VOLUME XXV, NO. 21
MAY 24, 1972

THE QUALITY OF MEN

IN one of his sage moments, Nathaniel Hawthorne said of the time he spent at Brook Farm: "I was beginning to lose the sense of what kind of a world it was, among innumerable schemes of what it might be, or ought to be." He went on to suggest that anyone working for change who also wants to keep his balance needs a periodical return "into the settled system of things to correct himself by a new observation from that old standpoint."

Such a return may have been easy in Hawthorne's time, but to find a "settled system of things" today requires a trip through time as well as to some other place. In a settled situation, most people believe that what they are doing is right and good. The general objectives of life are agreed upon, regarded as attainable, and sought with some certainty concerning the rules that need to be observed along the way. The "unknowns" do not paralyze, but challenge and invite, while the institutions of the time seem to have a natural place in the scheme of things.

Who, if anyone, is able to feel this way about his situation, today? After the second world war, an American writer coined the expression, "The Great American Fish Fry," to characterize the longings of many of the returning soldiers. They wanted to come *home* and go *fishing*—to live for a while in a friendly unspoiled environment, under settled and predictable conditions. They didn't want to go fishing forever, just long enough.

People can still go fishing today, but the image of an untouched wild is no longer the same. There are probably some clean streams in the United States, but the feeling that the whole world is tainted by pollution has penetrated everywhere, like a bad odor. Even the idea of a "settled system of things" is hard to formulate. We are something like the Ancient Mariner who, when he tried to pray, was haunted by wicked whispers. It is perhaps not so remarkable that the last desperate remedy that an age which relies on technique has devised to escape from the ills it has created should be the chemical expedient of drugs.

There have also been healthier emigrations of the mind. An entire generation of the young saturated itself with the imagery and derring-do of Tolkien's *Ring* books, and could any story of perilous striving and heroic achievement take its readers farther away from the circumstances of the present? It is not inaccurate to call the tale of Frodo's adventures an account of a settled system of things. The social setting is clearly medieval. There are many established and accepted social roles and orders of responsibility in life. There are unequivocal rules and moral principles. There is good to be served and evil to be resisted. There is *noblesse oblige* and honor, and the hope of repair for damaged souls. A humble person on whom destiny lays a great burden makes himself into a hero by generating the persistence and courage he needs for carrying out an extraordinary responsibility.

Did the boys and girls who reveled in the *Ring* books have a better intuition of what was missing from their lives than the educationists and social critics of the 1960's?

Radical thinkers are now investigating the causes of the disintegration of the New Left and wondering about future forms of revolutionary action. One diagnosis of what happened to Students for a Democratic Society is to the effect that the anti-authoritarianism of students and their distrust of all "hierarchy" led to the development of a *de facto* ruling hierarchy which was not organizationally acknowledged. Meanwhile the destructuring of the student groups around the country resulted in disorder: "The actions taken to

fulfill the rhetoric of democratic participation consistently undermined the possibilities for a representative democratic organization: the pressure toward egalitarianism turned into its opposite, a hierarchical elite." This statement is in an article in *Liberation* for February, by Norman Fruchter, who also believes that the SDS lacked historical self-consciousness and was therefore unable to formulate appropriate ideological principles. The leadership was "personal and idiosyncratic," and ended, finally, in the debacle of the escalating militancy of Weatherman, which resorted to sabotage and terrorism and was reduced to a waning existence underground.

It was no more than accident to come upon a copy of Anne Morrow Lindbergh's diaries and letters of 1929-28, published recently under the title of *Bring Me a Unicorn* (Harcourt), while thinking about these things. There hardly seemed a connection between the thoughts of this sheltered but thoughtful and talented young woman and a post mortem on the New Left. But if there were anything to Hawthorne's idea, it might be worth some effort to look for a connection. One must begin by admitting that no less ideological person than Anne Morrow ever put pen to paper or sat down to a typewriter. In that sense, reading her is a blessed relief. America, moreover, was a very different place forty-five years ago—quite "settled" in comparison with the present. There is material on Miss More: row's years at Smith College, and about her home life. Her father was the fourth son of a mathematics professor with a large family and needed to work to put himself through Amherst. Rising, eventually, to be a partner in J. P. Morgan & Co., and later ambassador to Mexico, Dwight Morrow, as his daughter suggests, proved the validity of the myth of "Boy-from-small-town-makes-good." When he died in 1931 he was Senator from New Jersey. Mrs. Lindbergh says of him:

> But throughout his career in the business, financial, and diplomatic worlds, he yearned nostalgically for the academic life—not in mathematics, though he had a mathematician s mind, but as professor of history. Actually, as Harold Nicholson pointed out in the life of my father, in every task he encountered he was continually and incorrigibly a teacher to adults. The reverse, as is often the case, was also true. He was a curious, hungry, and ceaseless learner, an inveterate reader of history, philosophy, economics (Herodotus, Plutarch's Lives, and Plato were ranged beside Froude, Bagehot, and Prescott).

The question is this: Could a modern reader with "radical" inclinations—and in these times everyone has *some* radical inclinations—pick up this book and read about such people without developing a sense of unreality or impatience?

What we are arguing for, we suppose, is the legitimacy of a purely pragmatic approach to the matter of socio-economic systems and political conceptions, as distinguished from the virtually religious emotion and commitment that now goes into ideological views and claims. In other words, one *ought* to be able to read about a man who was a Morgan partner in the 1920's, and to consider him as a man, not merely as a finance capitalist. One ought to be able to see Charles Lindbergh through the eyes of a young girl who would a few years later be his wife, and be grateful for so splendid a portrait of a remarkable man.

This is an effort to throw off the heavy pall of ideological thinking. Politics is no more than a necessary evil, and it may not be as necessary as we suppose. Through Anne Morrow's eyes, we are introduced to a large number of people who are talented, gentle, good, and useful in a great many ways. The fact that a lot of them were rich or famous should bother us no more than it seemed to affect her. Her book is light, perhaps unimportant, except for some pleasurable reading, but in it there is evidence of a finely "rained sensibility that has very nearly gone out of American life. If we can't get back the qualities which went to make up this sensibility, it won't matter much what sort of revolution we are able to arrange.

It almost seems as though it is practically impossible for human beings to go about changing their socio-political arrangements and to remember at the same time the importance of the moral qualities of individuals. As a result, a ruthless sort of men come into power during the period of change. This has been true of nearly all the recent revolutions. It was not true of the American revolution, which ought perhaps to be called a war for independence instead of a revolution; and the liberation of India was neither a war nor a revolution, although it was marked by the establishment of new forms of government. Actually, Gandhi is the only revolutionary leader we can call to mind (except perhaps Mazzini) who laid as much stress on the moral qualities of individuals as on the issues of the revolutionary cause.

There ought not to be so much difference between men who are by instinct and inclination builders all their lives and those who undertake radical social change. The authentic builder is always an innovator; he is willing to be an iconoclast, but only in order to dear away obstructions to new growths which are ready to occupy the space that is made available. If such men were more numerous, and if their quiet labors were honored by those who write books and articles on social change, there would be far less disillusionment following in the wake of every successful revolt. "Why," a mournful radical historian once asked, "does the Left always make the revolution and the Right always write the constitution?" Because, it could be answered, of this division of labor between rebels and builders. It is one thing to have an impatient regard for what is morally right, and another to have a grasp of the necessities of vital process in human society. When institutions are destroyed, the patterns of behavior must then be governed either by extraordinary self-discipline or by naked authority; so, when the discipline is lacking, the authority fills the vacuum left by the revolutionary destruction of structure. It follows that those who would institute change ought to be models of self-discipline, to serve as examples to all the rest.

This, as we may recall, was Plato's idea in relation to the Guardians of his ideal society. And if that ideal society could not yet be realized, the wise man, as Plato says in the *Republic* (at the end of Book IX), would act in all ways according to that inner discipline, even while living in the existing society. What better way could there be to bring about *enduring* reforms?

But we have been meaning to quote some of what Anne Morrow wrote in her diary about Charles Lindbergh. Shortly after she met him as the result of his goodwill flight to Mexico City, where Dwight Morrow was ambassador, she became aware of the distorted image of Lindbergh that the newspapers were creating. She wanted to correct these misconceptions, and in her diary listed the qualities that she thought were important in this young man:

> He is great not because he crossed the ocean alone. He might have shown his genius in some other way. This explains the mad devotion to him. The flight gave him to the world. He is not a *type* of anything, as the newspapers have made him. Keen, intelligent, burning, thinking on all lines. . . .
>
> Every action sincere, spontaneous, direct, full of meaning. His effect coming into a room, going out. His effect on men—practical, cynical, worldly men—
>
> Dignity—
>
> The harmony of all his movements in the plane—
>
> His youth—
>
> His clean-cutness, freshness—nothing smeared—keen sharpness.
>
> Quickness and accuracy of thought and action.
>
> Nothing "grates": never a false note, a hint of smallness—never a tinny sound, as one might expect in a vulgar phrase, or badly kept fingernails—
>
> His cool "knowing what he is about" *all* the time—utter lack of recklessness, an amazing, impersonal kind of courage—
>
> Most of his modesty is not modesty—more selfless than that: impersonality.
>
> Tolerant good humor—
>
> The way his smile completely changes his face—

> The small-boy-hands-in-pockets looking-straight-at-you attitude.

Other people have said things like that about Lindbergh, but not so clearly, nor as well.

In his own way, Lindbergh has remained a builder all his life. Unfortunately, use was made of him by politicians, and his openness and candid way of saying what he thinks made trouble for him. He is not a man to whom political activity comes naturally. A little less than three years ago, he gave evidence of his awareness of what was happening in the United States, saying in a *Life* article (July 4, 1969) that if he had to choose between airplanes and birds, he would choose birds. Then, speaking of the deterioration in American civilization, he added:

> That is why I have turned my attention from technological progress to life, from the civilized to the natural world. In wilderness there is a lens to the past, to the present and to the future, offered to us for looking—a direction, a successful selection, an awareness of values that confronts us with the need for the means of our salvation. Let us never forget that wildness has developed life, including the human species. By comparison, our own accomplishments are trivial.

Well, if we go back those forty-five years with Mrs. Lindbergh and read about that time—and not only in her book, but in others—we get a sense of the country which, for all its faults, is very different from the feeling it produces in the present; and this feeling comes, not from the "system" or the economic conditions, but from the quality of the human beings who were often in positions of responsibility, and who were able to believe in what they were doing. This, at any rate, is something gained from trying to follow Hawthorne's advice.

How can we use what is learned in this way? That is a more difficult question. We can't ask nature for delivery of a selection of Charles Lindberghs—nor, for that matter, for a few Gene Debses. All that we can do is begin to give more attention to inquiring into what is responsible for the quality of human beings, and to asking what part may be played in bettering the quality of the times by showing deliberate respect for the quality of men—much more than for belief-systems and ideological doctrines.

These are days when it is no longer possible to go back to the patterns of conventional institutions for perspective and, perhaps, for a little "rest." The persons of the caliber Anne Morrow met and knew can no longer tolerate and maintain the conventional institutions, since now they mask too many anti-human practices. We know, as we did not know then, the effects of what we are doing. Take for example the assumptions of the conventional schools, as given by John Holt in *How Children Fail:*

> Behind much of what we do in school lie some ideas that could be expressed roughly as follows: (1) of the vast body of knowledge there are certain bits and pieces that can be called essential, that everyone should know, (2) the extent to which a person can be considered educated, qualified to live intelligently in today's world and be a useful member of society, depends on the amount of this essential knowledge that he carries about with him; (3) it is the duty of the schools, therefore, to get as much of this essential knowledge as possible into the minds of children.

But those bits and pieces of knowledge, while they may help to get the student placed in a job, do not help him very much to become a responsible human being. In *No Particular Place to Go,* Joel Denker expands on Holt's critique:

> Thus the student learns science independently from an investigation of the political economy. He studies how an automobile engine works but doesn't learn why corporations have taken so long to develop a pollution-free engine. He does not have to ask himself about what interests his research will serve, who will fund it, and what social priorities will guide his work. He takes a government course that emphasizes the importance of electoral politics, the legislative process, and pressure groups, but says little about the massive impact of corporate power on the political system. In order for students to accept their training the schools must conceal the fact that the education they are providing has an ideological purpose. Students must believe that they are acquiring empirical, neutral knowledge.

Isn't this writer interested in political education? It could certainly be called that, and the school he started with an associate, Steve Bhaerman, set out to "radicalize" the students they obtained. But they found out something basic in this experience: that the kind of education they wanted to result from their efforts could not come about through exposition of theory and critical analysis alone. After two years of running a free school, Joel Denker concluded: "Until the organizers of free schools are engaged in both intellectual and practical activity, we will not be able to create radical alternatives to the public schools." Some of the best people in the school, he found, were those who "spent much of the day doing their own work." He quotes approvingly the speech on Education and Self-Reliance by Julius Nyerere, prime minister of Tanzania. Nyerere envisions a society in which there are no boundaries between education and material production:

> Schools must, in fact, become communities—and communities which practice the concept of self-reliance. The teachers, workers, and pupils together must become the members of a social unit in the same way as parents, relatives, and children are the social unit. . . . This means that all schools, but especially secondary schools and all other forms of higher education, must contribute to their own upkeep; they must be economic communities as well as social and educational communities. Each school should have, as an integral part of it, a farm or workshop which provides the food eaten by the community and makes some contribution to the natural income.
>
> The school farms must be created by the school community clearing their own bush—and so on—but doing it together. They must be used with no more capital assistance than is available to an ordinary, established, cooperative farm where the work can be supervised. By such means the students can learn the advantages of cooperative endeavor, even when outside capital is not available in any significant quantities. Again, the advantages of cooperation could be studied in the classroom, as well as being demonstrated on the farm.

Education in a framework of this sort of experience would soon put ideology in its place, since the individual human qualities are inevitably recognized as having primary importance whenever people work together closely toward common ends. When thought is formed in relation to work performed, opinions arise intelligently out of experience, and not from the manipulation of abstractions in relation to a utopian ideal. Men come to be valued for what they are, rather than for their opinions, and meanwhile their opinions are increasingly informed by practical understanding.

REVIEW
LAST DAYS OF THE COLORADO?

A LITTLE over a century ago, John Wesley Powell, thirty-six years old, a veteran of the Civil War, a man who has been called a "self-taught scientist," led an exploratory expedition into the Rocky Mountains west of Denver, where he encountered the deep chasm through which the Green river flows. The course of the Green, as well as that of the Colorado, which the Green joins in Utah, was in those days marked "unexplored" on maps. Powell resolved to investigate both these great rivers and to map the areas through which they ran. He told the story of this adventure, undertaken in 1869, in his book, *The Exploration of the Colorado River.*

Little was known of these rivers until Powell mapped them. They can be crossed at only a few places along the 1400 miles of their canyon-locked course from sources in the Rockies to their destination, the Sea of Cortez.

In *Broken Waters Sing* (Little, Brown, 1971), Gaylord Staveley, a professional guide and commercial river runner, tells why he decided to repeat Powell's trip, on the hundredth anniversary of the original exploration, using wooden boats as Powell did, starting at the same point and on the same day of the year. He writes:

> For a canyoneer to be content with having run part of a runnable river is no more possible than for a mountaineer to settle for part of a climbable peak. During thirteen years as a professional guide on the publicized, romanticized sections of the Colorado, Glen Canyon and Grand Canyon, I'd known that one day I would have to find a way to run the rest of the river, the canyons of the Green and upper Colorado. The centennial year seemed an appropriate time both for following the route of Powell's discovery—what remains of it—and for writing something about the river and canyons as they are now, only one hundred years after becoming mappable territory.

The purely "adventure" side of this book cannot be captured in a review. Even the author has some difficulty conveying the tension and excitement felt by the men who guided their little boats through dangerous rapids, since one needs to have at least a little of this experience to know what he is talking about. Yet he succeeds in generating some of the feeling of the passages between great boulders or narrow canyon walls, and the reader may find himself tempted as a recruit for similar adventures.

While several of the members of the party were with Mr. Staveley from start to finish, others joined the expedition below Lake Powell. At the beginning there were only two boats, but the voyage ended with seven.

The expression applied to Powell's discovery—"what remains of it"—needs explanation, since this idea forms a sub-theme of the book. Here the author is referring to the great dams which have flooded beautiful canyons—such as Glen Canyon, which was lost to view in 1963—and the very rhythm of the river, which was once determined by natural factors but is now man-made. Staveley knew Glen Canyon well and speaks of it as having beauties to be found nowhere else, now never to be seen again.

Something should be said of the boats used on this voyage. Mr. Staveley seems the sort of man who, if he were a great hunter, would probably insist on using a bow and arrow. His boats are the only passenger-carrying rowboats now in use on the Colorado. War-surplus pontoons made into great rafts have taken the place of boats for the tourist trade, since they require comparatively little skill and cannot be capsized or sunk. Staveley might say that you don't really run the rapids in these cushioned affairs, but become able to ignore them. At any rate, his boats require oarsmen of some skill and experience. The design of these boats, it seems, was a contribution of wild geese, which are a common sight on the river. Major Powell had used heavy longboats, framed to withstand the impact of rocks. They were rowed bow first downstream, which was hard on the oarsmen, who could not see where they were going without

twisting around. Rowing downstream also often gave them a speed they didn't really need, from a safety point of view.

At the turn of the century, a trapper, Nathan Galloway, was impressed by the way the wild geese rode choppy water:

> A goose's body, it seemed to him, was a good hull, stable and maneuverable. The wetted portion is basically a distended triangle, with the wide breast as the base and the sides curved, and flared outward, as they come back to a point at the tail. The underside is "raked," riding deeper in the water midway along than at either tail or breast. The feet are at this deepest and widest point, where they steer the goose easily. Galloway believed a boat of the same configuration would be a good boat, and he tacked several crude ones together in the 1890's and tried them.
>
> Something else made sense to him, too, and he used it: The Canadian-Alaskan concept of "drifting," letting the river current carry the boat along, the oarsman not rowing, but instead keeping the stern end turned downstream. In that position he could look directly toward rocks or rapids he might be approaching, and he had all the strength of his oar pulls to hold against the current, or move across it.

A boat-builder in Ohio heard of Galloway's ideas and from their collaboration came the Galloway-Stone hull—much lighter in construction than previous river boats, with a stern-first orientation. This boat, first built in 1909, Staveley says, "has been the prototype for all subsequent successful fast-water rowboats." His own boat on this trip was called the *Norm*, "named for Norman Nevills, who pioneered fast-water trips as a passenger-carrying enterprise on the Colorado River in the 1930's." Norman Nevills is the author's father-in-law. The design of this and the other of Staveley's boats goes back to the shape of the goose's body, first observed by Galloway.

Staveley doesn't say much about his own skill in handling a boat in the rapids, except to remark, once or twice, that the oars are a part of his arms, but he has an interesting passage on teaching one of his companions something of the art. His pupil was Doug Weiner, once a captain of a university rowing team, and no beginner, but the circumstances were quite different on the Green river where the lessons began, and the boat was no racing shell. Staveley wanted Doug to be able to take over and lead the party, if necessary, so he sat behind him and watched.

> Doug handled the *Norm* completely, running continuously fast water and two pronounced rapids within the first hour. During that time I discovered what a compulsive thing "back-seat driving" can be. It wasn't that he misjudged or mishandled; it was just that I didn't have the oars in my own hands. Sitting there behind him trying to learn how to teach, as it were, I found hitherto unrealized admiration for the self-control of a flying instructor who once sat behind me and rode through all my gross mishandlings of the airplane without sending me into further confusion by losing his own calm. I tried to emulate him and comment only when Doug waited longer to start a maneuver than I would have, but a lot of it was nit-picking. I missed any number of good chances to keep quiet. It's as difficult for me to be a passenger in my own boat as it probably is for some people to ride through fast fender-to-fender freeway traffic in their own car with someone else at the wheel. Not that they could do more behind the wheel themselves, but they'd feel better. Doug helped by being patient, and both teacher and pupil learned.

After it was all over, and Staveley had found a private place on the beach of the Sea of Cortez, not far from where the Colorado empties into the ocean, he wondered if the trip was really worth a book about it:

> What had we done? Started on the same day in May and run in forty-three days the river that had taken the Powell expedition almost twice as long. Reoccupied some of the historic campsites, camera stations, and observation points. . . . Introduced some new people to the river.

But nobody, as he says, can now duplicate the grandeur of Powell's achievement, which was *discovery*, and he concludes that they ran the river for themselves. Then he adds:

> A newspaper editor, in alleging that Grand Canyon had more worth as a location for hydropower dams than as a setting for wilderness experience, once told his readers that river-running was for "only

> the reckless few." Despite the context of his remark and the thrust it was meant to have, he was right. Broken waters don't sing for everyone. But the solitary man or woman has been forgotten in the mushrooming madness for mass recreation. Running a river is one of the few remaining ways to compete against nature rather than against others, or against society. It's a wonderful change, a wonderful struggle, because the river lets you know immediately whether you've won or lost. In the battles of day-to-day life, one can't always recognize one's wins and losses. But the successful run of each rapid is a clear-cut victory all in itself, and the run of a whole river reiterates all of the victories along the way.

How has man changed the rhythm of the river? Boatmen speak of the flow of the river in terms of "cuesecs," by which they mean the number of cubic feet of water which pass an imaginary line from bank to bank, per second. Old timers feel able to estimate the cuesecs with reasonable accuracy, and regard thirty thousand cuesecs as ideal boating water on the Colorado. With less water the rocks appear and are dangerous, and much more water is dangerous, too.

But now the number of people in the Southwest determine the cuesecs of the river, since they all use electricity, and when they use a lot of it, the computer which regulates water flow from behind the great dams calls for more water power to generate more electricity to answer the demand of the people for light and power.

> The complication to river runners lies in human life patterns. In terms of electrical demand, Southwesterners, like Americans in general, do most of their living from mid-afternoon until the early hours of the morning. Thus there is a heavy demand for electricity from, say, three in the afternoon until three the next morning, then less demand from three in the morning until three the next afternoon. The computer reacts to these two different demands by letting a larger volume of water through the generators for twelve hours, then a small volume for the next twelve. The effect of this is to send higher water down the canyon for a half day, then lower for the next half day. By the time the low water begins, the front of high-water has traveled about forty miles downstream, making a forty-mile-long plateau. The lower water follows it as a lower plateau about the same length.

On Sunday people leave the cities and the use of electricity drops to its weekly extreme minimum, which makes for very low water in the river. It is dangerous to run the rapids on Sundays, since the river is narrower, slower, and the rocks break through the surface.

So, as Mr. Staveley says, there was some point to taking a real look at the Green and Colorado rivers at the end of the "Powell Century." For as dams are added, they may one day not be "natural phenomena" any more.

COMMENTARY
THE MAHABHARATA

THIS week's "Children" article calls attention to Elizabeth Seeger's rendition of the *Mahabharata*, titled *The Five Sons of King Pandu.* However, we found no reference in this edition to Miss Seeger's earlier book, *The Five Brothers*, published by John Day and reviewed in MANAS for Feb. 2, 1949, presenting essentially the same material. We have not been able to locate our review copy of the latter work, in order to make a comparison, but our review of twenty-three years ago suggests that the two books are much the same. In any event, what was then said of MISS Seeger's work does a good job of conveying the spirit of this extraordinary epic:

> The story is simply told for readers of twelve and over. The framework of human attitudes typified by the *Mahabharata* is in terms of a number of accepted principles of human relations. Kings are kings and servants are servants. The warrior must fight and the spouse must serve. The laws of duty and of destiny are as fixed in the nature of things as the stars in heaven. The natural and the supernatural mingle like members of the same family and as casually. Manners, custom and tradition rule the tide of the story like oriental despots. . . . These people are both human and divine. . . . They are stylized figures and they are mortals with whom our sympathies are joined. The righteous are victorious, but they pay the asking price of victory. The unrighteous get their reward, too, for though they were loyal to wrongdoing, at least they were loyal to something. . .
>
> At last one realizes that something wondrous is taking place above the battle. It is not anywhere on the battlefield, nor confined to any warrior, but it is felt—felt rather than heard—like a far-off chorus intoning a celestial chant. It is the grand summation of human heroism, not embodied in any one act, careless of sins or virtues, beyond good and evil, beyond agony or bliss. Perhaps it is the striving of all those men and women, from sudras to saints—just that they press and work on. Perhaps it is in the panorama stretching from heaven to earth, in the upward movement of men, the downward movement of gods. Perhaps the grave institutes of the Law, acknowledged by all, repeated by all, make the story a bridge to unite time and the eternal, the quivering hearts of fighting and dying men with the motionless heart of all. . . .
>
> As Olympus watched over the ancient Greeks, as Odin and the mighty of Valhalla cherished the Norse, so have the gods and heroes of the *Mahabharata* ensouled the great civilization of the Orient. And we are sure of one thing more—that there can be no greatness, any time, anywhere, without *some* gods and heroes to dream about.

"This, then," as our "Children" article says, "is what the world has lost since the days before the great printing presses, whatever else may have been gained."

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
ANCIENT CLASSICS

IN her introduction to *The Five Sons of King Pandu* (William R. Scott, 1967), Elizabeth Seeger speaks briefly of the two great epics of India, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana,* showing that they are truly the sources and mirrors of Indian civilization. *The Five Sons* tells the story of the *Mahabharata* so that it will hold the interest of young people. Of the work on which her book is based, she says:

> The *Mahabharata* in its entirety is the longest of all scriptures and of all poems; for it is three times as long as the Bible and eight times as long as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* put together. For two or three thousand years the story that forms its nucleus has been the vehicle for the moral philosophy and for the highest spiritual teaching of Hinduism; it has acquired not only enormous elaboration in the telling, but also enormous digressions amounting to whole volumes that are purely philosophical and only tenuously connected with the original narrative. It has become the very encyclopedia of Hinduism: "The storehouse," as one scholar says, "of genealogy, mythology, and antiquity."

Hardly an area in the whole of Southeast Asia has remained untouched by these epics. The sculptures and reliefs of temples from Angkor to Ceylon, the plays and chants known to the villagers of Burma, Siam, and the Indies, and the dances of the Javanese, derive from the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana.* Miss Seeger writes:

> The great arts of India, Indonesia, and Southeast Asia are as hard to understand, if one is ignorant of the two Hindu epics, as the arts of Europe would be if one did not know the Greek myths and the Bible. Kunti and Draupadi are of the stature of Penelope, Antigone, and Alcestis, but one knows them better because the Indian legends are much longer and more detailed than the Greek; Bhishma and Vidura, Yudhishthira and his brothers stand beside David and Solomon, Odysseus and Achilles, Arthur and Roland and Galahad. Is it not time for us to become as familiar with these great figures of Indian tradition as we are with those of our own? Is not the Aryan heritage ours also? And is it not well to know the sources of the culture of a great people who will become increasingly important in the world?
>
> The Indian epics do not belong so much to the past as ours do, for they are alive and active in the life of India today. The grandmother or the mother tells them to the children; bands of actors and of minstrels travel about presenting them in town and village, where amateurs, too, love to enact them; priests recite the sonorous Sanskrit verses while interpreters translate them for the listeners; scholars and poets rhapsodize on solemn and festive occasions, taking one incident and improvising upon it, after the manner of the Greek rhapsodes. The Pandavas, Kunti, and Draupadi are great examples of noble and virtuous behavior, held up to children and adults; their misfortunes still draw tears from the listener or spectator and their victory brings an ever-returning joy.

While there are many sources for the Greek myths and legends, we know of hardly any other writer who has done for the epics of India what Elizabeth Seeger has done. Her story of the five sons of Pandu is a splendid portrayal of the great struggle which reaches its climax in the section known as the *Bhagavad-Gita,* the philosophical poem which tells of the depression and withdrawal of Arjuna, the chief of the Pandus, when confronted by so many kinsmen and friends on the other side. Krishna, who has become Arjuna's charioteer, addresses him as guide, philosopher, and friend, and so develops the great themes of Indian philosophy which have been the study of the wisest men of India across thousands of years. To know the story of the *Mahabharata* as a child is the best possible preparation for reading and learning from the *Bhagavad-Gita* in later years.

There is perhaps the question: but should not each age or civilization devise its own epics? Why should modern man borrow from the distant past? We have no ready answer to this question, save that to produce epics it is necessary for there to be men cast in the heroic mold, and where will one now find poets of this sort? Miss Seeger, however, has an answer of her own:

> The great epic stories are few and their number will probably not increase—unless, for our sins, a

new flood washes mankind from the face of the planet, leaving only another Noah or a Manu to start the long course of civilization over again.

For the great epics came out of the dawn of the world, when everything was new: before man wrote or read, when intuition and experience were the only sources of his knowledge; when, amazed and stirred by the cosmic drama in the midst of which he found himself, he tried to find his part in it, his relation to the earth and its creatures, to the heavenly bodies, to his fellow men. In order to record them, he put them into stories that caught the rhythm of the turning earth. There is no better way to remember and to make others remember than to make a story and to put it into rhythmic speech.

Because the epics were composed before writing was known or before it was widely used in the country of their origin, they were not individual works but collective, for they were told by the teacher to disciple, by parent to child, by storyteller, each generation, each unusual person adding something until the story grew, like a Gothic cathedral, including many centuries in its final form. And, like a Gothic cathedral, it gathered in its growth the history, the beliefs and customs the economy and the arts of the times it passed through, and preserved them for us. Only a great framework can hold all these things together and keep its own shape through so much handling; the epic, therefore, is always a magnificent story.

So, Miss Seeger believes, the conditions for making new epics are not present in our society.

Nor, it should be added, are the conditions propitious for making the epics we have inherited serve in the vast civilizing function they once performed, before a superficial literacy destroyed the foundations of oral culture. The beauty, graces, and nobility of oral speech that were known to every class of society before the dominance of the written word can be restored only by great deliberation. Years ago, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy wrote at some length on this question, quoting first from a distinguished authority on literature:

A "literary" man if there ever was one, the late Professor G. L. Kittredge writes: "It requires a combined effort of the reason and imagination to conceive a poet as a person who cannot write, singing or reciting his verses to an audience that cannot read. . . . The ability of oral tradition to transmit great masses of verse for hundreds of years is proved and admitted. . . . To this oral literature, as the French call it, education is no friend. When a nation begins to read . . . what was once the possession of the folk as a whole, becomes the heritage of the illiterate only, and soon, unless it is gathered up by the antiquary, vanishes altogether." Mark, too, that this oral culture once belonged "to the whole people . . . the community whose intellectual interests are the same from the top of the social structure to the bottom," while in the reading society it is accessible only to antiquaries, and is no longer bound up with everyday life. A point of further importance is this: that the traditional oral literature interested not only all *classes*, but also all *ages* of the population; while the books that are nowadays written expressly "for children" are such as no mature mind could tolerate; it is now only the comic strips that appeal alike to children who have been given nothing better and at the same time to "adults" who have never grown up.

This, then, is what the world has lost since the days before the great printing presses, whatever else may have been gained. There is no longer a common speech informed with the imagery and shaped by the forms of great oral literature. To restore those excellences, there must be at least the foundation in a knowledge of epic themes, and since making these stories known to children can be a delight to adults as well, a great debt is owed to Elizabeth Seeger for making the classics of India so easily available. In passing, it might be noted that Miss Seeger is the sister of the poet, Alan Seeger, who was killed in World War I, and is remembered especially for the lines beginning, "I have a rendezvous with death/ At some disputed barricade."

FRONTIERS

GNP "Fetishism"

NEARLY nine years ago, in MANAS for Aug. 23, 1963, Walter A. Weisskopf, who teaches economics at Roosevelt University in Chicago, wrote in sharp criticism of the failure of economists to recognize the inadequacy of the Gross National Product as a measure of human well-being. Pointing out that while both sociologists and social psychologists have for years been "criticizing *the detrimental effects of our economic system, regardless of the wealth it has given to the masses,"* economists continue to assert that all is "basically sound" with the country by reason of the ever-growing market value of goods and services. The reason for this devotion to the Gross National Product as an index to national health is apparently a simple fidelity to Adam Smith's contention that wealth is a paramount goal in human life. After all, men satisfy their desires by means of wealth, and surely this makes it the highest good for people who, being democratically "free," choose to have a great many desires that need satisfaction!

Elaborating, Dr. Weisskopf wrote:

> The goal accepted by conventional and liberal economists alike is full utilization of resources, leading to ever-rising standards of living for all. The ends of full employment and continuous growth are projections of the acquisitive attitude, of the individual striving for more and more into the social and national sphere. Bertrand de Jouvenel has called this system the Civilization of *Toujours Plus*—"Always More." This attitude was a mainspring of early capitalism and it pervades the nations and national economies of today.
>
> Even the most liberal economic advisers who may not sympathize with individual acquisitiveness recommend it as the exclusive basis of national economic policies. The ideal of an ever-increasing Gross National Product has become a shibboleth in economic reasoning and a golden calf of economic worship. I submit that these goals were appropriate in the early stages of economic development, when scarcity still existed, but that they are causes of disorder in the present stage of affluence of the *American* economy. We cling to them because of their traditional emotional connotations and because of a misinterpretation of human needs and human welfare.

Questions of this sort are at last beginning to receive general discussion. The uses of the GNP as a tool in social and economic analysis were examined at the last annual meeting (in December) of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, under the general issue of the application of scientific information in social and political settings. The discussion is reported by Julian McCaull in the March *Environment*, in an article entitled "The Politics of Technology." Various speakers challenged the value of the GNP as a measure of progress or human good. For example, F. Thomas Juster of the National Bureau of Economic Research pointed out that the higher costs of additional police protection may in no way reflect better conditions, although they boost the annual GNP. The same speaker said:

> Do we have more national security as a consequence of higher outlays for national defense? Is our flow of environmental benefits higher as a consequence of attempts to limit effluents? None of these questions have easy or simple answers, but it is quite possible that in all these cases the benefit flows—personal security, national security, and environmental security—are no higher than a decade ago and, if anything, lower. If so, the expenditures designed to maintain these benefit flows can be considered as offsets against depreciation of the assets, and incomplete offsets at that. If so, they would not constitute a final output.

Other contributors made similar comments. If you pay more for dry cleaning because of pollution, should this expense become part of the GNP?

William D. Nordhaus of Yale University presented an analysis of the GNP from 1929 to 1965, during which the GNP apparently tripled, but after suitable deductions which took out values that did not apply to the actual economic welfare of people, the advance during this period amounted to only 42 per cent. But these comments and demonstrations, while critical, are

still from a conventional point of view. A more searching observation was made by Dr. Nordhaus and a colleague:

> We are aiming for a consumption measure, but we cannot of course estimate how well individual and collective happiness are correlated with consumption. We cannot say whether a modern society with cars, airplanes, and television sets is really happier than the nation of our great-grandparents who lived without use or knowledge of these inventions. We cannot estimate the externalities of social interdependence, of which Veblen, Galbraith, and other social critics have complained. That is, we cannot tell to what degree increases in consumption are offset by displeasure that others are also increasing their consumption. Nor can we tell how much consumption is simply the relief of artificially induced cravings nurtured by advertising and sales effort.

In short, what seems implied here is that even a properly corrected "consumption measure" may prove an inadequate guide for the making of "national policy." This seems a proper if somewhat feeble recognition of the folly of expecting the government to devise a formula for the "happiness" of the people.

Actually, all these considerations are taken up in the article by Prof. Weisskopf, and they get attention, also, in the voluminous writings of E. F. Schumacher. The fundamental conclusion, which must be reached, sooner or later, is that economic equations are not primary in mapping the achievement of a good life for human beings. The ideals and aspirations of the individual are the controlling factors, which economic factors may serve in a necessary but subordinate function; but since political power has no access to these real factors, there has been a tendency, first, to deal with them only rhetorically, out of respect for "tradition," but more lately to ignore them entirely as nonexistent. The rule which seems to govern conventional economic thinking is a very old one, and was briefly recorded by a rebel of a past generation:

> I am master of this college
> And what I know not is not knowledge.