

## Writers and Writing

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dividual. "How easy everything would be," Friderike writes, "if you were only more aware of your creative powers; you are a much too modest creature."

That Friderike constantly encouraged and inspired him we see from the letters of each. Although the lectures (like his journalistic chores) took him away from his writing he loved the public acclaim, once signing himself "Your seven-thousand-times photographed, filmed, and much radioed Stefan." Likewise he took great pleasure from the popularity of his books outside of Germany.

—EDWARD A. BLOOM.

**ADVICE TO A POET:** A young German poet about to become an army officer and saddened by the apparent frustration of his artistic desires sought advice in a letter from one of the great figures of his day, Rainer Maria Rilke. Although Rilke had never met the acolyte, Franz Xaver Kappus, he answered generously and wisely. From this beginning grew the famous ten "**Letters to a Young Poet**" (Norton, \$3), first edited and translated in 1934 by M. D. Herter Norton, and now revised with extensive notes. Like Kappus, Rilke had been an unhappy cadet, in a Moravian academy, until ill health forced his withdrawal. His sympathetic understanding everywhere underscores the letters he sent Kappus between 1903 and 1908 from various places in Europe where he searched vainly for cures. In offering solace to the young man Rilke was setting down his own positive testament of life and art. "Do not believe," he wrote, "that he who seeks to comfort you lives untroubled among the simple and quiet words that sometimes do you good. His life has much difficulty and sadness."

With a gentle, compassionate simplicity characteristic of his poetry Rilke criticized Kappus's verses. But he warned him, "With nothing can one approach a work of art so little as with critical words," and, "Nobody can counsel and help you. . . . Go into yourself. Search for the reason that bids you write." Solitude according to Rilke is the essence of art, which is "an infinite loneliness." The created work he said must spring from necessity. The "great inner solitude" cannot be destroyed if the individual is dedicated.

Rilke's beautifully stated counsel, thus, may be regarded as a sensitized projection of his introspective processes as well as of his poetic theory and poetic application. —E. A. B.



—"Road Mending on the Boulevard St. Remy," by Van Gogh.

"... paintings of exceptional distinction are scarce."

vate collections are still liquidated from time to time.

**I**N THIS connection I am reminded of an ingenious explanation of the mechanics of the art boom which a New York dealer gave me a few weeks ago. He compared the art market to a long flight of stairs, with numerous landings. The prices, he said, go up step by step until they reach a certain floor. At that point the market (especially in Paris) freezes, and very little is available for the collector or dealer to buy. For convenience we might call this the \$1,000 level, and people who have paid around this price show no inclination to sell. But when the ascent resumes and reaches a stage sufficiently higher than the first—\$5,000, for example—the market re-opens and many works are offered by those to whom the profit is attractive. After an interval the climb begins again. It continues until a third landing—\$25,000 or even \$50,000—has been attained, when the same thawing process takes place once more. And so on.

The dealer's theory, as noted, applies mainly to the Parisian market. But since this market is a vital force in establishing prices elsewhere, the theory is worth keeping in mind. It does not, of course, obviate the possibility that isolated artists may rise in value through intrinsic quality alone, even though this quality is admitted only locally. Our own Winslow Homer is a case in point. Europeans have a limited respect for his art, if they know this art at all. Yet in this country Homer's prices have gone up almost without pause since

his death in 1910. The same thing may be said of certain British or Central European artists whose names are seldom mentioned far from home. I always remember the remark of the great art historian Erwin Panofsky when someone accused him of false modesty about a book he had just published. "False modesty," he said, "is better than no modesty."

Are we reaching the top of the current art boom? As suggested in passing, no one can safely predict whether this is the case or not. Certainly some of the famous artists of the past seventy-five years may one day slide abruptly down the banister of the staircase their market has ascended by stages: some will make the climb again; others will slump forever at the bottom of the flight. It seems to me, however, that the big figures in twentieth-century art will hold their lofty place or go still higher. We should remember that it has taken them a very long time to get where they are market-wise, as it took their immediate predecessors, the post-impressionists. Degas lived to see one of his pictures bring around \$100,000. Why should not Picasso? The profound visual speculation to which we give the name "modern art" has taken a full half century to earn its fortune in hard, cold cash. I doubt that, at its best, it will soon lose it, though some artists too heavily indebted to fashion may one day pay a harsh rate on interest. —JAMES THRALL SOBY.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** In the issue of February 5 Mr. Soby will discuss the current market for American art around the world.

# Education and the Control of Evolution

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dependent of natural selective influences—through medical science from disease-producing microorganisms, through weapons from all higher forms of animal life except his own species, through agriculture from acute limitations in food supply. Advances in the field of medicine, totally aside from their great humanitarian influence, are significant in human evolution in that medicine is a relaxation of selective pressure. Each conquest of a disease permits men constitutionally susceptible to it to survive where they previously would have died; medicine contributes to a more varied spectrum of humanity. It is not too rash to predict that selection, *except as it may be practised on man by himself*, will be a negligible factor in changing our biological future.

One other force remains to be considered, namely, mutation. Geneticists find that gene mutations occur repeatedly at a characteristic rate for each and the mutant returns to the original gene form at another characteristic rate. In the absence of migration, selection, and chance the frequency of a mutant type in a population would theoretically become stabilized at a level determined solely by the relative strength of the forward and backward mutation rates. Mutations which have been repeated many times during the existence of the human species would not, by themselves, be expected to produce anything novel in our future biological heritage. There is always the possibility that some brand-new mutation will occur. But any large deviations from the normal are seldom successful in evolution, and with humans the new type would have to intermarry with "normal" people and establish successful mutant offspring. Since mankind has already achieved so complex a social system, it seems highly unlikely that novel mutants will be a significant factor in human destiny. We can, to be sure, now artificially speed up mutation rates in experimental organisms by radiation and with chemicals but, short of a vast breeding program involving official artificial selection, mutation appears to be an improbable force for changing the human species.

The most reasonable conclusion seems to be that man will remain biologically much the same far into the foreseeable future. We are "stuck" with our biological heritage; though long-range stability together with maintained variability in each gen-

eration do provide a mechanism for biological change if strong adverse forces, now unforeseen, should arise. Science-fiction to the contrary, it is unlikely that the man of 5000 A.D. or 50,000 A.D. will have a big head and withered arms; he will be just about the same physically and mentally as he is today. This being the case, wherein does man's future lie? It is not in organic evolution but, rather, in cultural evolution, which in turn is made possible only because of the level reached in the past by organic evolution.

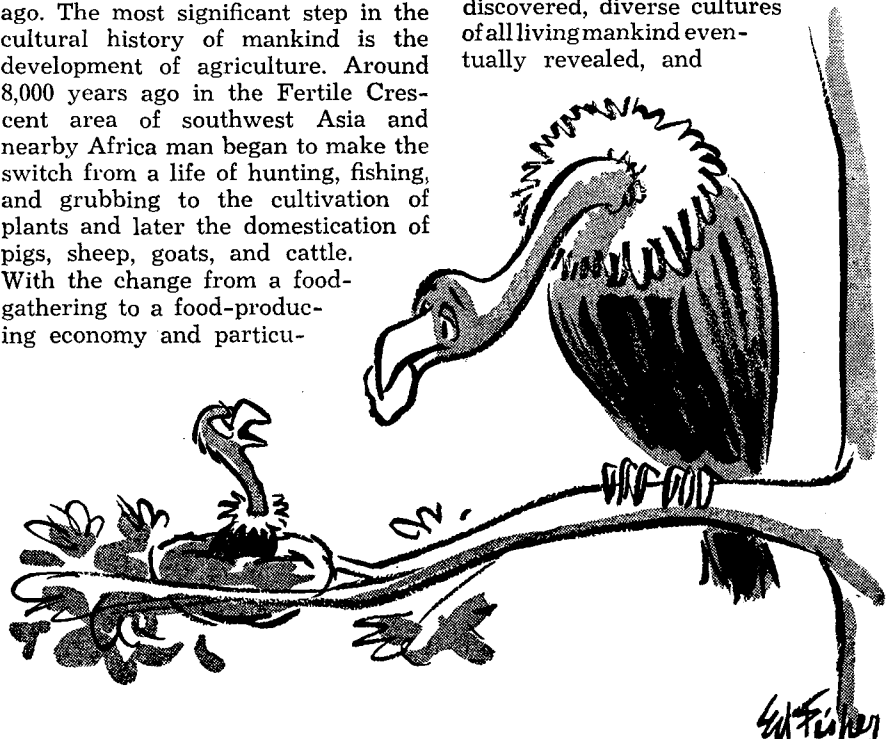
## CULTURAL ACCUMULATION

According to the cultural anthropologist Slotkin, "Culture or civilization, taken in its widest ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, and any other capabilities or habits acquired by man as a member of society." In still more general terms, it is all that is learned rather than directly inherited through the genes. Use of fire and crude stone tools is concrete evidence of culture in early man. Toward the end of the Ice Age bone began to replace stone in implements for special uses in the Western Eurasiatic cultures. Art reached astonishing sophistication in the caves of Lascaux and Altamira in southern Europe 12,000-20,000 years ago. The most significant step in the cultural history of mankind is the development of agriculture. Around 8,000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent area of southwest Asia and nearby Africa man began to make the switch from a life of hunting, fishing, and grubbing to the cultivation of plants and later the domestication of pigs, sheep, goats, and cattle. With the change from a food-gathering to a food-producing economy and particu-

larly with the harvest and storage of grain man acquired security, leisure, and community living on a scale previously impossible.

The Food Producing Revolution was such an important advance that within 2,000 years (4000 B.C.) in this same region—blessed by a favorable combination of human capability, equitable climate, and agriculture—man's cultural pattern reached that degree of complexity known as civilization. According to Toynbee, twenty-one civilizations have risen, seven of which are in existence today. History is essentially a record of these successful human populations. Their roots have always been dependent on agriculture, and particularly cultivated plants; the Sinic on millet and soybeans; the Indic on rice; the Mayan on maize. Each of these civilizations has contributed to man's total cultural heritage.

Culture, from a biological viewpoint, is a means over and above genetical adaptation by which a society adjusts to the environment. All plants and animals (including earliest man) lack sufficient culture to free them from dependence on their environment. Organic evolution endowed man with a superior brain capable of conceptual thought, true speech, and unique powers of educability. Cultural accumulation, triggered by the invention of agriculture, was made possible by writing—the means of recording cultural progress. Urban living stimulated the exchange of ideas. Fifty-five centuries after the beginning of civilization the New World was discovered, diverse cultures of all living mankind eventually revealed, and



"What—carrion again?"



civilized man hesitantly entered an era of "One World Consciousness." As the eighteenth century closed "Scientific Man"—who uses or misuses a rational, step-wise, objective, experimental process to increase knowledge and control—began to emerge as the dominant force in culture. We are in the midst of that period today, struggling ever more successfully to rise above the obstacles imposed by the non-human environment.

#### ACCELERATING ADVANCE

Looking over the record one may gain the impression that man's progress followed a steady rise; a gradual, sustained mastery of his environment. This is not so. Millennia passed without appreciable change. There was relatively little cultural advance from the subhuman types of Java and Peking man of at least 500,000 years ago to Neanderthal man of 100,000 to 50,000 years ago. There has certainly been more cultural change in the last 500 years than in the previous 500,000—and the claim could be substantiated that there has been still greater change in the last fifty years.

Change in speed of human travel is a familiar and dramatic index of "progress." For thousands of years of man's history travel by foot was the fastest means available. The much talked of four-minute mile, fifteen mph, and sprint records of about twenty-five miles per hour represent near limits to unaided human speed. With the domestication of horses, over 5,000 years ago, the rate was raised to a level somewhat less than thirty-eight and one-half mph—the present thoroughbred record (Citation, 1950, one mile in 1.33 3/5). From the beginning of human evolution until the nineteenth century man was held to speeds of less than forty miles per hour. In 1829 this barrier was broken when a steam locomotive made forty-four miles per hour, and by 1901 steam engines attained a speed of two miles a minute. In 1910 the automobile took over with a speed of 131 mph; and in 1920 a French airplane set the record at 188 mph. Propeller-driven aircraft led the field until the later war years—in 1939 a Messerschmidt smashed official records with 469 mph. Since the war jet-propelled aircraft have jumped human speeds by another 300 miles per hour. The 1953 record for man's level flight was 753 mph. A piloted aircraft has already traveled in level flight at 1,600 mph—almost two-and-one-half times the speed of sound.

This achievement is staggering. In the beginning it took 500,000 years to make a gain of twenty-five miles per hour (fifteen to forty mph); and

today only fifteen years to make a gain of almost 300 miles per hour (469 to 753). To consider that this represents only technological advance is to miss the whole spirit of human imagination and understanding. To be sure the index is speed, but the real adventure is in the increased knowledge: knowledge of aerodynamics; knowledge of combustion; knowledge of metals; knowledge and control of the world we live in. The same could be said today of any area of the basic sciences or developmental improvements dependent upon them. Edwin B. Wilson of Harvard has said, "We can do more things with greater assurance of success than we could 2,000 years ago or 200 years ago or even twenty years ago . . . there is an accumulation of knowl-

edge and of method with a resultant increase of control. The scientist builds upon previous knowledge. There is advance of the sort one finds in the growth of a coral reef—there is building upon what is already laid down."

This concept of accumulative accelerating progress is not generally considered applicable to philosophy, poetry, the fine arts, or for that matter to social studies. It is, indeed, fashionable among some in these quarters to voice the opinion that belief in progress is Victorian, something that was outmoded by 1914. Regardless of the necessity for applying different criteria to the humanities than to sciences, it is a valid conclusion that the common pool of human experience and knowledge, the total cultural her-



## Your Literary I. Q.

Conducted by John T. Winterich

#### RECOLLECTING RHYMERS

Unlike elephants, which sometimes do, poets never forget. They remember so well, in fact, that they frequently boast about it. Here are ten remembering bards, and you are asked to identify them and the works cited, and to tell, in each instance, exactly what is remembered. If you achieve fifteen of the requested bits of information, grin and bear it; from sixteen through twenty-four, smile but don't cheer; twenty-five and better, loud huzzas. Answers on page 40.

1. "I remember — — — — —,  
How it thundered o'er the tide!"
2. "I remember, I remember  
— — — — —,  
The little window where the sun  
Came peeping in at morn."
3. "Well I remember — — — in the sunny arbor  
Beyond your open door."
4. "I will remember — — — — —,  
Little French Lick and Lundy's Lane."
5. "I well remember — — — — —,  
And what I wanted. You, unwise,  
With sore unwisdom, had no eyes  
For what was patently the cause."
6. "Yes, I remember — — — — —  
The name—because one afternoon  
Of heat the express-train drew up there  
Unwontedly. It was late June."
7. "I remember — — — — —; sweetly did she speak and move;  
Such a one do I remember, whom to look at was to love."
8. "Only stay quiet while my mind remembers  
— — — — — from the beauty of embers."
9. "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought  
I summon up remembrance — — — — —,  
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,  
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste."
10. "I remember, I say, — — — — — who passionately clung to me;  
Again we wander—we love—we separate again."