

Something in young Snodgrass' face also aroused my interest. I looked at my watch. It was not yet nine.

"Young man," I said, perhaps on a hunch or premonition, "if Soames and Swanson here have grown so old as to have lost the adventurous call of youth – well then, I shall go! I have always wanted to see the Nameless Ones in action."

I reached for my coat, but Soames and Swanson were there before me.

“When you put it that way, Matson,” Swanson said, “you give me no opportunity to refuse. Who among us will confess to having lost our youth?”

So the four of us were soon riding toward the east end of town. When we arrived at our destination, which was a large barren room in the rear of a cobbler’s shop, the rain had ceased altogether. Young Snodgrass shepherded us inside to the place where the services were in progress.

I looked about me. The people were a cross-section of the town itself. The high and the low, the rich and the poor, the average resident of the average street were in the congregation before us. Our entrance had passed unnoticed, for all were intent upon the recitation of a creed writ large upon the wall. In God we trust, all others pay cash. The people were reciting this in great solemnity.

“This is a common sign in cobbler shops,” I whispered to Soames and Swanson in explanation of the creed. “Usually it has no ceremonial significance. It has never before been elevated into a formal affirmation of a faith. In practice, I confess it does have deep rootage among some people.”

Young Snodgrass indignantly hushed my whispering. He was evidently much taken with the strange faith. As the recitation continued with hypnotic effect upon the congregation, I noticed a singular occurrence which cast a somewhat ominous shadow upon the service. I saw a man in a long purple gown walk up to an unsuspecting worshipper, tap him gently upon the head, sufficient enough to stun him for an instant, and then extract his pocketbook.

“Good heavens, Matson!” ejaculated Swanson. “Did you see that?”

I wondered whether anyone else had seen it too. My question was immediately answered when Snodgrass turned to me with evident pride upon his face.

“Beautifully done, don’t you think?” he said.

We hustled young Snodgrass into a corner of the room. “Listen here,” I said sharply. “What goes on here? What does the ruffian mean by hitting people upon their heads and then extracting their wallets?”

Young Snodgrass looked surprised. “Why, this is part of our ritual!” he exclaimed. “This is our way of taking the offering.”

“The offering!” we exclaimed in unison. “Why, this is nothing more than outright robbery!”

But young Snodgrass was unperturbed.

“That act, gentlemen, you have been privileged to witness,” he said, “is the very highest expression of our faith. Only when you have attained the stature of a Nameless One are you permitted to gather in the offering.”

“By Jove, this is a strange faith,” Swanson murmured.

“Not so strange,” I whispered in reply. “Not so strange if you are privileged to be a Nameless One.”

We stood in the corner watching the unfolding of the drama. Nothing more occurred except the process I have mentioned. Every now and then, the man in the robe would gently stun a worshipper and as gently extract his pocketbook. Young Snodgrass did not seem the least perturbed.

“You see,” he continued in explanation, “The Nameless One, by raking the pocketbooks of the worshippers, thereby removes their material temptations. He creates the proper conditions and atmosphere under which true religion operates. Now the worshipper is free to soar into the highest plane of our philosophy without encumbrance.”

“Amazing, Matson,” Swanson said. “Consider the terrible logic of it all. And all the while the Nameless One is pocketing a fortune!”

“Look here, Snodgrass,” Soames interposed with sharp lucidity. “You’re being duped. How can you be so blind! Don’t you see what is happening? The Nameless One is taking your pocketbook. Inside is hard, cold cash. He is enriching himself on the basis of religious fraud. He is enriching himself at the expense of your ecstatic stupidity!”

“Of course!” young Snodgrass cried with shining eye. We were taken aback. “Of course, that is just the point. Don’t you see? The Nameless One is on another plane of life and thought from all the rest of us. He is beyond the reproach of the material world.

“Because he has no need for material things, he is one of the very few who is able to make use of them without spiritual loss. On the spiritual plane on which he lives, money cannot touch him. Therefore he alone can use money extravagantly and not be defiled by its possession.”

Swanson wiped his brow. His voice sank to a low whisper.

“Who else possesses this power and lives on this plane?” he asked breathlessly.

“Very few,” Snodgrass replied, holding himself proudly erect. “There is only an aristocracy of Nameless Ones. Most of us are neophytes. But there is always the ideal and the hope that some day we too may be Nameless Ones and live upon the exalted plane of true philosophy!”

“One more word, Snodgrass,” I cried, “before we leave this most interesting place.” I hoped he did not detect the sarcasm in my voice. “What are the prerequisites for becoming a Nameless One?”

“Faith in the Nameless One himself,” responded Snodgrass promptly. “The Nameless One knows best. This is our motto. ‘In God we trust, all others pay cash.’”

This is our creed. That some day we too may become Nameless Ones, this is our hope. These three tenets represent the structure of our faith.”

“Thank you,” I shouted aloud. I had had enough. There was nothing more to be gleaned here. “Come Soames, come Swanson!” I called rushing from the room. The others joined me and we started toward our cab around the corner.

“Surely, Matson, you are not going to leave the situation as it now stands!” Swanson cried incredulously. “There must be something we can do to break up this nefarious ring. There must be a counting house in the back of the cobbler’s shop that would put a bank to shame.”

“And what good would it do?” I asked with some asperity. “So we break into the house and seize the stolen coin. And what happens? They call the police and put us in the clink. Consider the fiendish ingenuity of the plot. They call the place a house of worship. The take, they call the offering. There is nothing here that can be proven. It is the perfect crime.”

We sat in an uncomfortable silence as our cab wound its way homeward. Silently we climbed the stairs to my study. Flinging off our coats, we sat before the dying embers of the fire. The pale light of dawn touched the window pane.

“And yet our little experience is most instructive,” I continued as though in answer to their unspoken question. “At least we can classify the crime. It is a case of misplaced faith. And in the long process toward its solution we must begin with young Snodgrass.”

“What do you mean?” Swanson said, as Soames drew closer to the fire.

“I mean this,” I continued. “The plot involved here is above the province of the law. The place to begin is within the mind. This case has certain affinities with The Case of the Cosmic Blackmail and with The Case of the Creeping Creeps. In all three the victim is first persuaded to separate from the simple life and to feel somehow especially anointed.

Being softened up, it is easy to become a victim.”

Swanson and Soames were obviously impressed by this analysis.

“In The Case of the Cosmic Blackmail,” I continued, “the threats of rewards and punishments were used as mechanisms of the crime. The victims first were separated from the rest and made to feel that special rewards depended upon acquiescence to the blackmail ring, or punishments would follow. In The Case of the Creeping Creeps they were first made to feel they possessed certain privileges because of race or nation. In this way each was played against the other and every person was placed at odds with others.

Consequently, they all became easy pickings. The instigators played upon their pride and said those who did not play the game according to the shakedown rules would

become like ordinary people they had been taught to despise. There was a nice little psychological racket in all this. The entire edifice was based upon the illusion of superiority. Now in this Case of the Misplaced Faith the superiority claimed is a spiritual one. Just as the doctrine 'the King could do no wrong' hoodwinked people until they became subject to a kingly power, so the claim of spiritual superiority creates the illusion of religious aristocracy. In reality, as we have just witnessed, the practical result is loss of pocketbook."

Swanson and Soames now seemed plunged into the deepest gloom. Evidently they could not see a way out of the morass in which we found ourselves.

"But there is a solution to this crime," I continued.

They brightened up at once.

"We can do something for young Snodgrass and others like him. The root of this crime is in the mind. It is a simple case of misplaced faith."

I walked to the library shelf and pulled down a book.

"Why, it's a Bible!" Swanson cried incredulously.

"You didn't think I'd find my clue in such a book?" I laughed, amused. "What would you say if I told you this is the source of most of my solutions to theological crime?"

I opened the book to a well marked place.

"Ah!" I exclaimed. "Here is our answer, 'For how can he who does not love his brother, whom he sees, love God, whom he does not see?'"

I closed the book.

"Gentlemen," I said, "this is the clue that will lead to the solution of our little mystery."

We again placed ourselves around the fire. Soames fanned a flame in the dying embers. The grey dawn was beginning to dispel the pool of darkness.

"We have been neglecting young Snodgrass of late," I said. "The conclusion of this little case will take some time. We must help change the emphasis in Snodgrass' mind so that he can find a more natural, healthful orientation for his faith. The wonders of science and nature, the common life, the tangible things of earth are the emphasis he needs to help restore his proper balance. Thus he will stop reaching out for shadowy things and after strange figments of unreality. Instead, he will build an honest faith upon human needs and achievements."

"Yes, we have been neglecting Snodgrass and many more like him," I continued. "Youths like Snodgrass have been deceived into arrogance and privilege. Through our neglect, he has taken upon himself the aura of religious aristocracy. We must bring him

home again to the real nameless ones of earth. These are the people all about him. We must bring him back to simple life and simple things.”

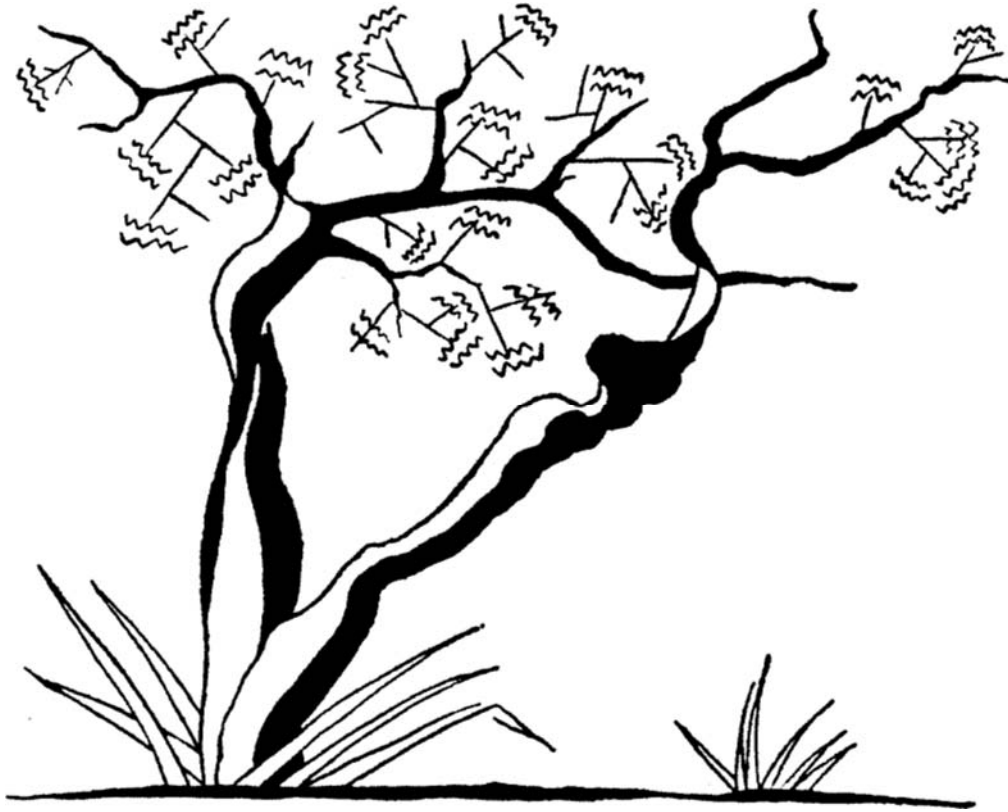
“But how shall we do this?” Soames asked.

“Ah — we will show him the good uses of money and how, wisely spent and shared with less fortunate ones, it brings joy and happiness. Like Scrooge, we will journey with him to the poor and the needy and see how food and warmth can bring health to sickly cheeks and how the sharing of substance can bring peace of mind. We will see how these things come to us, too, in the sharing. In place of his present hokus-pokus, we will help sweeten his mind by our mutual effort. In this way, Snodgrass becomes his own detective and discovers for himself the reality of common, human, and simple faith.”

There was silence after this long peroration. The fire had gone out. The dawn had come. We heard a door slam downstairs. Snodgrass had returned.

“Amazing, Matson,” Dr. Swanson said. “It always seems so simple when you explain these things to me.”

“Elementary, my dear Swanson,” I replied.



# THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE AND MY FRIEND CHARLIE

*August*



## 8 THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE AND MY FRIEND CHARLIE

One August morning as I was about to leave for Phoenix, Arizona, my telephone rang. It was the local newspaper asking for the topic of a talk I was scheduled to give upon my return. I didn't have a topic in mind and picked one out of the air. "The Categorical Imperative and My Friend Charlie," I said into the phone. The only difficulty was I didn't have the slightest idea what the topic meant!

On the way back from Phoenix, I stopped off at a library and looked up "categorical imperative." This awesome name proved quite simple. It is like the Golden Rule. The philosopher Immanuel Kant had polished it up. The axioms of ethics are reduced to one, he said. This he called "the categorical imperative." He defined it as follows: "Act only on such a maxim as you can will that it should become a universal law." In short, behave as you are willing to have everybody else behave. Your personal conduct should be such that you are willing to have it become a universal rule of conduct.

Now I had the meaning of categorical imperative. But what about Charlie? Surely this name must have come out of my subconscious. I dismissed all the present Charlie's I knew, for his was too profound a psychological phenomenon to be brought into the light of a present time. It was more satisfying that the outline be blurred in the pleasant obscurity of the past. So I engaged in self-analysis. Driving from Phoenix on this warm and drowsy day, I let my mind slip along the stream of consciousness as my car slipped along the stream of traffic. Slowly the proper Charlie took outline from the past.

I had met Charlie when I lived in New Mexico. I was unemployed at the time and prone to spend long hours in the sunshine looking out upon mountain and sky. This led me into a somewhat philosophic and introspective turn of mind. I had recently terminated my military service and possibly was victim of post-war lassitude. I was engaged in examining my general life attitudes and aptitudes. If the truth be told, I didn't want to do very much at all. It was at this critical moment of introspection that I first met Charlie. I never knew him by any other name. He had the laundry route on the street on which we lived. He made his first call on a bright August morning and came into our living room clean, clear-eyed and radiant. His good spirit and good health were in utter contrast to my own mood, and I confess this somewhat prejudiced me against him. His visit was short and had to do with the long laundry slips in his hand and the business relating to his trade. We got further acquainted by engaging in the usual conversation courtesies upon the weather, and our hope of fine weather to come. On his part, however, Charlie had but one comment to make, and he made it many times. Regardless of what I said, he always answered, "You can say that again!"

I returned to my chair by the adobe wall and tilted my hat to shade my eyes. I put Charlie out of mind, but not for long. Somehow the thought occurred to me that he had made a very profound statement. If one changed the emphasis from “You can say *that* again,” to a new emphasis, “You can say that *again!*” one had caught the secret of our power over nature. This power that we possess to state and restate ideas and to say them again and again marks us as a unique creature in nature. This ability to suspend ideas in the air and walk around and look at them from many angles is the key to scientific method.

The basis of all experiment is controlled observation, which is doing something over and over again so that the law of averages can give validity to the findings and can also establish exceptions to the rule.

“What is a law of science or a law of nature?” I asked myself. “Why, it is exactly as Charlie has put it! You can say that again. Surely he must be a man of very great insight.”

I got out of my chair and walked around the garden. The more I thought about it, the more excited I became.

“Indeed, Charlie’s statement is the basis of all learning, all education,” I said out loud. “It is applicable to the emotions, too.”

I thought of Pavlov’s dog and reflex conditioning. I remembered how people sometimes behave in utterly irrational ways if they have been emotionally trained to do so by repetition. I thought of the way Hider youth looked upon Jewry as a result of emotional conditioning and of the way some people look upon Negroes because of repetitive pattern drilled into them. It was very clear to me now that Charlie had dealt with a first principle of all learning when he said “You can say that again.”

There is no reason, I thought, why the power of the repetitive word should not be used for high ideal and good cause. Why shouldn’t truth, beauty, and goodness be used again and again? Why shouldn’t faith, hope, and charity be repeated too? As for Pavlov’s dog, why, St. Bernard dogs are trained to carry refreshment to weary mountain travelers!

The repetitive word can also be used for good purpose. So now I found myself eagerly awaiting Charlie’s next visit to see what further wisdom he could bring to my problem.

He came on Mondays. I planned to be at home the next time he called, and this was not inconvenient since I had not yet thrown off my lassitude. Again I was seated by the wall in the sunshine when his cheery truck drove up. His booming voice preceded him as he jumped off, fresh, eager, and full of the joy of life. Our laundry business was more quickly dispatched this day and we had time for a fuller conversation. I talked about many things including the war and my lassitude. I was interested to find that Charlie had dropped the significant phrase he had used the week before. But now he had

a new one. As I told him about my hopes, fears, and dreams, he consistently repeated but one reply. It was this, "What do you know!" he said.

Obviously, there was some lesson he wanted to drive home, and so after he had gone I sat down to think it over. "What do you know!" I repeated to myself. Four words. Where should the emphasis be? And in a flash I saw the secret of the riddle. Most people emphasize the *know*. But it is the word *what* that is important. The word *what* is basic and antecedent to the know. People do not what their knows. They know their whats.

Take the current conflict in public education. It is commonly felt that the conflict between what we might call traditional education and progressive education is primarily around the method of teaching and how the child learns. Now I grant it is a most important matter whether the child learns primarily through the three Rs or primarily by following potential aptitudes and interests. But let's not kid ourselves that this is the basic issue of the controversy. It is not the how of learning but the what of learning that is more unquestionably at stake. This is the conflict over what shall be allowed to enter Junior's little head. It is not accidental, for instance, that the study of the United Nations and more specifically UNESCO (the United Nations' Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) should be the subject of controversy in some school curriculums. Those who support the inclusion of such instruction realize that it aids the child to become oriented intellectually and emotionally toward concepts of world community. Those who look askance upon the United Nations or UNESCO are seeking to omit or remove this content from the child's mind.

That the *what* of learning is antecedent to everything else is clearly seen when we survey the history of knowledge. It would simply not have been possible for Socrates to understand the theory of relativity as we know it in modern terms. The content of human life and experience, and the development of human thought, had not sufficiently advanced scientifically to make such occurrence possible in his time. Before we can imagine ideas, there must be some basis for such imaging to occur. Only after cumulative knowledge, can imagination, and even genius, take another leap forward to advance human thought.

So it seemed clear to me as I was thinking about these things that my friend Charlie had again hit the jackpot of profundity when he had insisted on the importance of the truth. "What do you know!"

I was much improved now in my mental health. I was getting a grip on myself. I was beginning to stir out of my lassitude and contemplating the possibility of looking for a job. Charlie's work was bearing fruit at about the same time as my leave-pay was rapidly diminishing. I only saw him once again, but his next visit was in many ways the most important, for with unfailing instinct he gave me a clue to a philosophical problem which was deeply disturbing me. I had sufficiently improved in my mental outlook to the point that I had coffee on the table when he came. We sat down for an extended

chat. I decided I would let him talk and I'd remain the silent and eager listener. He spoke volubly and well. I found him solidly rooted in the realities of life. He talked about himself, his family, and his laundry route. We discussed wages, hours, and working conditions. He talked about his boss with great gusto, but perhaps this part of the conversation we'd better not repeat. I was most interested, however, in a new theme with which he punctuated his many thoughts and comments. As he concluded each idea, and often each sentence, he'd lean over with a strange intentness and add, "If you see what I mean!" These were the last significant words I ever heard him utter as we said good-bye that day with great regret.

"Don't take any wooden Nickels," he admonished, slapping me vigorously on the back as he turned to go. Then he paused in the door and added enigmatically, "If you see what I mean!"

Frankly, I didn't. But I knew this must not defeat me. It was important I should gather the very last fruit of his wisdom.

"If you see what I mean," I said to myself over and over again. "Is it possible that in a crude sense he meant saying one thing but meaning another?"

I was thinking of those who say "peace" but really mean "war"; or of those who say "war" but really need "peace"; and of those who say "freedom" and then interpret the meaning of this word to deny a Japanese-American the right to live in the same neighborhood. I was thinking of those who say "freedom" and use it to justify making as much money as possible, come-what-may to the social community, or at the expense of the welfare of their fellow men. Did Charlie mean saying one thing and meaning another?

One may take any word and read diametrically opposite meanings into it. Here is a great word like patriotism for instance. Patriotism means love of country, including its traditions and people. Patriotism also means the actual love of the land. The true patriot will not scar the countryside nor needlessly destroy wild life. The true patriot will not indiscriminately chop down tree-life merely for personal gain. The true patriot actually loves the country. On the other hand, patriotism may be construed to mean such a narrow thing as "my country right or wrong," or special vested interest.

In a school board hearing concerning a guide for teachers used in a public school system, the following statement from a UNESCO publication was severely criticized by those who wanted the guide withdrawn from the curriculum. "The child must get into the habit of regarding the earth as his habitat, and his country as part of it, rather than consider the rest of the world as an annex to his own country." This was cited to the board as a statement no patriotic American should subscribe to! On the contrary, it is exactly this kind of statement with its broad outlook, and the ability to welcome it, that we want our young people to possess. So a great word like patriotism has a variety of meanings read into it. Was Charlie referring to the usage of words as in saying one thing but meaning another?

I think he was referring to something even more fundamental than this. When he said “If you see what I mean,” he was referring to the most important thing one can say about human language. Language not only describes the speaker’s world but also includes something of the person speaking. The philosophic word meaning is rich and full. It is not to be confused with *mean* used to describe something stingy, or *mean* used to describe something average. The word meaning; as Charlie used it, is somehow connected with the inner nature of life itself as well as with the inner nature of the person using it. It has in it a feeling for the future. The meaning of our total life is the potential growth in it, the future that can come out of it. So the word meaning is deep and rich. The contemplation of the meaning of meaning brings us close to important processes in nature and in ourselves.

I took Charlie’s admonition to see what he meant very seriously. I decided he was asking me to review the meaning of my life. He had already shown me that repetition is not a bad thing if performed on behalf of good values and fine causes. He had shown me that we must set up the kind of life and world that feeds good content into the mind and emotion. And now he was indicating that life must fulfill itself in purposeful activity if it is to be effectively complete and to have meaning.

Out of this combined inspiration I reached out for a letter that had been lying on my desk for many weeks. It was an offer of a job. I accepted and went back to work.

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Of all the trains of thought Charlie’s words provoked, this matter of education is probably key to all else that happens in our time. We live in a changing world and a lot depends on whether we change with it, and how we make the proper adjustments. We will need a new kind of being in this new kind of world. The creation of this new human being is an important part of the task of education. Therefore, the place to begin is with our children, so that a new generation will be created to live in and cope with the atomic era. How shall we create this new generation? We shall do it by allowing our children a sufficient freedom to develop their minds unfettered by prejudice in order that they can find their own path to a better way of life.

Perhaps we can see this more easily if we place it another way. The very last thing that will create a generation able to live sanely and wisely in this new kind of world is to load their innocence with our own ethical failures. If many of our unproductive ideas about peoples, races, and religions should be passed along uncritically to our children, there would be little progress in human nature. If limited and limiting ideas about sex and morality in general were passed along uncritically, there would be little improvement in general mental health.

Abe Fortas, commenting upon a paper read by Brock Chisholm to the American Psychiatric Association in 1946 upon this general theme, said: “We must make it possible, General Chisholm advocates, for human beings to think and thereby to act rationally. If we are to do this, we must first free them of the terrible burden of blind

authoritarianism, of the slavish acceptance of the doctrines which each generation is supposed to accept from its predecessors like a burial urn, and to pass on untouched and unexamined to its successors.” [footnote 5]

The older morality was primarily based on the concept of sin. The thinking of our entire adult generation has been penetrated by this concept.

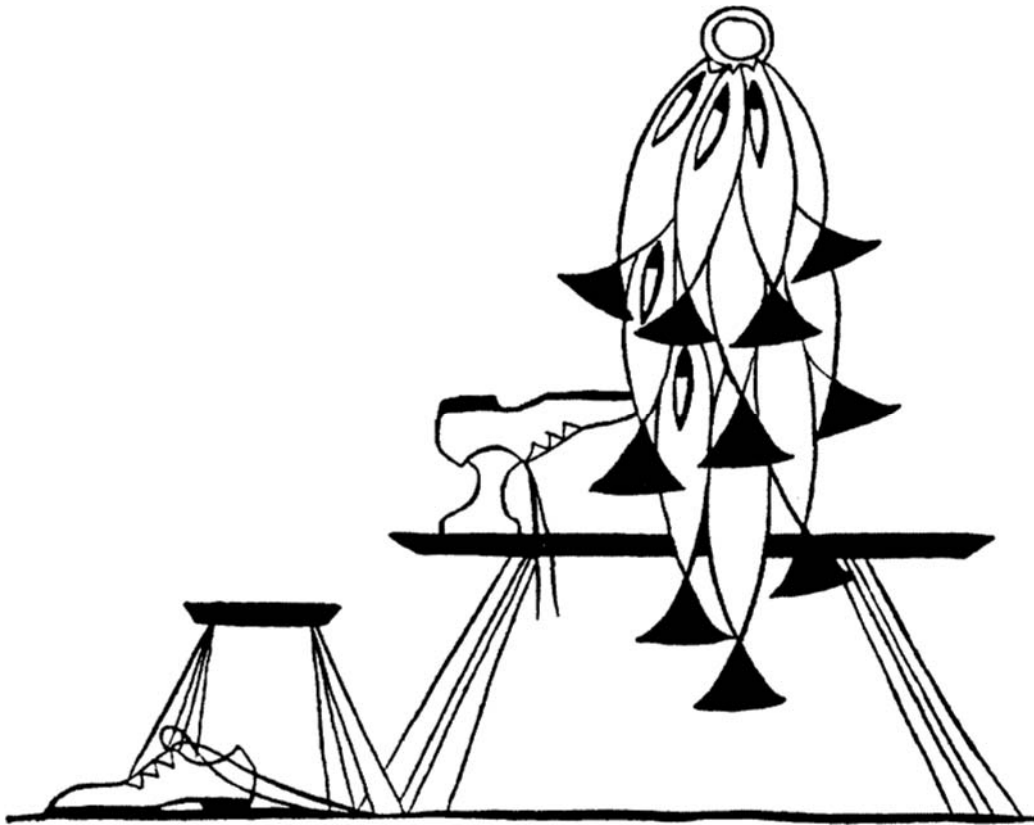
Commenting on this, Brock Chisholm said in the aforementioned paper: “For many generations we have bowed our necks to the yoke of the conviction of sin. We have swallowed all manner of poisonous certainties fed us by our parents, our Sunday and day school teachers, our politicians, our priests, our newspapers and others with a vested interest in controlling us. ‘Thou shalt become as gods, knowing good and evil,’ good and evil with which to keep children under control, with which to prevent free thinking, with which to impose local and familial and national loyalties and with which to blind children to their glorious intellectual heritage. Misguided by authoritarian dogma, bound by exclusive faith, stunted by inculcated loyalty, torn by frantic heresy, bedeviled by insistent schism, drugged by ecstatic experience, confused by conflicting certainty, bewildered by invented mystery, and loaded down by the weight of guilt and fear engendered by its own original promises, the unfortunate human race, deprived by these incubi of its only defenses and its only reasons for striving, its reasoning power and its natural capacity to enjoy the satisfaction of its natural urges, struggles along under its ghastly self-imposed burden. The results, the inevitable results are frustration, inferiority, neurosis and inability to enjoy living, to reason clearly or to make a world fit to live in.” [footnote 6]

Now the fact is, we are on the threshold of creating a world more fit to live in. The necessity exists and the capacity is there to do the job. This includes the happy task of social engineering. It should be our pleasure to help our children break through any psychological vicious circle burdening the thought and development of our generation. We can enjoy helping our children live in a free, tolerant, and cheerful world. They need breadth of spirit and a generous nature. They need opportunity to learn to think for themselves, including the making of their own decisions. Of course we will not leave them utterly alone in this but will always strive to develop their moral independence.

For what is morality? It is a way of life designed for our general good. It is a way of life that has validity when it aids us to live fruitfully and happily. When a code fails to serve us, we need to change it. The Sabbath is made for us. We are not made for the Sabbath. Let us recognize the moral person. One who goes about with endless guilt feelings is actually the sick one. One who carries a constant burden of sin is a neurotic. The morally successful one is able to walk erect without oppressive guilt feelings and able and eager to contribute fruitfully and happily to the general common life.

How much beauty, freedom, and ease of living will come into our modern world if we will test our morality on the basis of personal and social effectiveness in living! Generation after generation in the past has imposed narrow concepts upon children, and

their innocence has too often been corrupted with anti-Semitism, racial prejudice, irrational prejudices against other nations and cultures, hostile feelings of aggression in war. It's about time we left our children sufficiently free to find out for themselves that we can be (and should be) brothers and sisters. If we leave them sufficiently alone, they might fashion their own world of tomorrow, and a better one than we did. Perhaps more than anything else, education needs to grant children academic and intellectual freedom—the right to discover and explore for themselves their ongoing life's journey.



# THE NEW CHOSEN PEOPLE

*September*



## 9 THE NEW CHOSEN PEOPLE

Religion can sometime be likened to a cry of the human heart for justice. I discovered this one cool September evening as I sat in my study and read a poem. It was in a book of modern poetry in which the editor had the insight and the courage to include the last speech of Bartolomeo Vanzetti as a lyrical poem.

In his last speech to the court, Bartolomeo Vanzetti first speaks about his co-defendant Sacco.

“Sacco is a heart, a faith, a character, a man; a man, lover of nature, and mankind; a man who gave all, who sacrifice all to the cause of liberty and to his love for mankind: money, rest, mundane ambition, his own wife, his children, himself and his own life.” [footnote 7]

Then Vanzetti speaks about himself.

“If it had not been for these things I might have live out my life talking at street corners to scorning men. I might have die, unmarked, unknown, a failure. Now we are not a failure. This is our career and our triumph. Never in our full life could we hope to do such work for tolerance, for justice, for man’s understanding of man, as now we do by accident. Our words, our lives, our pains—nothing! The taking of our lives—lives of a good shoemaker and a poor fish peddler all!” [footnote 8]

Sacco and Vanzetti were executed over twenty-five years ago as alleged criminals. It was their radicalism, however, that was really on trial, and it was hysteria that blinded society’s better judgment and led to their execution. Few events have so stirred the earth’s millions as their trial and death. Vanzetti was right when he said his death would be his greatest triumph. By it the obscurity of his simple existence was transformed into one of the most meaningful events of his time. The light that was Vanzetti flared into radiant brilliance at the end. Perhaps Vanzetti would have felt hurt at my designating him a religious man. He might have denied this. As a philosophical anarchist, he may have characterized himself as opposed to religion.

And yet what are we to say about one who stands within the shadow of the executioner’s axe and, instead of pleading for himself, looks at his friend and says: “I am a better babbler than he is, but many, many times in hearing his heartfelt voice ringing a faith sublime, in considering his supreme sacrifice, remembering his heroism, I felt small at the presence of his greatness and found myself compelled to fight back from my eyes the tears, and quanch my heart trobling to my throat to not weep before him; this man called thief and assassin and doomed. . . .”

There is something in such language that for me bears the stamp of authentic religious passion. It has a sweep that moves away from self and out to others. It is as searing a language as that of Amos and Isaiah—a mixture of compassion and anger and a cry for justice. Such words punctuate the centuries. They seem to possess a largesse of

heart. It does not matter in our understanding of him if Vanzetti did not consider himself religious and indeed felt religion to be a brake upon human progress. We are also free to define our own words. What one thinks of oneself need not be the final statement. I trust Vanzetti's spirit will not be too displeased if I choose to describe him as a truly religious man.

Indeed there is often a wide chasm between our stated beliefs and our real belief about things. I remember when I was graduated from elementary school how I recited (quite eloquently, as a youth will), a great quantity of stated belief. But if at that time you had asked me what I really believed, we would have entered an entirely different world. I really believed that my father was the finest man who ever lived. I really believed that Babe Ruth was the greatest giant among men. I really believed that the umpire who called the Babe out on strikes not only had defective eyesight but was also thoroughly detestable. There was a time when I almost really believed that there was a Tarzan who could swing from tree to tree and could kill a lion with his bare hands.

Had you asked me then whether or not I believed in heaven, I would have assured you I did. I knew people walked around heaven playing stringed instruments, mostly harps. I myself wasn't too partial to the harp, but there was a boy down the block who played the mouth organ wonderfully well. This I liked best of all though I didn't suppose they'd play mouth organs in heaven. But had you asked me, I would have confirmed my belief in heaven.

It would not have been the same heaven, however, as witnessed by a little girl I observed one night at an amusement park. I had taken a stroll down the boardwalk and walked out on a pier where they have a huge Ferris wheel. It was brightly lighted in gay and sparkling color. I noticed this little girl with long, golden curls who in turn watched the Ferris wheel. If you had told her this wheel was heaven, she would have assented with a deep and profound belief. Hers was a complete and unlimited devotion. This was an experience that absorbed her entire being. The little girl literally trembled with joy and anxiety as the brilliantly lit wheel whirled round and round. She did not need proof about life's wonder, about heaven. She was watching it! Hers was a deep and implicit belief. And so it is with each of us. We may observe people the way we observed the child watching this wheel. See the object of value to which they give their implicit assent and loyalty, and you have seen their religion.

So it was in the case of a man like Vanzetti. Look at the values about which such a man becomes excited, and you have found the clue to his belief in life. It matters less what he states his position to be than what his life testifies it actually is. It is understandable why philosophic anarchists like Vanzetti were chary of the word religion. So many crimes have been committed in religion's name. The philosophical anarchists were largely idealists and peaceful despite the caricature of them to the contrary. They saw but the negative side of religious history and practice, and concluded religion was but an obstruction upon human progress.

There is another side to the coin, however, of which Vanzetti may have known little. Religion has been a source of great happiness. It has also been a source of human progress. Its magic gave birth to modern science. Its heroes pioneered modern ethics. Its theology sired modern philosophy. Its missionaries opened up new continents. Religion has played a very great and mixed role in human history, and you can take your choice as to whether humans would have progressed faster with or without it. The choice was not theirs to make in the development of history. In the beginning we did not have a choice between organized religion and no religion at all. Religion simply existed as we existed and was a concomitant of our life upon earth. It was a necessity in coping with the universe.

But is organized religion a necessity today? Much is at stake here and only the future will determine its role. The religious form of life will have to prove its worth for survival. Organized religion is on trial before the bar of civilization. We are not on trial before the bar of organized religion. Too many agencies now are competing for our loyalty and idealism to make the outcome a certainty. This much we can say. Our survival is not contingent upon religious institutional survival. It is only contingent upon realizing the values claimed by religion such as truth, beauty, justice, and goodness. Institutional religion has yet to prove Vanzetti wrong in his estimate of its place in human affairs. It must prove this by mending its ways. The call of the prophets “to repent” shall yet be heard in the land for this is the perennial call of religion — the cry for justice. Perhaps the inner flame will yet rise as it once rose with the prophets in Judaism. Perhaps the genius will come again as it did in the first flush of Christianity. And if past history means anything, it will come as a cry for social justice. This has always been the law and the prophets of religious revival.

It seems to me the best chance for a revival of the religious spirit in our time may be the exact combination of intellect and social passion symbolized by flaming spirits like Vanzetti. His kind of torch was lighted in the crucible of a deep concern for humanity. His kind of life was a personal dedication, to advancing the dream he possessed — bringing in the truly good life. It was a modern vision of a Kingdom of Heaven on earth. It is out of people like these and out of dreams like theirs that a new resurgence of vital faith may come. I mean this in the broadest sense and not necessarily in approval of their specific philosophy. I use them only illustratively as typical of “great-hearted men of the people” and the kind, to use Vanzetti’s phrase, who “sacrifice all to the cause of liberty and to the love of mankind.”

Such social faith is not pallid or petty. The root of the tree is deep-going and the trunk rough hewn. The kindling that comes out of it is capable of lighting the world. The light from this kindling cannot be hidden in any bushel nor is it a candlelight of a particular religious ceremonial. Instead, it is a bonfire that flares deep out of the needs and yearnings of all peoples. The prophets too came out of the people. Here is where Judaism found its revival. Amos was a shepherd. Jesus was a carpenter. Here is where Christianity got its flame among the poor and the despised of earth. And always

the custodians of religion failed to recognize the new flame when it came. To the priests at Bethel, Amos was not a voice of religion but of revolution. Religion was clearly defined in their minds as having to do with sacrifice and feast days. "I despise your feast days," Amos cried, proving how irreligious he was. Today we cite him as the beginning of prophetic revival.

To the king at Jerusalem, Isaiah was not a man of religion but of politics. To the king, religion was something that had to do with temple and ritual. Isaiah went about messing with affairs of state. Today we cite him as a great leap forward in ethical thought.

We must beware of defining religion too narrowly, too exclusively. We cannot chop it into merely believer and unbeliever. It must be big enough to include within its fold both a Thomas Aquinas and a Vanzetti — to include great thoughts and great hearts, great human beings and great causes. Some Vanzetti of the future may yet save religion from out of the valleys of indolence and fear. The religious sea is not a private waterway exclusively our own where only our kind of ship is allowed to sail. Instead, it is an ocean without boundary with all sorts of people and ships sailing upon it. The master mariner of tomorrow may sail a craft utterly unlike any we have known, which nevertheless contains precious cargo of human value. And that ship may carry a potential that, in its own way and out of its own genius, may open up some new passage to the Indies of tomorrow.

One of the persisting surviving ideas of history is the concept of the chosen people. In the Judeo-Christian tradition it has had an especially marked influence. But it is not unique in this tradition alone. It is found in other cultures as well — Islam for instance. It seems to me the time has come to think of chosenness in the universal terms of all humanity.

Perhaps it was unavoidable that we should have gotten off on this erroneous historical footing so that each culture, nation, and religion thinks of itself as especially ordained to lead the rest. Perhaps it was inevitable that our childhood should parallel individual childhood by an insistence upon the importance of self.

A concept of a chosen people for the future, however, could only further divide us instead of uniting us. A new concept that all humanity is chosen must take its place.

In the past, the chosen people idea had some greatness in it. The literature of Christian service, for example, is filled with sacrificial men and women giving their lives on behalf of their missions. Israel, for instance, conceived itself as chosen to suffer for all humanity. Islam too has felt itself to be especially chosen. "There is no God but God and Allah is his Prophet." The historic concept of the chosen people had purpose in it. All people and all religion must feel worthy enough to live.

However, we must not confuse this idea with our modern concept of all humanity. The distinction should be clearly drawn. For when all is said and done,

chosenness involves a separation in humanity unless this chosenness includes all humanity. When a religion or a nation feels chosen to serve, or chosen to impose its will upon others, people are divided into the haves and have-nots. Feelings of importance or worth are purchased at the expense of all others not so chosen. And purchase at this expense is made just as truly when a person dies on behalf of such a concept as when he inherits all the kingdoms of the earth because he is so chosen. When the idea has been carried out to its logical conclusion in the history of religion, we have arrived at such divisions of humanity in the past as the elect and the damned, and the saved and the unsaved. Today, we acknowledge all people as one, though we hold to our personal preferences in religion. We are aware that we shall rise or fall together.

Nations too inherit ideas of being chosen. Too often this nation or that nation, this culture or that culture, this philosophy or that philosophy has considered itself especially ordained to bring justice or righteousness to pass, according to its own limited lights. But in our modern world only humanity as a whole may make such pretension. For humanity cannot survive today if any lasting divisions occur within it. The time has now come to elevate the concepts of the past into their worldwide view. The new doctrine of the chosen people must encompass all humanity. And what is humanity now chosen for? It is chosen for a mission to the future. And what is this mission? It is so to live that the young generation and those yet to be born may possess life in abundance in every sense of the word. This is the only valid doctrine of a chosen people today. It is one that maintains the values of the old but does not divide humanity. Instead, it binds us all together in a common service and a common destiny.

Such a broad outlook does not disparage or lessen the greatness in any tradition. Jesus shines with the same brightness for all, as a common possession of all of us. Amos glows with the same intentness when Judaism's horizon encompasses the world. The verses of Iqbal, the poet of Islam, may now reach beyond the Mussulmen. It is not necessary that one be a chosen people to give value to the greatness in one's religion. The same is true with nations. National greatness is found in the true values people cherish, and in the manner in which love and devotion to their country reach out into the world. To some degree, world-mindedness is already a common possession of us all. This is the thing about modern life that so attracts and disturbs us. We know our life has already taken on worldwide shape. We have to think and rethink so many things to embrace this enlarging horizon: for instance, the nice comfortable doctrine of being a chosen people. It is hard to grasp our new role in human affairs as being part of a larger family. Instead, we think we are losing something when we drop the familiar shibboleth of "chosen people." This accounts, I think, for some of the odd ways that people behave when confronted by such a challenging symbol as that of the United Nations. It is at the heart of the emotional opposition to UNESCO. Alas, the day has gone when we can reserve to ourselves a completely free hand in human affairs. For the day of the chosen people has gone from social reality. Or to put it another way, instead of saying "Alas!" we may say, "Hooray!" For the day has also gone when other nations can reserve to

themselves a completely free hand in dealing with us. Their day of being chosen people has gone too. And what remains? A new chosen people—all of us together—making our first halting, stumbling discovery of the new world we inhabit, of the new life we are to have together. We are in a period of world-growing pains—a time of world adolescence. It is a groping, fascinating, disturbing time of discovery of new world self.

In the midst of adolescence we do and say the strangest things. “I certainly never plan to marry,” says one adolescent emphatically to another. What he or she means is, “The possibility of marriage attracts and disturbs me at the same time.” So much of the opposition to the United Nations is a vow to curb undue haste in international marriage. It is a way of saying that intimate relations with new and strange sirens of the East both attract and disturb us. What is involved here is the way we choose to live together.

There was a time when parents made the choice of what boy should marry what girl in their respective families. Increasingly and inevitably, young people began to make this choice for themselves. The same is happening in our world family today. There was a time when chosen people made decisions for our own good. Increasingly, we are finding this will not work and is not for our own good. The people of the world find they have to make their decisions together to make them binding and to make them work. So it is that the doctrine of the chosen people is going by the board of social reality. The trend is unmistakable. The thought of the world lags behind the reality that nurtures it, except for pioneering concepts like the United Nations. We are finding we must live together if we are to live at all.

Religion is making this discovery too. The future of religion is in its ability to bind us together in a common humanity and in a mutual effort. The new vision of a worldwide humanity is already softening former rigid concepts in the religious groupings. The future will accelerate this trend. For all of us, by virtue of being citizens of our own country, are already by this very fact citizens of a new world. All of us, as participants in any religious tradition, share the dim outline of world religion. Universal religion and world-mindedness feed each other. And this is the very antithesis of the former concept of the chosen people. It is the elevation and extension of this former concept into a new reality, the new concept of the chosen people, the democratic concept of one humanity.



# THE INVERTED TANGENT

*October*

## 10 THE INVERTED TANGENT

“I saw unbounded horizons: front and back.”

— from a post card of David Smith, nine years old, written the first morning at sea en route to Hawaii.

The seeing of unbounded horizons is the prerogative of youth. It is, in fact, the prerogative of each of us, regardless of age; for the green emotions never die.

At a school function recently, I seemed to hear the music of unbounded horizons while I listened to a young girl play the flute. It is an intriguing instrument with great charm, especially when played by a young lady. The piping music seems to dance around the instrument and beckon the listener on to some enchantment beyond the sound. These are the unbounded horizons within. The story of the Pied Piper who played the rodents to their doom is not without relation to the tempting quality of the music. You do have an urge to follow the sound of flute music.

The flute pipe was originally a working tool of the shepherd. The instrument possessed both artistic and utilitarian value. The sheep could hear the shepherd blow the pipe and would follow it or feel comforted by its sense of nearness. The shepherd could also while away the solitary hours. Something of this solitude seems to linger on in the instrument. It has in it the sound of soft dancing feet. The notes running up and down the scale concoct an elfin quality — reminiscent of the simplicity of childhood and of fairy worlds. And the piping notes tempt the listener into sylvan glens of imagination. Perhaps this explains the flute’s appeal in the story of religion.

For what is religion also but a heightened imagination? A religion of bread and butter only, of business and social prestige, of keeping up with the Joneses, of insurance against calamity, is hardly a religion at all. Religion is also a kind of game, a great drama, or — if these words frighten us — an art by which men soar forth into flights of imagination. It has in it the sound of the shepherd’s pipe. All great religions have had their roots in the country and have known sheep and shepherd. Judaism, for instance, is the story of wanderers and sheep going northward out of the desert into higher country. Amos the shepherd went the familiar route from Judah to Bethel, much like our Western cattlemen grazed their herds toward richer lands. The story of Judaism is one of constant allusion to sheep and shepherd. “Jehovah is my shepherd and I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul. Yes, though I walk through the valley of death I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy crook and thy staff they comfort me.”

Jesus of Nazareth also became known as a great shepherd. There were even those who said he was the Lamb of God, for the figure of the shepherd became central in Judaism and Christianity, reflective of the tender care Jehovah bestowed upon his flock. Later Christian folklore relates that shepherds were in the field the night Jesus was born



and had foreknowledge of what was to happen. Shepherds have always been considered close to nature and attuned to its secrets. These particular shepherds were reputed to have seen nature's routine upset by a great star. Like certain wise men, they were privileged to be "in the know" of what was going on. For folk-people like their shepherds to be "close to the throne" of miraculous events. Shepherds are nomadic and romantic people playing their pipes to their scattered flock, but they are also a bridge to the elfin world of religious imagination.

People were not far off the path of truth in calling Jesus a shepherd. He loved sheep and lambs and told many a tale about them. One was about the shepherd with a hundred lambs in his flock. An animal became lost, and this shepherd risked leaving the ninety-nine to search out the one that had wandered away. This simple story has come down through the ages as a heartwarming and tender reminder of the precious worth of the individual. It has in it the solitary note of the shepherd's pipe, for the flute is an individualistic instrument. When we hear a symphony and become aware of the flute, it seems to stand out alone, hovering distinct above all other sound. It is like the shepherd standing alone under some great sky. This feeling that religion possesses about the value of individual persons comes out of the lonely playing dreams through their instruments.

Yes, sheep and shepherd are creators of the piping music dear to religion. Because most religions have grown up in the country, their origin is in such simple things. Even a mighty organ is an instrument of many pipes reminiscent of these simple solitary origins. The shepherd's pipe, however, is not limited to any individual experience. It also has its place in the dance — probably the first physical expression of religious enthusiasm. The ancient chants followed this art as a kind of choral accompaniment, and the flute was not far behind. The piper was not only a contemplative on the lonely range, but a social artist playing for the dance as well. Especially in autumnal season of the bacchanal, does the piper come into his own. When the pipe is blown, your feet twitch and — watch out — or they will take you off you know not where! Whether in a modern ballet of red shoes or an ancient dance of the whirling dervish, the music may go to your head and your feet may lose their autonomy. For the playing piper bewitches.

All folk-people know it is a dangerous time that may tempt one into unforeseen indiscretion.

Even the greatest are not exempt from the piper's witchery. When David, King of Israel, brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, he led the procession with the pipers directly behind him. The music went to his head, and he danced the dance of the whirling dervish with all the other vain young fellows right out in the street in front of his people. His wife, it is reported, sat in the balcony and despised him for it. But I dare say the people were delighted. There is a common democracy in dancing feet which is elemental.

The playing piper, then, symbolizes the place enjoyed by imagination in religion. It dramatizes the place of play-acting in religious dreaming. And the capacity to dream is not a possession of youth alone. It is like a green sap that courses through all our life until our dreams possess us. We should not be afraid of our pipe dreams. These are not all from the smoker's pipe but sometimes from the shepherd's reed. For our dreams are an important part of us. They are the flights of imagination that carry us into the search for new art and new science. If we fail either to blow our solitary pipe of dreaming or hesitate to lose ourselves in the enchantment of collective music, the jig is up with us. If we never listen for the sound of a distant flute and never risk searching out the strange new music, we are as good as dead. The capacity to dream, to dare, and even to make mistakes and repent, is of the stuff and yeast of life. We do not live by bread alone. We also live by imagination.

Of course, we cannot live by pipe dreams only. Eventually, as Professor Ralph Barton Perry points out, we must pay the piper. "In real life," he says, "consequences are taken account of. . . . [footnote 9] The child can play in a dream world without undue awareness of consequences, but in the process of growing up, the adult must learn to dream in such a way that it does not become illusion. "Activity is deemed frivolous or excessively playful," Perry says, "when, like Nero's fiddling, it disregards facts or consequences that press for consideration." [footnote 10]

There is a lot of day dreaming and wishful thinking in contemporary life that disregards facts or consequences which press for consideration. We must strike a proper balance between our imagination and our reality. The relationship between imagination and reality, between play and fact, is one of the pervading and persistent problems in human philosophy. Fact unclothed with imagination is desolate. Imagination seeking to live free of fact is sterile. But facts alive with dreaming, and dreams seeking to pull the world along with them, are the ebb and flow of true creativity. It is as true in the specific field of religion as anywhere else.

A great deal of religious philosophy concentrates upon a detailed description of life after death. Upon first glance, this might seem like a religion of imagination. Actually, imagination needs an actual life upon earth in order to gambol and graze. A wise saying is that extremes meet. The converse is also true. Some take a limited and prosaic set of rules and set them up in point one, two, three, four order and then say, "This is our religion." Such codification may be helpful, provided it is a working tool only. It is not religion. The breath of poetic imagination needs to be added to make religion meaningful. The feeling of more to come, of open doors to the universe of dreaming, is the additional ingredient necessary. Religion is the experience of being enamored with our dreams, of hearing the call of the shepherd pipe. Religion means dressing up our life to give it depth, form, and dignity.

I am aware many hesitate to use the word religion because it is so hard to define. It can be used to describe a particular tradition such as Buddhism, Judaism, or

Christianity. It can also be used to depict an attitude toward life that tries to see it in its entirety as a unified entity. In either case, we are puzzled to know how to strike the right relation between fact and dreaming. There have been moments in religious history that have exaggerated either claim. Jonathan Edwards in his Resolutions of 1722-1723 once resolved “never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I can. Never to allow any pleasure or grief, joy or sorrow, nor any affection at all, nor any degree of affection, nor any circumstances relating to it but what helps religion.” Poor Jonathan Edwards! He needed to hear the call of a shepherd’s pipe. Yet, on the other extreme, are the hermits who removed themselves from the world to spend their lives in contemplative dreaming. These never experienced the joy of common, simple, social effort. We have had to strike a balance between dreaming and performance. Religion cannot exist apart.

The art of life is to take its raw material and dress it up in the garments of a drama. Undergirding our common life is a simple equalitarian democracy. We are all born, live, and pass away. As we engage in this process, we develop a social ceremony to carry on our tasks with imagination. We mold our common life into a kind of theatre in which to carry on its play. We build churches in which to worship, law courts to dispense justice, and governments to carry on affairs of state. Every now and then we affirm our simple democracy and remember that the minister in the pulpit is a human being too; that Judy O’Grady and the colonel’s lady are sisters under the skin; and that it’s hard to identify an emperor without clothes. We remember that the person behind the court bench is also another person, and that the member of congress or senator is really our public servant. But in between these recollections, we like to dress them up in robe and white tie to give them a proper setting. We also plot their cues to carry on the drama. It hurts when the drama is cheapened in any way or the ideal tarnished. We like to think of church and state and justice as something more than the personal whims of the actors. We like to think of these things in terms of our dreaming. The minister is more than a human being and also a symbol of our dream of justice. The elected servant is more than a politician but also a symbol of commonweal.

So it is in all our living, whether on the broad stage we call philosophy (which is the cinerama view of it all), or in our period pieces of history like a church (life in 3D vision), or in the hustle and bustle of daily activity in job and among friends (the silent and talking pictures of our life screen). In all of these we like to conceive the movement as a kind of art. We want the play to proceed according to aesthetic canons of taste so that its serious drama is not trivial, and the play in lighter vein not pompous. Above all we want our life dressed with imagination so that it keeps us on edge with novelty.

There is no offense offered religion by recognizing its kinship with art. We do not admire truth the less when we prefer it clothed in beauty. We do not deprecate our need when we say the products of nature should have style. The shepherd still plays music while tending sheep. We do no injustice to goodness when we advocate its pleasant expression. When the good person is surly, we do not take away that goodness

by suggesting the churlishness be overcome. When we say religion is also a heightened imagination, we are not implying that religion loses by this, but rather that it gains in scope. For religion is life and its ingredients consist of nature, men, women, children, human yearnings, and human needs. Religion is life and consists of food, clothing, shelter, truth, and justice. But something more needs to be added, to give flavor and zest.

... the sound of shepherd's music with human ears attuned to it and human hearts yearning and seeking for its melody.

In the major voyaging of life, we take many side trips to enrich our few leisure hours. We do not expect much more than relaxation and are always surprised and delighted to find new paths, new sights, and new treasures.

Recently, I embarked on a visit to the San Diego Zoo in California, having heard about its great variety and beauty of natural surroundings. One of the pleasant ways to view this zoo (if you are my age) is to ride around on the park bus. This is an open deck affair, winding slowly along the way of the many exhibits and stopping occasionally to observe some particular animal, while the driver explains its habits in detail. Now and then bread is tossed to a bear or a tiger or elephant which performs some little trick to earn this delectable morsel. It is all great fun, for the viewer's pang of seeing animals in captivity is relieved by the new open type cage pioneered by the San Diego Zoo. These cages allow space and freedom for the animals, seldom before achieved. It is true also of the cages that house the birds. Some of these are the size of small parks and so spacious that birds can fly at great height and live in conditions approximating the open forest. Here they are available for the study of scientists as well as for the pleasure of visitors like myself, fascinated and overwhelmed by the lush variety of nature's creatures.

Our bus turned down into a sylvan glen of tropical birds. We drove by the birds of prey, including great vultures and hawks of all varieties and from many lands. We moved by colorful birds like the peacocks, preening and pruning and strutting about, seemingly very much taken with themselves. In all honesty who can blame them? Such a riot of color! We passed pelicans standing on one leg, each looking more mournful than the one before. And finally, we came to the homely birds with the fashionable feathers, the macaw family stunningly attired in scarlets and greens and blacks and whites. Their faces stopped the bus in its tracks as the driver tossed them pieces of bread without bothering to linger or demand any tricks. The air was filled with the clamor and shriek of raucous sound coming from the throats of the family macaw.

In this part of the zoo there are many cages — some occupied and some empty. It was while the bus was slowly moving by what seemed to be an empty cage that an amazing spectacle passed my eye. I am not guaranteeing the facts, only describing an impression. A bird whizzed from one end of the cage to the other with such rapidity that it was back at its starting point even while I was focusing on what seemed the end of its journey. In addition, I felt sure that the bird flew upside down with its head where its feet should be and its feet at the point usually reserved for the head. I took one desperate

last glance at the bird cage before our bus passed beyond it. I seemed to read the name The Inverted Tangent.

All the other wild life in the zoo receded in significance. It seemed odd to me the bus driver had not called attention to the remarkable bird and that other passengers had not commented upon it. So at the end of the journey I collared the bus driver and the zoo keeper as they stood talking by the administration building.

“That was the most remarkable thing I ever saw back there among the family of macaw,” I said to them. I turned to the bus driver. “But I do think you should have taken time out to stop the bus before the cage of the Inverted Tangent.”

The bus driver looked at the zoo keeper in some surprise.

“The Inverted Tangent?” he said as though he had never heard of the bird before.

“The Inverted Tangent?” the zoo keeper echoed like an end man on a minstrel team.

Then they capped the line.

“Never heard of it!” they exclaimed together.

Obviously they were not as well versed in their zoo as I had assumed them to be. With particular detail I described the phenomenon that had taken place. Both men were courteous, as public servants should be, but they insisted I was mistaken. They implied, in fact, that I had been celebrating the night before. I could not convince them. At last in a kind of desperation, they drove me the short distance back to the family of macaw. This, they explained, was to convince me. There was no bird in such unheard-of flight. There was no cage labeled The Inverted Tangent. There was, in fact, no such bird. I admitted defeat gracefully, but I retained my original impression. I could not escape the feeling that I had witnessed something remarkable.

It was when I arrived back at my hotel room that I realized something else was gnawing at me. What did the zoo keepers mean? They had implied there was no such bird as the tangent! I took out my New Century Dictionary and looked up tangent. Here I found consoling words.

“Tangent—a straight line perpendicular to the radius of a circle at one end of an arc and extending from this point to the produced radius which cuts off the arc at its other end; now, the ratio of the length of this line to that of the radius of the circle; hence, of an acute angle of a right-angled triangle, a trigonometric function equal to the ratio of the length of the side opposite the angle to that of the side opposite of the other acute angle.” [footnote 11]

Here, you see, is described in utmost scientific clarity the flight I had the impression of witnessing in the San Diego Zoo among the family of macaw. And to indicate it is a bird we are talking about, the New Century Dictionary goes further to illustrate tangent from its usage in a novel, Smollett’s *Humphrey Clinker*.

“After having twelve times described this circle,” the author says, “he later flew off at a tangent to visit some trees at his country-house in England.”

Can there be any doubt this refers to the flight of a bird?

Indeed, I do not know why it should be so strange for a macaw to engage on such an unusual flight. It happens all the time in human experience. If our human experience is superimposed on the foundation of the animal kingdom, perhaps there can be throwbacks into animal life. And who can doubt that human beings possess the capacity to fly off with great elan in a given direction and end up exactly at the place from which they started?

We celebrate the birth of Jesus of Nazareth at Christmas, for example. We honor his birth at that season. But if the truth be told, his was a night in history that in some of its aspects was like that of the inverted tangent. For some of this flight turned somersault and ended up at the starting point. Jesus was preoccupied with the hope of the coming of God’s kingdom upon earth. This kingdom was conceived within the thought-forms of his contemporary Jewry and included Jewry’s liberation from Roman rule by God’s miraculous intervention. And what happened to Jesus? He was killed by the Romans as a troublemaker. Then the new religion that came after him and named Christianity was eventually taken over by the Romans to buttress Roman imperial power. Later the name of Jesus and of Christianity both were used further to oppress the Jews. So the meaning of Jesus’ ministering and voyaging was turned upside down. Is this not a precedent for the flight of the inverted tangent?

Or let us see the process in contemporary life. Here today are all the nations of the world in search of national security. They have materially increased their armies, navies, and guns and added new military technique. You would expect this achievement to produce calmer and happier people, nationally secure in the fulfillment of their stated purpose. And the result? They are more insecure (if possible) than ever before. They can not even be sure they will not destroy their planetary life. Is this not another human precedent for the strange flight of the inverted tangent? Why then should we think the macaw was flying in a strange fashion when human beings are doing it all the time?

But I think I know the secret of the riddle. It is the word future that is key to it. The secret is that history is a process. When you take off on historic flight, you must also judge the way the terrain is moving. You must plot your policy by estimating the direction in which life is going and then move along with it. If you do not do this, but always fly instead in opposite direction to the way the terrain is going, you are not likely to get very far, and generally you will end up at the place you began. Evidently something of this sort happened to the tangent.

My impression of the spectacular tangent was confirmed in a later report from some San Diego friends. It happened they were having a party one Saturday night after they somehow had received word of my experience with the tangent. They decided about three o’ clock in the morning (though they had not danced the whole night

through) to go to the zoo to see the bird for themselves. I do not know how they broke in at such a late hour, I only know that their report was unanimous. Not only did they see the inverted tangent, but each person saw at least two of them. My friends also observed a new characteristic of flight. The bird flew in a zigzag direction! Here is the additional scientific proof we needed, for is not science based on direct observation and quantitative analysis? This exploration party not only saw more birds than were ever previously seen but was also unanimous in describing a new characteristic of flight. Let any skeptic reader presume to be set against the whole weight of modern scientific evidence!

Is not this characteristic of zigzag flying also reminiscent of our human journeying? It happens all the time. Consider such a simple and taken-for-granted experience as, for instance, reading the morning newspaper. I recently read about a particle of atomic energy that had crept around the world. This radioactive particle may have traveled—according to the New York Times—from an atomic bomb exploded by the Soviet Union or the United States to a photographic plate in Britain after having first passed through the inside of an animal in India! It seems that some plates used in England for the study of cosmic radiation revealed the presence of this particle in the emulsion. The plates had come from the United States, but the emulsion was made from bones of animals imported from India. The best guess is that an explosion in Russia or the United States sent a particle of atomic dust to India where it rested on a blade of grass which was eaten by a cow. It went into the animal bone and traveled across the world to be made into emulsion, which in turn traveled back again to be made into photographic plate. It is this sort of thing that explains what we mean by the phrase “tightly integrated world.” Indeed, as the New York Times points out “the affair has impressed scientists here with the long-term hazards inherent in nuclear explosions.”

What a zigzag of contemporary fact our modern life’s journeying becomes! It is best that we acknowledge such zigging. It is always good to know the truth. Perhaps this is a key to conditioning ourselves, as well as the tangent, to normal flying. Perhaps the tangent is completely unaware it flies upside down. We see this unawareness all the time in human life. Consider what a zigzag course is often followed under the banner of religion. Under this banner, some have marched to great deeds of heroism and others to great cruelty. Some have given their lives to affirm a single word in a creed and others have devastated millions for a single change. If any word comes to mind in reading about Jesus, for instance, it is the word love. “Love thy neighbor. Love your enemies. He that is without sin among you cast the first stone. Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.” Despite such words, massacres have been performed in Jesus’ name.

Consider what happened to Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven. As in the Messianic tradition, Jesus probably conceived the Kingdom to begin in Jerusalem and then to extend to all the earth. It would be the redemption of the nation Israel that would reach out to all humanity. The essence of this teaching came from the prophets.

In it was the full richness of the earth. It was the dream of the Golden Age. It was the peace Isaiah sang about and the righteousness Amos preached. It was the tender love of Hosea's family image. Then what was done with this teaching? Institutionalism replaced informal sharing of teaching; abstract philosophy became more important than the rough and tumble of prophetic justice; and statement of faith became elevated above the Samaritan binding of wound. In short, something happened to the values Jesus expounded. Like the flight of the inverted tangent, they were turned upside down.

Fortunately, all journeying is zigzag and so this is not the whole story. There is creative zigzag too. There were those who hewed to Jesus' message and sought the prophet's dream of the Golden Age. There were also those who taught peace, justice, and abundance. There were those who sought to weld people together and not to divide them. There were those who believed in love and did not buy power at the expense of another's heartache. The unfolding of the concept of love is a flight in history that builds toward progress.

Too often we think of flight as running away from something. But it is also the capacity to fly toward something. There is such a thing in life as a broad flight that encompasses many peoples and many lands, reaching out to new and constructive values. This is historical flight that goes right side up as far as human values are concerned. It is an optimistic journey, and at its heart is the concept of love. Jesus' teaching is still a force in our world today. The vision of a world with happy men and women inhabiting it is one of the prime incentives of human journeying in our time. It is the vision of the Golden Age.

Well, having shown all this human precedent for the flight of the tangent, it does not seem odd to me it would engage in such curious flight. Perhaps the bird will learn to fly right side up again, for there is human precedent for this, too. Humanity has been out of kilter many times in the past and has somehow managed to get on keel again. Usually its need has acted as ballast for such correction.

At any rate, I want to return some day to the San Diego Zoo to walk about among the family of macaw. Perhaps I'll really see that whimsical face peering out from behind the cage marked The Inverted Tangent.





# THE FOREST AND THE TREES

*November*

## 11 THE FOREST AND THE TREES

California has this to offer holiday festivities — one may celebrate Christmas before Thanksgiving. One day last November I drove along the campus of the University of California in Los Angeles, and although Thanksgiving had not yet come, the Christmas decorations were already up in the Westwood Village streets! Yet I was not in the spirit of the holiday season. I was too much enjoying the sunshine. The yen for egg nog on Boston's Beacon Hill after trudging through snow, or of Christmas lights in Forest Hills with masqued singers beating time in the icy wind, is difficult to obtain in the semi-tropical California setting. I also felt a little guilty, as though I were betraying a tradition by moving about so lazily at this premature pre-Christmas time. Crowds were pouring in and out of stores, and motor vehicles were screaming up to traffic lights, turning sharply this way and that to get to wherever they were frantically trying to go. I wondered whether anybody else in the world felt as remote and removed as I did from the rough and tumble goings-on of pre-Christmas.

This was my mood as I chanced to turn down the side-street off the campus in Westwood and saw a little red-haired boy sitting under a tree reading a book. It was a gnarled old tree off the west end of the campus, if you know where to look for it. Here you may turn your back upon the village and face the hills to the north, transported out of the frantic world around you. And here sat the youngster I mentioned with the gentle sun caressing him. I suppose it was the contented expression on his face that really captured me. He was absorbed in the book he was reading, oblivious of me and of Christmas shopping. But he was alive with wonderful adventure and an exciting journey. This I knew from the rapt expression on his face.

I could not resist the temptation of a Peeping Tom. I wondered what he was reading and stopped my car to watch. Was it Horatio Alger's *Try and Trust*, or perhaps his *Sink or Swim*? I recalled the almost forgotten joy of going off under some lonely tree with Horatio Alger's *Try and Trust* in my pocket. In this book I had learned about a rough justice where the poor boy becomes rich and the rich boy becomes humble. In such books I had encountered my first concept of ethics. Later in life I chanced to live in a house in which Alger had lived, a little white house along the banks of the Charles River in Massachusetts. Every now and then some man or woman would come in to ask to stand in the house where Horatio Alger once lived. Evidently, others had remembered as I had.

*Try and Trust*! *Sink or Swim*! What a new world opens up in the pages where the poor boy becomes rich and marries the boss' daughter — and all accomplished by sheer character and fortitude. *Try and Trust*, *Sink or Swim* where I learned that crime doesn't pay and what happens to a villain shouldn't happen to a dog. It really doesn't happen in the end either, for in Horatio Alger, the villain is finally reformed through the kind office of the hero he has maligned all through the book.

“What a wonderful world it is,” I mused, “as read by a red-haired youngster under a tree before Christmas!”

I caught myself with a start. Probably he wasn’t reading Horatio Alger at all. With a twinge of both oncoming years and regret, I realized that there were now other books written by new Algers whose names I did not even know. These were probably about space ships and Mars. More likely this boy was reading. . . . well, I could not see the title. But I was certain it was good and true. This fact was written upon him with ink, indelible in lofty idealism.

As he turned another page and grew more rapt, I felt a sudden quickening of heart. Could it be that Frank Merriwell had just captured him? Had he come upon Frank Merriwell’s famous double inshoot? For those not versed in baseball, I should explain that a pitcher possessing a double inshoot has a wonderful skill indeed. There are many pitchers who can throw the ball and make it curve into the batter once. But Frank Merriwell could make it curve into the batter twice! I wondered whether my youngster under the tree had reached the famous game where Frank first revealed his tricky pitch. Indeed, there was only one catcher who could handle that pitch and curiously enough he, too, was a reformed villain. The wonderful thing about Frank Merriwell was that despite his great skill (and he was without doubt the most skillful athlete that ever graced the pages of this wonder world), he was also good and kind and always willing to help the underdog. He gave himself freely to younger players, enabling them to become almost as great as himself. Almost. You wouldn’t want them to become really as great as Frank Merriwell! After all there was only one Frank Merriwell. . . .

I had become confused again. I had gotten myself mixed into it once more. The chances were the boy under the tree wasn’t reading Frank Merriwell at all. Surely, though, he was reading about a brave new world — one of adventure and new discovery. Here was a rich and creative experience coming into being in the mind of a child.

I leaned back in my car, content. A good year ahead was shaping up, peopled by gallant knights and fair princesses redeemed. I remembered how I had once sat alone under a tree with a book upon my lap, wafting along in high adventure. True, there was an added reason why I was alone on this occasion. I was reading a book no red-blooded boy my age would be found dead with. It was called THE AUTOMOBILE GIRLS AROUND THE WORLD. Somehow the Rover boys were not at hand and Nick Carter had been locked out. But on that day with Laura and the Automobile Girls, I made a great discovery. I discovered that girls are human too and that a shared life of adventure with them might be possible.

My own youth was coming back to me as I watched the youngster under the tree. Here was something vitally connected with the past. It was something that begins afresh each day and with each generation, as it had with Horatio Alger, Frank Merriwell, Laura and Nick Carter. Here is the continuity in life which unites Frank Merriwell with John

Dewey; Horatio Alger with Alfred North Whitehead; Nick Carter with Ralph Barton Perry. Here was the stuff of life beginning to be compounded into art and science, literature and philosophy. Whatever came later would never be more wonderful than this initial journeying. Who knows, I mused, where this journey will take me? The voyage of life is rhythmic. Perhaps it will take me all the way around the world before I enter a classroom in the University behind me. If the road swings that way through some intervening trick of fate, it would then be peopled with facts and images from many lands. If the journey takes me that way it would be filled with the happenings of many centuries. The clock of history is also found in books, but in this imaginative experience it ticks in spurts and starts. It does not move evenly the way sand falls in an hour glass or shadows move across a sun dial. Here the ticking occurs in the galloping interests of a youthful mind, cavorting and leaping through the centuries.

I never learned what he was reading. It was with the greatest regret that I put my car in gear and quietly slipped away. I seemed to be leaving a bit of myself behind with the boy as I coasted downhill off the west end of the campus in Westwood Village, and moved on through traffic to the prosaic task awaiting me.

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Part of this self I left behind me came into being in that section of New York City with the good Old Dutch name of the Bronx. Later in life I read about the tree that grew in Brooklyn, but there were no trees in my Bronx neighborhood. Consequently, some of my happiest childhood memories include the periodic trips into the country to picnic in the forest. These were not ordinary picnics like jumping into a car today and riding off to the country. These were pre-automobile picnics and required a “much ado” about getting there. In those days only a few hardy souls were out on the roads in automobiles. We didn’t own one.

When summer and picnic Sundays rolled around, and families gathered with baskets of food, the problem was to get to the woods. This took about two-and-a-half hours. First you waited for the trolley where Willis crossed Third Avenue. These were not the usual grimy winter trolleys. They were the open-air kind where you could sit outdoors with the motorman. And while you clanged along, you knew you were journeying toward the country as apartment buildings grew smaller, empty lots bigger, and now and then an individual frame house stood in solitary splendor with a fence around a tree. You felt this change as a sailor knows the shore is near by the flight of a land bird.

At the end of the line, you changed to a second trolley. Now your heart beat faster, for this was the big one with huge wheels and piston-like power. It had a sign EXPRESS emblazoned across the front, and it did not pick up people at every street corner but went long stretches without stopping. Now you could not sit with the motorman, for this trolley went too fast and needed all his attention. However, if you were fortunate enough to get a window seat, you could press your face against the pane

and watch the open country whiz by. Before we reached our destination our impatience grew almost unbearable. And when the doors flung open, (and this trolley had three doors!) you tumbled down upon the grass by the trolley way. Nothing will ever compare with that trolley — not even the Santa Fe Chief and the Constellation.

It was now necessary to continue the journey into the woods afoot. The walk was broken by a ritual, a stop midway at a stone wall. Secreted in that stone wall was a coffee pot left between picnics. Somehow that coffee pot was a symbol that transformed the Jerome woods from a place for everyone into a place of our own. We called this part of the woods the Limberlost. As everyone stood around in a circle, and each child held its breath in an agony of fear lest someone had discovered the secret and taken away the coffee pot, someone would remove the stone and reach inside. Always the coffee pot was there, and all of us would whoop with joy at yet another successful thwarting of fate. Now we were ready for the final trek. A path led downward to a grove of trees — big and friendly trees with lots of places to hide and climb. Soft grass carpeted the grove, and a brook murmured nearby. It made me think of Sherwood Forest. Since by this time we were all ravenously hungry, the coffee pot was soon boiling with just the right amount of eggshell in it, to make the coffee crystal clear according to Scandinavian custom. Then the children went down to play by the brook. We knew every rock, bush and blade of grass. For the day it was our forest and we possessed it.

It was on one such picnic day that I discovered the contrast between forest and trees. After we had all eaten lunch and the old folks were resting, another little boy and I wandered away. Soon we had a terrible feeling we were alone in the Jerome woods. We were lost. What had been a community of friendly trees became transformed into a threatening forest. The old familiar landmarks were gone. What had been the friendly murmur of a brook became the angry sound of the wood. And as our fright increased, we thrashed through brush, getting further and further away from the beaten path. Whimpering and crying as we hunted for a familiar sight, we felt that every woodland delight had been transformed into an enemy. This was not a case of failure to see the forest for the trees. We were not seeing the trees because of the forest.

We were lost in the woods for several hours. In the midst of our greatest panic, we suddenly heard a faint helloing in the distance. How we screamed and helloed back until the others heard us! And what a welcome sight it was to see the first hand of the rescuers and to find our familiar landmarks again! Soon all our fears were dispelled and a second transformation took place. The threatening Jerome woods changed again into a friendly forest. The old familiar Limberlost reappeared as a community of trees, peopled with our own folk.

It seems to me that all of us are confronted with this same problem in our life's journey. We hear the call of the shepherd's pipe and want to press on to a new adventure. At the very same time we want and need to hold on to familiar landmarks. Our life's journey is a quest for certainty. What then are the certainties that we may

seek? Most of them have to do with things necessary to life itself. Food, clothing and shelter are basic to all. There is no reason why we should not have these things and be certain of them. There is nothing in nature that says we shall not eat, cover our bodies with adequate clothing, or, have warm places to lay our heads. There are enough of us and resources in the world, and enough skills to grow the food, weave the cloth, and build the shelters. All that is required is the organization. I am aware that great problems of social organization confront us in order to accomplish these aims. But they are possible. They should become life's certainties.

There are other certainties we also seek to create along life's way. Science especially helps create them. Some diseases once meant sure death. Research in science controls most of these diseases today. There was a time when we knew little about mental health. Today by preventive measures science can indicate programs whereby emotional problems can be lessened, thus creating a more balanced human being. Education in general also adds valuable resources in the quest for reasonable certainty. In addition to such practical tools as reading, writing and arithmetic, it contributes to our appreciation of art and music. Through increased education, we are finding increased certainty in understanding cultural values, and are also learning to utilize those values in advancing progress. These then are a few of the certainties along life's way. They become the familiar landmarks of our journeying which makes progress possible.

The quest for certainty is a legitimate quest when its purpose is understood. We may test our findings as we test anything else. If we believe we have found a new truth, we can try it out. We may get into difficulties if we are inflexible in applying truth and insist upon telling Mrs. Jones that her new Easter bonnet is atrocious. In general, however, we can put truth to the test and decide whether or not it is a better way of life than untruth. If we believe in goodness, we can try it out. We may get into difficulties if we are rigid in applying goodness and insist upon giving away our substance because Francis of Assisi did so. In general, however, we can also test goodness and decide whether or not it is a better way than "badness." If we believe in beauty we can try this out. Again we may encounter difficulties, if we insist that our idea of beauty excludes all other ideas. But in general, we may test beauty and determine whether a little effort in beautifying home and person does not make for happier living, and if good music and theater does not make for happier life. These are certainties we can test for ourselves. Their quest is legitimate and moreover they are realizable.

When we come to the quest for ultimate certainties, however, we need more restraint. To assert that any answer is the final one may lead to stagnation. Experience has shown too often such "final" answers are likely to be dogmatic and very often outright immodest. Statements about ultimatums are easy to make and difficult to prove. So often they capitalize on people's hunger for the simple truth. It is so easy to make an extravagant claim and pretend to a bit more than we really know. If we define religion as a quest for certainty, we should insist religion be as concrete and exact as life itself. It should be as scientific as the method of science and as philosophic as the method of

philosophy. When religion is expressed as poetic statement, it has the same truth as poetry and no more. If the findings of biblical historians tell us that Father Abraham did not make a certain statement, then Father Abraham did not make it. It may be a fine utterance or a good percept of life, but its authenticity is another matter. We should make no claim for religion beyond its strength. Religious truth can be tested the same way as any other truth. In the final analysis, religious truth is tested by common opinion and by common sense.

Of course, it is natural and enriching to speculate about the universe. It is indeed difficult to contemplate it without being caught up in wonder. But the history of human thought and the consequent enlarged vision shows the need for a certain reserve about embracing “ultimate” claims. Such legitimate doubt does not decrease life’s wonder. We are thrilled to look out upon the world and know we are the fortunate end product of evolution. Modesty in explaining its meaning does not decrease our reverence for life. Indeed, such modesty has more rectitude in it than an easy and extravagant claim to ultimate answers. For such claim cuts the majesty of the universe down to the mere size of our expressible thoughts and levels out the wonder into mere copybook maxims. Restraint is really the proper religious attitude to take toward questions of destiny.

There is too much hush-voiced pretension to “Ultimate” answers in religion today. Some take high moments of poetic expression or human heroism and then draw from these entirely unwarranted conclusions about “ultimate” truth. The greatness of poetry, or heroism, is not a whit enhanced by such abuse of logic. I am modestly suggesting that we set the sights of our life’s journey upon the familiar and tested landmarks of certainties, and allow our glimpses of the unbounded horizons to soar unencumbered. Does such an attitude mean giving up the quest for certainty? Quite the contrary. It conserves energy for realizable things, and leaves the joy of broad speculation and discovery to follow where it will.



## THE FOURTH WISE MAN

*December*



## 12 THE FOURTH WISE MAN

It is related there was a light that shone from the heavens upon the shepherds in the field on Christmas night. Can there be any doubt that a light always shines upon earth when people are caught up in the magic of the Christmas song, “Peace on earth, good will to men”? A field with shepherds is a fit setting for such a song. The scene is good — wide open country, a starry sky, and productive work such as herding sheep. Shepherds are usually quiet and observant and are likely to look into the sky. Nor are they too sophisticated to doubt that heavenly voices sing.

For us it is something else again. We do not have time to watch for a moving star. We have our eyes pinned on the United Nations headquarters in Rockefeller Center. If angels sang their song of peace over this building top, many a wise one would scurry back and forth with diplomatic pouch upon a modern camel’s back.

How, then, shall we spell out these lyrics and put them into common tongue? What language shall we use? How shall we merge our Western and our eastern scales to make the common sound of music? How shall the Indian sitar and the tom-tom of the Hopi join in common beat to make a network of sound?

This can be answered when life takes on its proper proportion. This all becomes simple when we take time to note how our own legend was born. Once this great refrain is grasped and elevated to the central theme, the rest is easy. The lesser themes leap to the page, and the arrangement seems obvious. The tom-tom beats and the sitar plays, and the miracle takes places as easily as angels singing on Christmas night and stars hanging motionless.

The birth stories about Jesus have a charm and air of “faded events of long ago” that are of the once-upon-a-time stuff of history. That these are legends rather than history is self-evident. The mood in these stories is different from that of the Gospel narrative generally. The New Testament has two accounts of Jesus’ birth, and these are somewhat contradictory. One is found in Matthew, and the other is found in Luke. (By Matthew or Luke, of course, I refer to the particular individual who is the source writer of the Gospel portion under discussion.) Matthew makes Bethlehem the home of Jesus’ parents. In Luke it is presumably Nazareth. The genealogies in these two Gospels also differ, although both intend to show that Jesus descends from David. In his birth story, Luke seems to repeat the cycle he has already made about John the Baptist. The parallel is so close.

Matthew in his turn is especially concerned with Old Testament prophecy. He had read in Micah. “But thou, Bethlehem.....out of thee shall come forth unto me that which is to be a ruler in Israel.” It is not strange, therefore, that the birth scene is laid in Bethlehem. He had read in Numbers. “There shall come a Star out of Jacob and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel.” So a star comes out of the East, right into the Christmas narrative! In the seventy-second Psalm it is written. “The kings of Tarshish and the isles

shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts, yea, all kings shall fall down before him.” So the kings travel into the birth legend with their gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. Isaiah had said, “The multitudes of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah: all they from Sheba shall come, they shall bring gold and incense.” And — lo! The wise men come on camels, although — except for walking — this is probably the way they would have come anyway — Isaiah or no Isaiah.

The plot now develops. In the good old tradition of the ancients, a child must be threatened and must make an escape from catastrophe. The “boy meets girl” formula may be the basic script in our Hollywood, but “the threatened child” formula is a basic plot in the Old Testament. Consider Abraham, Moses, and Joseph and think of Sarah and Rebecca. How often the wives of Israel’s great are barren into their old age, until miraculously blessed, and the line continues! The ancient audiences literally held their breath in dismay until the cosmic rescue. It was in the great tradition that the baby Jesus should escape Herod into Egypt.

But it is the birth story itself that delights us at Christmas time. Wise men who are astrologers can now come from the East and foretell the wondrous event. Stars can be conjured up like genie in Arabian Nights. Shepherds in the field set the stage, and angels in the sky supply the mood music. The props are gold and frankincense and myrrh. The genius of the playwright gives a sort of O. Henry twist to it all, for the sumptuousness makes a wonderful contrast to the humble Mary and her Son. The curtain rises — the play is about to begin! — and the spotlight shines upon a lowly manger. As the play proceeds, the wise men and shepherds and angels merge into the background. They are there to supply the excitement and movement on the stage. The charm of the narrative is matched by the ingenuity of its contrasts.

The wise men in this story intrigue me. Perhaps I’ve always wanted to be a wise man or to ride a camel. Camels seem like such friendly beasts, such decorous animals for riding. Or perhaps it is the gold and frankincense and myrrh (if the truth be told) that fascinates me even more. To know that those with gold and frankincense and myrrh are on your side sometime adds feelings of security in the hurly-burly of history. I am sure that the writers of the Gospel narrative were pleased to count those of such solid substance among their acquaintance. The early church was under grave suspicion by the Roman authorities when these accounts were incorporated into the Gospel narrative. It was not amiss to show that the important and substantial acknowledged the special claim of Christian origin. If these three wise men had been fellow carpenters from Joseph’s bench, if they had been three wise carpenters, it would not have met the political exigencies the occasion demanded. That Roman authorities looked upon Jesus’ contemporaries with a somewhat jaundiced eye is reflected in Joseph’s narrative about John the Baptist. “John was a good man,” the first century historian wrote. “People listened to his words with the greatest delight and flocked to him. Herod feared that the powerful influence which he exercised over the human mind (for they seemed ready for

any action which he advised) might lead to some form of revolt. He therefore decided to put him to death before a revolution arose through him.”

These echoes of great events make it seem politically fortunate, shall we say, that solid and substantial kings should pay homage to the founder of the Christian sect. The early Christian faithful, under scrutiny by the Roman Empire; must have felt encouraged by this powerful patronage. And so the wise men now take an important role in the drama. They testify Jesus’ birth is more valuable than the wealth of the Indies.

Fortunately for us, legend is very malleable stuff, and we can make our own miracle out of Christmas. We have cleared the air and perhaps the night is good for witchery. Rackham’s moons and stars of Bethlehem are not for ancients only. Let us stretch our minds from time and space back to Bethlehem. The miracle we perform this day is to see that all life and time and space is present in any birth in any manger. We shall stretch our minds in reverse.

First we take a star and place it squarely in the heavens. Next we take angels and place them near enough that we can hear their heavenly voices. Near the stable door we set down our shepherds, and our wise men are on their knees before a cradle. Mary is close by as mothers are wont to be. And in the cradle we place a little child. Our miracle is about to begin.

The courtyard gate opens, and the people of the earth troop by. Each looks long and searchingly at the babe. And as they look, they see the entire universe in that child — all time and space and history. All other babies of the world are in that cradle too — white or black, regardless of nation or creed. Our miracle is this: the abstract truth of life’s interconnectedness now becomes a living reality in the miraculous eyes that look down upon the crèche. A general comes and looks. The star upon his shoulder is not brighter than the star of Bethlehem. A statesman comes. The voice of the politician, which often shakes the world, is not silent before this wonder. All the rest of us pass by too — wise to some degree, I hope. Now we know that all the past and all the future and all the universe is in this little child. And all the children of the world are in there too.

We see clearly now our need for peace. We see it as the most normal and natural thing. The life before us is so precious that the thought of driving bayonet and bomb into its preciousness seems an unutterable, inconceivable, incomprehensible blasphemy. Nor can we engage in double talk, for-hush! — the baby sleeps. All the children of the world sleep here. In that sleep the universe yawns and stretches itself down to the essence of its valuable commodity. There can be but one outcome of this miracle — a simple, natural, unaffected outcome. It is to bring peace — the peace for which the whole world craves, the peace for which a child is born, the peace for which the heavens rejoice. The sound that comes from angels’ lips now is the same as that from Bethlehem nineteen hundred years ago. The voices floating out across the years merge now into a universal relevancy. The song is a familiar one. Our angels join those of the past in common lyric. It is a litany about good will and peace.

A minor miracle happened to me many seasons ago. I had been watching a group of youngsters rehearse a Christmas pageant, and I had become a little “punch drunk” (if I may use so inelegant a phrase) at the repetitive entrance of the wise men. The first made his lordly entrance with his gift of gold. The second wise man entered in flowing, spectacular robe and left his frankincense. The third came in, sumptuously robed, bearing his gift of myrrh in an important and impressive way. This matter of myrrh has always puzzled me and, to show my momentary fatigue, I sank into the lowest form of punning, murmuring to myself, “What myrrh?” Perhaps the universe groaned in protest, or I had become a bit heady from too much frankincense. At any rate, to my complete astonishment, a fourth wise man came down the aisle! This was a double take in miracles, for if events surrounding the three wise men were intrusions into natural law, surely this addition of a fourth wise man was an intrusion into the biblical narrative.

This fourth wise man looked somewhat like Alec Guinness. He did not walk so much in a lordly manner as with a certain preciseness. He was dressed in a white robe in the same style of the others, and he bore a tray marked Truth. On the tray were three small objects — a quill-like pen, a miniature surveyor’s tool, and a book on mental health! He laid these down beside the gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and after contemplating the manger for a moment in rapt awe — as all do who pass that way — he walked to the exit door with the same preciseness he had come down the aisle.

“Why, he’s a scientist,” I thought. “But something is wrong! There is no fourth wise man in the story.”

I rushed to the pageant director.

“Who put that fourth wise man in there?” I cried.

A complete silence greeted my remark.

“Fourth wise man?” the director repeated a few moments later.

“Yes, “ I insisted. “I saw him leave his tray!”

“There is no fourth wise man — only three,” the director said gently. “You must have been dreaming.”

Asleep or not, I said to myself, there was a fourth wise man and I saw him bring his gift of truth to Bethlehem.

Consider this gift. It is wondrous. It possesses the power of opening treasure chests. It is not rich like gold or frankincense or myrrh — true — but it is a key that opens priceless vaults of new discovery. One gives this gift with some hesitation. You’re never sure of what you’ll find when you use it. The key opens the new and the novel. Instead of gold or frankincense, you may discover a new occult product with a foreign sounding name like “atomic energy.” Truth is an astringent gift that requires a taste for its own sake and may also demand that you strip yourself of gold for its full enjoyment.

Take the quill, the ancient scholar's pen, left at the cradle at Bethlehem. Consider its threat to the birth story. The higher criticism and scientific study of the Bible might shake the stage upon which the drama is played. The fourth wise man could have walked right through the papier mache, leaving the stage in collapse behind him. But he was a Wise Man. He merely left his gift and retired with the others. He was too wise to use his gift destructively in the mere debunking of the props. Instead, he found the meaning of it all in the drama and the play itself. True, he left his gift so others might probe the wonder of the drama through the symbol of birth. He left his gift so that in places like India and China, where birth dramas also pay homage to their baby Buddhas and Confucius, they could do so without exclusiveness in the common legend of birth, including Jesus and a Moses. For the wise man knew that beyond his gift was the higher affirmation of the symbol of birth. This is the symbol of growth and of all potential human greatness.

He also left a miniature surveyor's tool at the cradle in Bethlehem. Consider with what unerring instinct this gift contrasts with the soft wealth of the others. Gold comes out of the ground, but a surveyor's tool is the magic which opens up the earth. Frankincense comes from across the sea, but a surveyor's tool navigates ships by means of the stars.

With such a tool there is little need to wait for the stars to come to you. As for myrrh (the resin found in Arabian and Abyssinian shrubs and trees), why even under our Point Four Program, surveyors' tools are sent as a matter of course to help set out new orchards.

How profound the fourth wise man really was! His gift makes gold look pale by comparison. It opens mines, brings world commerce to your very door, and lays out orchards dwarfing the Gardens of Babylon. Yet one gives this gift, too, with hesitation.

Consider what it has done to Bethlehem.

There are a group of scientists, called archaeologists, who use these tools. They dig into the earth to find what is written there. In Samaria they found ivory couches mentioned by a man named Amos. In Jerusalem they found a tunnel built during the reign of King Josiah. They discovered writings of Persian kings telling about the ancient nation of Israel. But, alas! They did not find any record of Jesus' birth at Bethlehem.

How fortunate that our wise man was truly wise. He did not throw his gift upon the manger and cry out, "Fraud!" He did not lift the scenery on the stage to show how seeming stone was cardboard, painted gray. He did not stop the drama to insist that Jesus may have been born in another place. He knew the importance of the play was in the symbol of creative birth. True, he left his surveyor's tool so other men might dig further into the established ways and find new colossal truths to sing about. But as far as the story of Bethlehem was concerned, he understood that beyond the gift of truth is the

higher affirmation of birth. He realized that painted props are essential to the illusion of any drama.

Only the last of the wise man's gift remains — the book on mental health.

How splendid is it to have this new insight into the inner workings of men, but how remarkable that the wise man knew this so long ago. In the giving of this gift, there is no pointed reference to the Bethlehem child. He has just been born. His future is largely in the arms of Chance. He is but a bundle of possibilities, a pink fragrance of sheer potential. Later on, superficial men will raise questions about his mind. Did he not think he was the Messiah? they will ask. Did he not expect the imminent reign of God on earth?

Was he not the victim of a great delusion?

They will forget they are speaking about common views held by his contemporaries, and accepted canons of thought in the time and place in which he lived. It would be like men a thousand years hence looking back at our recent views on physics and saying:

"Did you ever hear of Bill Smith who lived at the turn of the twentieth century? It seems he believed there was an ether in the heavens."

"Oh, no!" his colleague answers. "Why, he must have been out of his mind."

Such men forget that in the year 1900, this was a common view of physical theory.

When you indict one, you indict all.

But I wander. I have been telling you of the gifts of the fourth wise man. And what is important about this gift of modern psychological science? It is this. We now possess a new insight and a new truth about the general laws of human nature. And why is it important we recognize this? Because we can better discover our universal nature and our common identity. We can discover the similarity of all people and their needs all over the world. We can find we are all part of the same human manifold with similar yearnings and desires, similar aggressions and frustrations — even though these may be expressed in differing ways. The symbol of this is our common property of birth. The recognition of this truth may enable us to find our way out of any current darkness.

There is no hesitation whatever in placing this gift on the altar at Bethlehem. This humanity stretches throughout all time and encompasses the Babe as well as ourselves. Indeed, we would do well to make a Christmas toast to the common property of birth. We would do well to gather around the manger as men and women, shepherds, angels, players and audience, authors and readers, parent and child, soldiers of all armies across all battle lines, and people everywhere in and out of the United Nations, to make our toast to human clemency.

The fourth wise man had but a few symbols of truth in his offering at Bethlehem. There were many others he could have made. Perhaps we can sum them up by offering ourselves in the service of truth and to the fashioning out of a world where we may truly sing, "Peace on earth, good will to men."

The scholar's pen, the worker's tool, the engineers of mind and spirit, of science and truth, all these we lay at the altar of creativity and dedicate to the future found in every cradle.

## NOTES

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