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BOOKS FOR OUR TIME: VI

WE wondered if some additional volume would not insist upon adding itself to the original list of seven books chosen for discussion in this series. Edmund Wilson's *To the Finland Station*, having recently been put into print again (by Doubleday) after long neglect, reminded us that its credentials on political subjects are exceptional, and, further, that a volume on revolutionary philosophy ought to precede treatment of the next selection—Dwight Macdonald's *The Root Is Man*.

It is impossible to discuss the relationship of philosophy to politics, today, without devoting considerable attention to Marxism, both as a doctrine and as a social phenomenon, and *To the Finland Station* is the most rewarding, over-all treatment of Marxism we have encountered. While Marxism and Communism are no longer the same thing, a knowledge of the genesis of Marxism should be a prerequisite to any talk about Communism. If we had our way, we should insist that no one who has not read Wilson's volume or some equivalent historical study be allowed to say anything publicly about Communism at all. To attack so complex an entity as Communism before comprehending it is to confuse friend and foe alike as to our motivations—nor is it possible for us to remain unconfused ourselves when we attack in partial ignorance.

In reading *Finland Station* one comes to learn a great deal about the *raison d'être* of the Communist movement, and is often made to feel a profound sympathy for those who played self-sacrificial roles in its development. To be glad that this is so, and to recommend a book which makes it so, is not to defend Communism. It is just that without sympathy there can be no adequate understanding, and without understanding no one can fight an intelligent battle for or against anything. Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky—these men were human beings like ourselves, sometimes and in some ways better men than most of us; this we must recognize if we are to be just to history, or, in the final analysis, just to ourselves. Even if we are personally convinced that these historical figures were men of disreputable character, their theories and contentions would still have to be weighed independently, and faced squarely, apart from the locus of their inception. This we shall have to grant if we are in any measure devoted to philosophy, for philosophy demands that each idea receive consideration in itself, without prejudice.

Since we recollect uncertainties about some of Wilson's other books, this seems as good a time as any to make it plain that our selections of "Books for Our Time" do not necessarily imply wholesale approval of the authors involved. We believe that a book may be, in a sense, greater than its author—or perhaps it is that sometimes a single volume distills the best that a man has to give, leaving aside many of the vagaries of personality. It has come to be a habit with liberal critics since the days of Marx to maintain that important and useful thinking cannot be found in a "tainted" source—*i.e.*, that a writer's politics determines the merit of all else. Once we accept this criterion, or the criterion that a man's religion, or even his personal habits, may make all his *ideas* useless, we have gone a long way toward constructing a closed and padlocked mind.

Marx's trouble, Lenin's trouble—and perhaps a part of Stalin's trouble, too—was not that they failed to see important truths, but that they were convinced they had seen all the truths worth seeing. And if, because of our own inherited and conditioned prejudices, we fail to acknowledge the importance of whatever truths these men did envision clearly, we have simply duplicated their error and may expect that the price ultimately paid by history for our shortcoming will be similar to what must be paid for theirs.

Let us turn, then, from this prefatory sermon to the content of Mr. Wilson's work. (He is at all times and in most ways our idea of a superb historian.) We learn, first, from chapters dealing with diverse precursors of Marxism, that Communism today is indeed a "complex entity"—born from a number of historical inevitables. Part of what became Communism was a general revolutionary spirit, the determination of the dispossessed to find their places in

the sun. With each passing year, the dispossessed gained more of the wherewithal to effect a new balance of power: the day-to-day dependency of the wealthy classes upon specialized labor in the factories gave the "proletariat" and its readers an increasingly formidable position. But Marxism involved more than an opportunistic revelation that the further the industrial revolution proceeded, the stronger the working classes could become. Marxism was not only a political doctrine: it was a curious form of idealism, and also an attempt to found a new science.

This science was the socio-economic approach to history designed to encourage men to believe that the conditions surrounding them had not been preordained by either God or Cosmos, but were, rather, the results of human patterns of interaction. Michelet, the great mid-nineteenth-century historian, caught the vision of "humanity creating itself" from Vico, who, hundreds of years before, had attempted to disclose "the laws of human history" in terms suitable to a world in which both cultural and political factors were increasingly involved. And as Michelet began to write a series of historical studies, to which the condition and mind of his time were singularly receptive, the wider implications of a phrase like "the science of history" gradually emerged. Michelet and many of his contemporaries imbibed the idea of Progress from the philosophers of the French Revolution. Christianity, for the *philosophes,* was chiefly a general framework of ethical ideals, while theology was neglected in the new belief that "the heavenly city" could be erected here on earth. But the revolution had failed—failed, Michelet saw, because of an oversimplified theory, and because the dynamics of modern history-making were not yet understood. To build a heavenly city would first require the knowledge of the laws which governed an expanding industrial society. With that knowledge, the forces of history might be controlled and guided in the desired direction. It is here that Marx, with his passion to control history so that a better society of the future might emerge, entered as the idealogue of the hour.

It is the "idealism" embodied in Marxism, however, which seems to us most in need of understanding today, and here Wilson is extremely helpful. In 1842 Michelet the historian wrote: "Action, action alone can console us! We owe it not only to man, but to all that lower nature which struggles up toward man, which contains the potentiality of his thought." A curious sentence this, bespeaking a mystical feeling of dedication to the cause of "evolution" itself, and what is to be noted, as one travels the 485 pages of Wilson's book, is that Marx, Engels, and Lenin all expressed similar sentiments. Revolutionary communism drew into itself the crusading socialist enthusiasms of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Robert Owen, and thus grew in part from the noble dream of the free and just society for all men.

While a young student in Berlin, Marx wrote that "the highest divinity" is "human self-consciousness," and he believed, we discover, that the doctrine of social revolution provides the imperative means by which the full flower and glory of mankind could be realized in a future unclouded by class interests. Karl Marx was deeply convinced of man's moral responsibility to man, and thought that equality and fraternity could prevail after predatory economic interests had been eliminated by revolution. The agency, of this change, of course, was to be an aroused "proletariat," but note, in this passage from Marx's writing in 1843, his involved reasoning in discussing the "proletarian" as the eventual savior of all mankind:

> A class in *radical chains*, one of the classes of bourgeois society which does not belong to bourgeois society, an order which brings the break-up of all orders, a sphere which has a universal character by virtue of its universal suffering and lays claim to no *particular right*, because no *particular wrong*, but complete wrong, is being perpetrated against it, which can no longer invoke an *historical* title but only a *human* title, which stands not in a one-sided antagonism to the consequences of the German state but in an absolute antagonism to its assumptions, a sphere, finally, which cannot emancipate itself without freeing itself from all the other spheres of society and thereby freeing all these other spheres themselves, which in a word, as it represents the *complete forfeiting* of humanity itself, can only redeem itself through the *redemption of the whole of humanity*.

One must recall, here, the nineteenth-century life of the "under-privileged"—what a polite term of understatement!—about which young Friedrich Engels wrote so passionately while traveling in England as the wealthy young emissary of his father's firm. He saw "hundreds of thousands of all classes and ranks crowding past one another," all nevertheless "human beings with the same facilities and powers, and with the same interest in being happy. And have they not in

the end to seek happiness in the same way, by the same means? And still they crowd by one another as though they had nothing in common, nothing to do with one another, and as if their only agreement were the tacit one that each shall keep to his own side of the pavement, in order not to delay the opposing streams of the crowd, while it never occurs to anyone to honor his fellow with so much as a glance. The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are herded together within a limited space."

So Marx and Engels joined to compose a revolutionary gospel which would enable humanity to break the fetters of its own bondage—a bondage formed more in ignorance than from inherent evil of the "ruling classes," but which they thought was now so deeply entrenched in systems of privilege that the "ruling classes" could never see the oppression of the proletariat for what it was until the revolution had been accomplished. But even their doctrine of revolution had idealistic overtones. Wilson justifiably calls "inspiring and important" their "idea that the human spirit will be able to master its animal nature through reason," though, as Wilson also notes, the two revolutionary enthusiasts "managed to make a great many people think the opposite of this: that mankind was hopelessly the victim of its appetites."

To read the drama of Marx's and Engels' personal lives is to awaken to dimensions of "Communism" which its present, rigidly institutionalized form largely conceals from view. Engels was charming, loyal, dedicated to principle and therefore unswervingly self-sacrificing. Marx was a brooding genius, a man who had every opportunity to make "a success of life" for himself and his beautiful wife, but who chose to identify himself with the dispossessed! of all the earth—a true internationalist. His austerity and his indomitable will command our respect; and, however much we regret his fanatical "hate the capitalists" plank, and however ably we point out his dangerous and illogical extremes of revolutionary doctrine, we are well able to understand why his work has lived on into the twentieth century. After detailed and thorough criticisms of Marxian limitations, Wilson closes his volume with an appreciative survey of Marx's labors, from which we reproduce the following:

> Let us begin by asking ourselves what we mean, whether we really mean anything definite and fixed, when we casually use the word "Marxism."
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> The Marxism of Karl Marx himself was, in its original form, a mixture of old-fashioned Judaism, eighteenth-century Rousseauism and early nineteenth-century utopianism. Marx assumed that capitalist society had corrupted the human race by compelling it to abandon spiritual values for the satisfaction of owning things: he believed that the day would arrive when the spirit would come back into its own, when humanity would destroy its false idols and the sheep be set off from the goats: this could only be accomplished by communism—i.e. the common ownership of the means of production which would make possible a society without classes.
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> As for the aims and ideals of Marxism, there is one feature of them that is now rightly suspect. The taking-over by the state of the means of production and the dictatorship in the interests of the proletariat can by themselves never guarantee the happiness of anybody but the dictators themselves. Marx and Engels, coming out of authoritarian Germany, tended to imagine socialism in authoritarian terms; and Lenin and Trotsky after them, forced as they were to make a beginning among a people who had known nothing but autocracy, also emphasized this side of socialism and founded a dictatorship which perpetuated itself as an autocracy.
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> When all this is said, however, something more important remains that is common to all the great Marxists: the desire to get rid of class privilege based on birth and on difference of income; the will to establish a society in which the superior development of some is not paid for by the exploitation that is, by the deliberate degradation of others—a society which will be homogeneous and cooperative as our commercial, society is not, and directed, to the best of their ability, by the conscious creative minds of its members. But this again is a goal to be worked for in the light of one's own imagination and with the help of one's own common sense. The formulas of the various Marxist creeds, including the one that is common to them all, the dogma of the Dialectic, no more deserve the status of holy writ than the formulas of other creeds. To accomplish such a task will require of us an unsleeping adaptive exercise of reason and instinct combined.

What does all this have to do with "communism"? What we know as Communism today does indeed have many horrifying features, and its political leaders have frequently turned to cruelties and exploitations unparalleled in "capitalist" society. In common with Marxism, Communism has proposed to use insane means to bring about human sanity, and thus Marx as

a prophet, and Soviet Russia as an administrator, have failed. But if we neglect to admit the ravaging extent of human wrongs which Marx and Lenin desired to right, or if we fail to see that Lenin, too, was a humanitarian—even if a mistaken one—we will never comprehend that mysterious force which causes millions to revere these powerful men as patron saints. Nor will we be able to understand, either, that if there had been no Marx and no Lenin there would have been other upthrusts of violent doctrine, and perhaps even worse ones, for social upheaval became inevitable as far back as the middle ages.

Revolutions and revolutionists deteriorate, there is the sad fact. Marx once regarded the idea of a "dictatorship" of the proletariat with what seems a reluctant distaste—later he grimly enjoyed its prospect. And Lenin, a great man, one who originally had comrades of noble mien to work with when the Bolsheviks first took control of Russia, found himself trapped by the shortcut methods of change he believed it expedient to adopt. A tragic aspect of this transition appears in *To the Finland Station* (the title derives from Lenin's return through Finland from exile to accept leadership of the revolution) in a passage quoted from Max Eastman, who visited Russia in the early twenties. Here we are helped to feel what seemed to so many the glorious promise of the hoped-for New Age in Russia:

> A wonderful generation of men and women was born to fulfill this revolution in Russia. You may be traveling in any remote part of that country, and you will see some quiet, strong, exquisite face in your omnibus or your railroad car—a middle-aged man with white, philosophic forehead and soft brown beard, or an elderly woman with sharply arching eyebrows and a stern motherliness about her mouth, or perhaps a middle-aged man, or a younger woman who is still sensuously beautiful, but carries herself as though she had walked up to a cannon—you will inquire, and you will find out that they are the 'old party workers.' Reared in the tradition of the Terrorist movement, a stern and sublime heritage of martyr-faith, taught in infancy to love mankind, and to think without sentimentality, and to be masters of themselves, and to admit death into their company, they learned in youth a new thing—to think practically, and they were tempered in the fires of jail and exile. They became almost a noble order, a selected stock of men and women who could be relied upon to be heroic.

But the "noble order" was short-lived. With the violence its representatives thought necessary for the revolution's success, they destroyed themselves. And Lenin, too, the once-inspiring leader, suffered disillusionment. Wilson's parting from Lenin is as poignant as it is illuminating:

> Lenin's ultimate aims were of course humanitarian democratic and anti-bureaucratic; but the logic of the whole situation was too strong for Lenin's aims. His trained band of revolutionists, the Party, turned into a tyrannical machine which perpetuated, as heads of a government, the intolerance, the deviousness, the secrecy, the ruthlessness with political dissidents, which they had had to learn as hunted outlaws. Instead of getting a classless society out of the old illiterate feudal Russia, they encouraged the rise and the domination of a new controlling and privileged class, who were soon exploiting the workers almost as callously as the Tsarist industrialists had done, and subjecting them to an espionage that was probably worse than anything under the Tsar. What Lenin had actually effected was a kind of bourgeois revolution; the situation had, in a sense, worked out according to Marx; but it was not at all what Lenin had intended. Lenin himself died, after only six years of power, in great perplexity and anguish of mind, outmaneuvered by one of his lieutenants who knew how to distribute patronage and had no scruples about deceiving the public.

Letter from **INDIA**

VEDCHHI—India's biggest political problem today is making democracy efficient enough for the social and economic change that every country must undergo after attaining freedom. Stories of the economic progress of neighbouring countries that do not pledge themselves to democracy flow in every day and the man in the street is often heard muttering: "We want an iron man at the helm." Or, "How long are we going to continue this sluggish method?" He cannot appreciate the flowery words of praise that are showered upon India by curious visitors who come here with fantastic ideas about this "backward" country and who are wonder-struck by the sight of New Delhi, Hirakud Dam or Bombay aerodrome. The common man wants immediate solution of his problems and it is this part of the stories of the progress of dictatorial countries that attracts him most. If democracy is slow in bringing about an economic revolution, it is useless to him, he thinks.

One of the chief reasons for the delay in execution of the ideas of the "men at the helm" in democracy, is the party system. It is the tendency of opposition parties to oppose every step of the government, not only in the parliament, but on the field of work as well. As Jayaprakash Narayan, leader of two major opposition parties now merged into one called the Praja Socialist Party, says: "In spite of the great areas of common approach and ideals, our political parties are wasting their efforts and hindering the nation's progress by carrying on opposition for opposition's sake."

"The man at the helm," Nehru, is aware of this serious drawback and is sorry that his recent talks with Jayaprakash with a view to find out the means of joint efforts in solving national problems failed. Jayaprakash, on his part, expresses the view of some of the sanest men in India, when he expresses his doubts whether India could afford the luxuries of parliamentary niceties and keenly feels that India's is a race against time since the accelerated dynamics of history are hardly likely to give her even a tenth of the time in which Britain evolved her political institutions and broadened her democracy.

Vinoba Bhave, the man who has started the "Loot with Love" land-gift mission, is clearer about this. "Western democracy, with its majority rule," he says, "does not quite suit our genius. Let us adapt the Panchayat type of government where most of the problems are tackled on the village level, leaving all the controversial subjects open to discussion and where all the decisions are unanimous. What we want immediately is agreement on specific issues and common effort to carry out the agreed programme in the shortest time."

Events are fast moving towards the fulfillment of this hope. The support of almost all the political parties to the Bheedan Yajna, the KMPP-Socialist Party merger, the Nehru-Jayaprakash talks and the general acceptance of some of the programme in the Five Year Plan, are indications to a brighter future.

INDIAN CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
THE C. O. AT HOME

THE Fellowship of Reconciliation, an international Christian Pacifist group, recently published a novel by a former assignee to Civilian Public Service about what conscientious-objectors thought and did during the war years. (We shall stop for identification, since many readers have probably never heard of "Civilian Public Service," the alternative service into which Conscientious Objectors were drafted by Selective Service during World War II. CPS was supposed to provide "work of national importance under civilian direction," and most of this work was under the supervision of the U.S. Forest Service.)

It seems likely that the FOR would not have published *Aideen MacLennon,* Robert Wilson's semi-autobiographical story, if any other publisher could have been induced to accept it. Both the Fellowship and Mr. Wilson would have liked to acquire as many readers as possible. The book, however, is not one about which clamor for motion picture rights might revolve, so that it would be no surprise if Wilson's novel had found no takers among the "Will it sell ?" publishers. In addition, the writing is often painfully self-conscious, although, in defense of Mr. Wilson, it might be suggested that the attempt of pacifist moderns to be thoroughly self-conscious about all their values may make for a strong sense of social responsibility, if not for successful story-telling. Also in Mr. Wilson's favor is the fact that while many C.O.'s may have wanted to write a wartime novel, no one else, so far as we know, has summoned sufficient effort to do so. This is not so hard to understand. Any account of the wartime detention of conscientious objectors is compelled to digest an enormous amount of diverse material. In the first place, there was no "single type" of conscientious objector. Some inclined towards Christian mysticism; some were of humanitarian-socialist persuasion, with no discernible theological leanings; some were simply rebels against conventional society, in the framework of which they felt war to be inevitable; some were docile followers of a traditional religious pacifist credo, by way of old-time war resisting sects such as the Brethren and the Mennonites; some were ministers' sons; some were young teachers and professors; and a large number defied any classification whatsoever. Any "C.O. at home" story which overlooked the wide variety of experiences resulting from this conglomeration would fail in its portrayal.

Wilson, in one way or another, gets around to most of the complications in the CPS equation, including some account of the compromising situation caused by the eagerness of the traditional peace churches to offer to administer the C.O. camps at their own expense. Following is a sample of Wilson's writing—one of many passages explanatory of the set-up and background of CPS. "Aideen," the somewhat poetically named protagonist in the story, having successfully concluded his skirmishes with the Draft Board, the FBI, and the Department of Justice hearing agent, now arrives at one of the C.O. camps established to provide manpower reserves for fire fighting:

> They were led into long wooden barracks and assigned steel cots made up with khaki army blankets. These were almost the only furniture of the long room. Though he did not know it, this barracks was to be his home for a year and a half.
>
> Beside other cots, on orange crates or trunks, stood photographs of wives and children to whom other assignees wrote home: wives who slept in lonely beds, children who began to know the pinch of poverty. But this was not new, this was not reserved for pacifists. Beside them, across the world, numberless men lay on straw pallets under the snouts of guns and begged for the oblivion of sleep, and God knows what proportion of the mothers in the world stared daily at their own front doors to see the fear creep in like smoke around the cracks. . . .
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> This was his battleground. This was the point where he joined forces with the rejected leaders, the dreamers of a too-far-distant future. . . . Here they would match their untried unity with the forces that owned the world, with the evil and error within men's hearts—first of all their own—which permitted war

to be regarded as a possible, though hateful, alternative to living with each other.

These men were backed by a long heritage of great minds that were unified within the consciousness of God, timeless men whose prophet voices through every century have haunted the halls of human folly. Morally and financially they were backed by other reconciliation-minded citizens whom age or sex prevented from serving in the camps.

This was the experiment, entered into with hope, and continued with doubt and misgiving; in which religious pacifists attempted to work with government in administering a system of service alternative to the military.

This was the creature that changed, chameleon-like, before the eyes of the very men within it: from a system of honorable non-military service, to isolation wards for political prisoners, then back again, to legally sanctioned, almost patriotic service.

Within this framework some thousands of draft-age Americans were attempting to work out a common response to what had happened to them. There was an inspired attempt to express the power of suffering in love, to demonstrate to the reasonable public who otherwise might question their sincerity that they were willing to work hard on any assignment of service to society, however small. Even without pay.

There were at the same time conflicts and disheartening failures in the necessary small realm of working and living together.. There was chafing at petty restrictions and dissatisfaction with government inefficiency and "made-work" projects. There were evolved sundry philosophies of resistance and non-cooperation.

Aideen saw, in those first days, a caged look in the eyes of these men who sometimes asked themselves if they were slaves. Perhaps the look was in his own eyes instead. In time this passed away.

While the present Selective Service law and regulations (as of 1950) permit assignment of war objectors to numerous types of endeavor, the original plan, implementing the Selective Service Act of 1940, simply bunched the men together in deserted camps. Members of the peace churches were so anxious to forestall possible government hostility to C.O.'s that they were willing to defray the operating costs of these units out of subscriptions from their own memberships, in return for which they would be allowed to administer the camps. Thus, while permissive legislation (Public Law 6303 had provided for pay and dependency allowances not to exceed that supplied to Army privates, the Quakers, Brethren and Mennonites assured the government that C.O.'s would be glad to work for nothing to prove their "sincerity" and, moreover, when able, would happily contribute some thirty-five dollars per month for their own food and utilities. Many pacifists vehemently questioned this "deal" with Selective Service, saying that it was unfair for members of any pacifist organization to assume that they could represent all kinds of C.O.'s; these critics also suggested that for a pacifist to help administer conscription in time of war was a betrayal of principle.

So far as we have been able to determine, the chief disadvantage of this particular financial arrangement was that the C.O.'s had little chance to mature their own relationship with government agencies; always the "buffer" of a well-intentioned peace church official stood in the way, and, similarly, the government had little incentive for discovering better ways of employing many men of marked ability within the C.O. ranks.

Both peace church officials and the officers of Selective Service seemed agreed upon one thing—the outlook of "let's keep these boys out of the public eye so that the American Legion and parents who have lost sons in battle will not be stimulated to troublesome indignation." Therefore, as the intensity of war increased, and as the inequities of the no-pay and no-dependency-allotment program stirred many CPS camp members to slow-down strikes and other protests, the camps became more and more detention institutions, the only egress from which led to prison. Finally, through the unremitting efforts of pacifists to find more significant employment of "the boys," new opportunities developed. CPS men were allowed to fill the desperate need for personnel in understaffed

mental hospitals. Others volunteered as medical guinea pigs. Many C.O.'s served with distinction in these fields, as was recognized in a *Life* summary of mental-hospital reform. So Wilson's suggestion that CPS shifted "from a system of honorable nonmilitary service, to isolation wards for political prisoners, then back again, to legally sanctioned, almost patriotic service" is essentially accurate.

Since the Fellowship of Reconciliation went to the trouble and expense of publishing *Aideen MacLennon,* we think it at least deserves reproduction of two paragraphs of peace propaganda found on the dust jacket of the book. The FOR has worked ceaselessly to convince more Americans that anything is better than militarism and here obviously, hopes that any who are intrigued by the unusual philosophy expounded in *Aideen MacLennon* will write (to 21 Audubon Ave., New York 32, N.Y.) for further information concerning pacifist activity.

This is how the FOR links Wilson's novel to its own cause, under the title "No Compromise With War":

> Nobody wants war. Everybody, as the editorial writers and columnists are fond of saying, is a pacifist in peacetime. But there is a profound difference between the peacetime pacifist and the man who has rejected the method of war entirely, regardless of apparent consequences. The former hates war but believes that in the end there is no substitute for it, the latter claims to know a workable alternative, but insists that the first step to it is the abandonment of war itself.
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> Aideen MacLennon was a full-time pacifist, and his story is the account of a man who tried to live that conviction while his fellows were busy fighting mankind's worst war. There are thousands of other Aideens: men who fought their war in the forests and hospital wards and prisons of America, trying as best they could to keep alive a witness against all war, and to inject into the stream of history as much good will and reconciliation as they could.

In conclusion, then, while we admit to being troubled by some of Wilson's literary mannerisms—as when he describes the physical attractiveness of his hero—we nonetheless wish that some pocket-book publisher could be induced to issue the story in a twenty-five-cent reprint. It would be a good thing for hundreds of thousands of Americans to encounter these unfamiliar dimensions of pacifist thought and activity. Whether the majority of such an audience would conclude their reading of Mr. Wilson's book with a liking for or a prejudice against the author and his pacifists is another question, and probably of secondary significance.

COMMENTARY
WORTHY VENTURES

A BIT of publishing news we should like to pass on to our readers is the fact that Doubleday, probably the largest firm of publishers in the United States, recently made available a low-priced, paper-bound edition of *To the Finland Station* (see "Books for Our Time") as one of the new Doubleday series of "Anchor Books." *To the Finland Station* has been out of print for a number of years and this new edition, which sells at $1.25 is unquestionably a public service.

Whoever the editor of "Anchor Books" is, he has won our admiration almost completely with his selections for this low-priced series. Now available, along with *Finland Station,* at prices ranging from 65 cents to $1.25 a volume, are such titles as *Socrates* by A. E. Taylor (reviewed in MANAS, March II, 1953), *American Humor by* Constance Rourke, and *An Essay on Man by* Ernst Cassirer. We haven't read *American Humor,* but if it is anything like Constance Rourke's *Roots of American Culture,* it is a book to own and to treasure. (For a sample of Miss Rourke's approach, see Frontiers in MANAS for July 28, 1948.) In the case of *An Essay on Man,* while, again, we have not read it, we know that the ennobling conceptions of the Renaissance thinker, Pico della Mirandola, run through Cassirer's work like a theme—as, for example, in two articles by Cassirer in the April and June 1942 issues of the *Journal of the History of Ideas*

Anchor Book titles announced for Fall publication this year are equally inviting. Five of the ten books named have been either reviewed, quoted, or mentioned in MANAS, these five being *The Liberal Imagination* by Lionel Trilling (MANAS, June 14, 1950), *Man on His Nature* by Sir Charles Sherrington, *The Lonely Crowd* by David Riesman (Sept. 3, 1952), *Three Philosophical Poets* by George Santayana, and *Seventeenth Century Background* by Basil Willey. Trilling's book is a classic of modern liberal criticism; Riesman—already widely quoted and influential—seems to have ploughed new ground for social applications of psychotherapy; *Three Philosophical Poets* (on Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe) is a landmark of interpretive scholarship, showing how, for example, Old Testament allegory and Greek metaphysics are united by the Italian poet—an almost incredible synthesis of alien ideas; and *Seventeenth Century Background* makes the story of this turbulent and creative period in English thought an unforgettably exciting adventure in historical study. Few readers of these books could part with memory of their contents without a feeling of loss or even a kind of mutilation of mind.

We shall look forward to further Anchor books with eagerness.

Incidentally, if your local dealer does not stock Anchor books, you can order them direct from Eastern News Company, distributors, at 306 West 11th Street, New York 14, N:Y. Eastern News, we might remark, has been a staunch friend and supporter of MANAS from the beginning. Through cooperation of Eastern News, MANAS has appeared weekly on newsstands in New York City, starting with Number 1 of Volume I. This has been of inestimable value to a periodical which is struggling toward national and international circulation, yet lacks both the promotional budget and the popular mass appeal commonly held to be necessary for this sort of growth.

So, while expressing appreciation for the quality of Anchor Book selections, we may also take note of the unusual character of the Eastern News Company, which is devoted to the distribution of educational and cultural literature of recognized worth.

FRONTIERS

Psychological Break-Through

A READER calls attention to the closing chapter of Havelock Ellis' *Dance of Life,* remarking that the hope there presented, of the "æsthetic instinct taking over from the possessive instinct," seems to him both "inspiring and true." For the full impact of this idea, however, it is necessary to read this book which, although set down thirty years ago, has still a fresh, contemporary appeal—even more contemporary, perhaps, than when it first appeared.

The Dance of Life is almost certain to persuade most readers to take another look at their ideas on "art." Art, for Havelock Ellis, acquired a meaning which reaches far beyond ordinary notions on the subject. "Art," he says, "is the moulding force of every culture that Man during his long course has at any time or place produced. It is the reality of what we imperfectly term 'morality.' It is all human creation."

Morals, for Ellis, is the art of living. Yet he wrestles with definitions quoting a score or more of other thinkers while adding several of his own. The idea that ari art must serve a "moral" end comes up for examination:

> To assert that poetry exists for morals is merely to assert that one art exists for the sake of another art, which at the best is rather a futile statement, while, so far as it is really accepted, it cannot fail to crush the art thus subordinated. If we have the insight to see that an art has its own part of life, we shall also see that it has its own intrinsic morality, which cannot be the morality of morals or of any other art than itself.... The Puritan's strait-jacket shows the vigour of his external morals; it also bears witness to the lack of internal morality which necessitates that control. . . .

This chapter is a catalogue of profundities and semi-profundities. Ellis continues:

> Most of us, it seems to Bergson, never see reality at all, we only see the labels we have fixed on things to mark for us their usefulness. A veil is interposed between us and the reality of things. The artist, the man of genius, raises this veil and reveals Nature to us. He is naturally endowed with a detachment from life, and so possesses as it were a virginal freshness in seeing, hearing, or thinking. That is "intuition," an instinct that has become disinterested. "Art has no other object but to remove the practically useful symbols, the conventional and socially accepted generalities, so as to bring us face to face with reality itself." Art would thus be fulfilling its function the more completely the further it removes us from ordinary life, or, more strictly, from any personal interest in life. . . .

Suggestive passages of this sort go on and on. If Ellis had been a lesser man, one might insist that he shies away from art with a "moral message" for the reason that, with others of his generation, he was sick to death of conventional moralizing and sought the freer air of uninhibited creativity. But what Ellis really seems to be saying is that an art which has to "preach" its morality is merely bad art—that the truly great expression will embody sufficient of a universal quality that its morality will be effortless and wholly appropriate. Its meaning, that is, at the moral level, will not vulgarly intrude upon the reflective individual, but will nevertheless be there, as truth of many sorts may be found in every authentic creation.

The Dance of Life is a work of great self-consciousness, which brings us to the point of these notes in review. The artist, as Ellis describes him, is a man who acts as an individual with the power to create. He possesses a sense of the nature of being which is lacking or dulled in many men. The latter usually think of "art" as pictures hanging in galleries, or canvases within heavily gilded frames which are, in turn, framed by costly and luxurious homes. "Art" is a subject for conversation, for worldly-wise tolerance and condescension. But Ellis proposes that art is the natural expression of the *normal,* uncorrupted human being. Man, then, is naturally an artist, on this view. When he looks out on the world, he sees meanings instead of an array of "utilities." The wild enchantment of a mountain canyon makes no appeal to him as a business opportunity for an exclusive tourist camp. The busy life of a city does not thrill him with a feeling of its

productive industry, unless it be in the terms that Walt Whitman might have been thrilled.

An artist, we shall be told, must eat. How soon, alas, comes this forcible reminder from practical men of affairs—the men who "make the world go 'round." Yet the practical men who complain of taxes and "kids in the army" might learn great lessons from the artist, who sometimes is willing to go hungry, not because he wants to, or likes it, but because, in a world dominated by businessmen, the artist is often a misfit. Ellis, an artist in the study of man and human behavior, has this to say:

> . . . the possessive instinct, while it is the cause of the formation of an economic civilized society, when pushed too far becomes the cause of the ruin of that society. Man, who begins by acquiring just enough force to compel Nature to supply his bare needs, himself becomes, according to the tragic Greek saying, the greatest force of Nature.

Now comes an interesting comment on the role of law and convention:

> Yet the fact that a civilisation may persist for centuries shows that men in societies have found methods of combating the exaggerated development of the possessive instinct, of retaining it within bounds which have enabled societies to enjoy a fairly long life. These methods become embodied in religions and moralities and laws. They react in concert to restrain the greediness engendered by the possessive instinct. They make virtues of Temperance and Sobriety and Abnegation. They invent Great Images which arouse human hopes and human fears. They prescribe imperatives, with sanctions, in part imposed by the Great Images and in part by the actual executive force of social law. So societies are enabled to immunise themselves against the ravaging auto-intoxication of an excessive instinct of possession, and the services rendered by religions and moralities cannot be too highly estimated.
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> They are the spontaneous physiological processes which counteract disease until medical science comes into play.
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> But are they of any use in those periods of advanced civilisation which they have themselves contributed to form?. . . The efficacy of those restraints depends on a sensibility which could only exist when men scarcely distinguished imaginations from perceptions. Thence arose the credulity on which religions and moralities flourished. But now the Images have grown pale in human sensibility, just as they have in words, which are but effaced images. We need a deeper reality to take the place of these early beliefs which the growth of intelligence necessarily shows to be illusory. We must seek in the human age an instinct in which is manifested a truly autonomous play of the power of the imagination, an instinct which by virtue of its own proper development may restrain the excesses of the possessive instinct and dissipate the perils which threaten civilisation. The æsthetic instinct alone answers to that double demand.

Against the acquisitive instinct which seeks property, Ellis sets the creative impulse of the artist. If by artist we may understand men like Havelock Ellis, then we can do nothing but agree. Actually, the word "artist" is not of extraordinary importance in this argument, although it seems a bit unfaithful to Ellis to say so. He is really calling for human beings who respect themselves as creative beings. What is wanted, then, and what most of us find quite difficult is the capacity to look at our lives and our actions in a new light of self-consciousness—as though the self-justifications we accept from custom and convention were simply *no longer there*. Eventually, we suspect, every man will have to face himself without the support of the crowd, without the reassuring approval of the market-place. A man is not quite a man until he has begun for himself this somewhat painful course of psychological break-through to individuality. The conventions on which we rely, as Ellis says, have had undeniable uses—have been literally indispensable to a certain stage of human development and culture. Yet they are manifestly not enough. They are only the *instinctive* safeguards established by the social organism, while the present, as Ellis puts it, calls for "a truly autonomous play of the imagination."

The man who starts working in this direction will probably have to give some hostages to Caesar. The artist, we have admitted, must eat. But let him beware lest, in order to exchange his crust for a banquet, he tries to glorify this

allegiance by enthusiastic cheers and wordy justifications. A compromised artist can never escape the ache of conscience—the feeling that he is somehow self-betrayed.

It is not that we advocate the bare subsistence of a hermit's cave, but rather that what needs to be recognized is the fact that an excessive emphasis on the need to be "practical"—to see only utility instead of searching out meanings—to use up one's energy in acquisition instead of creation—has turned this world into a desert of want, with only a few oases of prosperity heavily guarded by atom bombs and such-like devices. The people who set out to turn the world into something better will probably have to be satisfied with a humble fare, even though their capacities are such that they might easily repose among the wealthy and the mighty. Nor is there anything "wrong" with a comfortable existence supported by an ample supply of the things of this world. But there is something wrong when people are so easily persuaded to cut one another's throats to get these things, while preventing others from getting them.

The angry revolutions of our time, we submit, have been frantic efforts to restore stature, color, and life to the Great Images to which Ellis refers. They are spasmodic attempts by the social organism to prevent human intelligence from doing away with itself. The terror of the dictator is the tool by which he tries to convince his people of the reality of "beliefs which the growth of intelligence shows to be illusory," Such methods, however, cannot succeed, save by throwing mankind back into the stage of infancy—or by being correct in the assumption that civilization has failed as an enterprise in growth toward self-consciousness, and now needs the iron rule of a formidable Decalogue, the stern authority of a threatening and Jealous God.

Perhaps Ellis is right in suggesting that we need the help of the artist to lift us out of ourselves. Literature, which is a form of art, a critic once remarked, is a confession of social life, reflecting all its qualities, its baseness and its heroism. The artist, then, provides a vision of, or at least a perspective on, ourselves. Not all artists, doubtless, deserve the attention which Ellis recommends, yet there is so much wisdom in his observation concerning the appreciation of art that we offer it in conclusion. He found that, in his own case, the perception of beauty in a painter's work—

> came only after years of contemplation, and then most often by a sudden revelation, in a flash, by a direct intuition of the beauty of some particular picture which henceforth became the clue to all the painter's work. It is a process comparable to that which is in religion termed "conversion," and, indeed, of like nature. Schopenhauer long ago pointed out that a picture should be looked at as a royal personage is approached, in silence, until the moment it pleases to speak to you, for, if you speak first (and how many critics one knows who "speak first"), you expose yourself to hear nothing but the sound of your own voice. In other words, it is a spontaneous and "mystical" experience.

Some may suppose this undue honor to a painting. We shall not argue the point. But the principle proposed is sound enough to be applicable to all phases of human experience—to the great spectacle of Life.