

The Saturday Review

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Fable for 1957

AND then one day in 1957 the men of the United Nations felt they had wearied of listening to one another. And so they made it to be known that on a certain day they would open their doors and ask the people to come in to speak, that they might say what was in their hearts. When the day came the people waited in long lines, each for his turn to speak, for it was true that there was much that was of concern to them. And three of those who spoke seemed to speak for all. One of them was a teacher.

"It is my privilege in life to help in the education of the young," he said. "I am asked to prepare the young for a place in society, to instruct them in skills, to enable them to place a high value on the lessons learned from human experience. But the biggest problem in education lies outside the school. It is that the world itself scorns the meaning of education.

"You dispute this? I ask you a question, then: What is the one purpose of education that ties all other purposes in education together? And I would answer that it is to profit from experience.

"For this is what progress is made of. Man learns his lessons and grows. He builds his sciences on the tests he makes and the experiences that flow out of them. We teach the story of history that young people may learn. And yet the big lessons in the world that determine whether people will live or die, and the meaning that their lives will take, have yet to be learned by governments. Education for the young thus becomes a farce because society itself refuses to be educated, refuses to respect known experience as a guide.

"Consider the history of nations. Never once in the history of man has peace been maintained by coalitions or power blocs or special alignments solemnly put together. Yet there invariably comes a time when it is to the interest of a nation to break the treaty or the alignment. Very recently many of the nations of the Western world came together and with great ceremony signed pacts establishing a North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which called for militant action to resist aggression. But as has happened again and again in the past, when a situation arose that made unilateral action desirable, that action was taken and the basis of the treaty organization was grossly violated.

"We talk about the consequences if the peace should fail. We said the peace could be assured if only aggression could be halted. And we looked in only one place for the potential aggressor, forgetting that war can also be the product of an uncontrolled situation. How much has the world actually studied the causes of war? Why is there an illiteracy of society itself on matters that transcend all else? How can we expect education to make any sense to our youngsters, when we send them into a world in which anarchy is upheld over sanity, lawlessness preferred to peace?

"Consider the paradox. Here we have a United Nations. At a moment's notice, dozens of men in this chamber would spring to their feet if the sovereignty of their nations were infringed. But what about the sovereignty of the human community? Who will spring to his feet to defend people—people, regardless of their national flag?

"Slowly, at incredible cost, the

realization has come that a U. N. Police Force is necessary. Several questions: How is it that the lessons of Korea with respect to a police force were not learned? How is it that such force is brought into being only after the damage is done? And now we have the ludicrous spectacle of the U. N. Police Force being instructed by the belligerents concerning where they should or should not go. And how can a police force truly function unless it has clearly defined laws to enforce? People want justice. The purpose of law is to create a foundation for justice. If the U. N. is concerned only with improvising a force to repel aggression after it occurs, and not with justice, there can be no real basis for peace.

"At least this is what history tells us. And we have a right to expect that nations will learn from history, for what is a nation but an assemblage of human beings—the same human beings who work so hard to make their lives productive and who insist that their children be given a proper education?"

THE second person who spoke identified himself as a clergyman.

"My plea is brief," he said. "I ask whether you understand the position in which you put me and all men like me who minister to the spiritual needs of people. You have told us, in effect, to detach ourselves from our concerns with the sacredness of man. You have arrogated to yourselves—and when I speak about 'you' I speak of the nations in their full sovereign armor—the power of decision concerning what the nature of man is to be. You now possess the means for creating new forms of life to replace man. You can do this by twisting man's genes and making him into a monster. You say that this will not happen, but you do not know that it will not happen.

"What is Sin? What is Evil? Are they merely random acts committed by an individual against others and against himself? Or are they things that can make man into something he was never intended to be?

"If, therefore, I am not expected to exempt myself from my concern for the sacredness of man, I must come before you to ask that you see beyond the cause of the nation to the cause

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NEOPLASTIC PEOPLE

EDGAR ANSEL MOWRER's "Sawdust, Seaweed, and Synthetics" (SR Dec. 8) touches on a problem that needs a lot more thought. The analogies between man in society and cells in cell communities are legitimate. The problem of self-limitation of growth was solved a long time ago by cells; it had to be before the higher organisms could develop.

I wish to urge a Society for the Study of World Population, to collect funds and sponsor scientific research on the problem of how to limit world populations and on the question of what constitutes an optimum population—before it is too late. It should also sponsor philosophic discussion of the issues involved. The American people have responded generously to the drives put on by the great philanthropic organizations for cancer, polio, heart disease, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, tuberculosis, and other diseases that represent evils whose elimination is a universal goal. Our people must be made to realize that unlimited use of man's reproductive powers is as much to be feared as any other neoplastic disease. All uncontrolled growths inevitably kill the host on which they live.

VAN R. POTTER.

Madison, Wis.

NEUROTIC SOLITUDE

IT'S CURRENT psychiatry which helps make for overpopulation. These days its express goal is genital primacy, monogamous affection, heterosexuality, marriage, and procreation. Not just for those who want to, but for *everybody*. If you don't want to you're inviting psychiatric attention. Solitude? Privacy? Independence? To most psychiatrists these are neurotic desires.

JAFFERY SUTTON.

New York, N.Y.

SR'S CLARION CALL

I'M AFRAID THAT the future, which has the right to judge us as to how we meet our specific challenges, will find us a lazy, stupid, and ungrateful generation. At least SR is doing its best to wake us up, with articles like Mowrer's.

EUNICE FITZGIBBON.

Matteson, Ill.

WHERE WE DON'T WANDER

CONGRATULATIONS TO Mowrer and to SR. I wish the article had ended with this quote from Henry Thoreau: "We need to witness our own limits transgressed and some life pasturing freely where we never wander."

G. R. DEERING.

Manhattan Beach, Calif.

LEVITTOWNER SPEAKS

AS BOTH A TEACHER and a resident of one of what Mowrer calls the "monotonous



THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"Stop making promises—you're already elected."

Levittowns" I hasten to deny that all the members of my profession are little more than coaches for conformity. Don't you think we like privacy once in a while, too? Certainly we're not beating the drums for the overcrowded classrooms in which we're supposed to function. I do agree that Levittowns aren't the most beautiful places on the globe, but they are more beautiful than the cities from which most of us came. There's grass here—nice and green, too.

WILLIAM C. HUGHES.

Levittown, Pa.

GRIM PROSPECT

THE PROSPECT OF earth "covered with a writhing mass of human beings"—and the grimmer reality of modern Calcutta or Canton—ought to shock us into doing something to preserve the treasures of natural beauty, freedom, quiet, adventure, and self-expression. Otherwise "Nineteen Eighty-four" will be upon us before we know it.

WILLIAM E. LUKENS.

Plymouth Meeting, Pa.

MORE AVERAGE CHILDREN

THE "AVERAGE YOUNG WOMAN" is limiting her childbearing—that's the trouble. The young woman whose intelligence soars above 140—the woman whose children are needed in the future world—is probably married to a college professor making \$4,000 a year, and has only one child. Or she's a career woman with no—or just one—child. The silly little fluff who could barely finish high school already has four children, and the semi-moronic woman in the slums of Asia has borne eighteen,

of whom twelve or so somehow survive.

SR should not encourage the young woman of high intelligence to shirk her biological responsibility—on the grounds of overpopulating the earth or any other grounds. The average intelligent college woman had better have ten or eleven children, even if she has to deny herself an automatic dishwasher, if we want a decent world to live in.

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY.

Rochester, Tex.

THE BALL TO SIMPLE SIMON

DEAN GILDERSLEEVE's astringent comment on "The Abuse of Democracy" (SR Nov. 24) brings to mind Bryan's dictum, "The cure for the ills of democracy is more democracy." Let us make our colleges completely democratic. If it gives a dimwit a sense of inferiority not to be promoted along with the bright, it also gives the feeble a sense of inferiority not to be acclaimed along with the strong. Why should that hulking brute Taddeo Przybyski be allowed to monopolize the position of halfback on the varsity team merely because he can plunge fifteen yards through the Oklahoma line whenever he is given the ball? To let Przybyski have all the glory gives a sense of inferiority to Caspar Milquetoast, Jr. True, young Milquetoast weighs only 110 pounds and is blind in one eye, but what of that? Our team must be run on democratic principles at any cost; only so can we achieve what seems to be the goal of American education: to prevent Simple Simon from ever suspecting that Socrates is the better man.

GERALD W. JOHNSON.

Baltimore, Md.