

be out of jobs. This monstrous bureaucracy can be depended upon to employ every possible means to preserve itself.

Mr. Eaton contended in his interview that there are no Communists in the United States "to speak of, except in the minds of those on the payroll of the FBI." I have no doubt that Mr. Eaton is correct. Although some people may have ceased to be Communists because of the social, economic and penal pressure asserted against them in the past decade, the more likely fact is that world events changed the minds of most Communists who have left the fold. Domestic Communism is not a menace today, and the army of snoopers are little better than a WPA engaged in made work.

Unfortunately, the climate of opinion is still so freighted with fright that forthright comments such as Mr. Eaton's can be drowned out by the usual noise about the Communist conspiracy. Some day, perhaps, we shall realize that a healthy society with confidence in itself needs fewer policemen than a frightened society. Until then, we shall be saddled with an expensive and for the most part useless corps of snoopers.

HUMANISM AROUND THE WORLD

Impressions of a Trip to America

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"If you have any thoughts or comments about your recent trip, *The Humanist* would be proud to publish them," Priscilla Robertson wrote, just after I returned. I have just enough pride to be susceptible to such an invitation; the more so as she added, "We should be particularly happy to have your informal, personal impressions." Good! So let it be understood that these lines will give no more than that. Perhaps, too, in this way I can make up for the fact that I had not much opportunity to speak for chapters of the Humanist Association. (I was invited to America by the Ethical Union; and this, of course, determined my schedule.) Nevertheless, I did meet quite a few A.H.A. members as well.

Two days after the Annual Assembly of the Dutch Humanist League, I started out. First stop was London, where I met with Dr. Blackham, the secretary of the International Humanist and Ethical Union, and we discussed the "atom bomb statement" of our international congress held in London last year. That same day I was in Glasgow, and on my way to New York! Inter-continental journeys are becoming almost a matter of daily routine. (By the way, if I may judge by a superficial impression, I would say that the Scotch are not the surly, sparing people they are made out to be in jokes. I'm inclined to say, "The English are friendly, but the Scotch are nice!") And now, I am already above the ocean. We make a "small" detour because of bad weather,

by way of Greenland and Labrador. Then—next morning—we are landing in New York. America!

New York is exactly what one had expected. Extremely busy, crowded. The skyscrapers are there as they should be, and at their feet, at the entrance to the city—a toll. When we Dutch hear of tolls, we think of the Middle Ages, but Americans seem to consider them quite usual. Apparently this practice has to do with the economic assumption that everything should pay for itself. Apart from that, this phenomenon has nothing in common with old-fashioned European tolls. There are plenty of entrance-ways with guardians in neat boxes, and on each box a small sign with the name of the guardian on it. For they are not just numbers, but individual personalities. America! I saw the same thing later on at post offices, for example—but this didn't keep the clerk from being peevish! Is this, I wonder, something to do with post office windows everywhere in the world?

American life is hectic. People work strenuously. But life in Europe nowadays tends in the same direction. Life in America, however, requires continuous top achievements. They are rewarded very well—but no one can be sure of his position. In this highly competitive society one never feels safe. This gives the life its typical character of insecurity, an inner, spiritual insecurity which the American way of life can hardly hide. Moreover, no time is left in the day for rest and reflection, or friendly contact with one's fellow man. This lack is made more acute by the enormous distances which people in the cities have to travel between their work and their suburban homes, which extend for miles along the outskirts. Really, it is a high price to pay for uncontrolled urban development.

"Relax, take it easy!" This is the magic phrase that Americans call to each other between bursts of activity. But many of them no longer have the capacity to relax, even if they have the time. For a fundamental insecurity cannot be abolished by tranquilizers, and a vehement hunger for friendship cannot be appeased by fulsome handshakes and embraces. But the foreigner is struck by the warm cordiality that meets him on all sides, and he notices the good-natured social give-and-take and democratic behavior among Americans of all classes.

In such a society—and the whole Western world is tending in the same direction—it is important to have, somewhere, a refuge where one can feel really at home and safe. This, I think, accounts for the revival of the churches as social institutions in the United States; and it is also responsible for the growth of the American Humanist and Ethical groups. Communities of kindred and united spirits, with significant ceremonies and activities directed toward the common experience of a common conviction, provide a refuge from the harshness of existence, and a relief from the demands of society. In a society that tends to conformity, ethical humanists are the non-conformists, united by a religious attitude and a scientific approach. And they are willing to make considerable sacrifices in order to exercise their function as a guide in society.

New York—Yellow Springs. Headquarters, respectively, of the American Ethical Union and the American Humanist Association. I could not tell which was more friendly toward me, more generous in its hospitality. If I see it correctly, the most important task of the Humanist Association is the publication of *The Humanist*, as the instrument of its clarifying function. The Humanists can boast of a number of the most outstanding American scientists and scholars among their membership, and these men and women seem to be more active in connection with the humanist movement than they are in the Netherlands.

The Ethical Union, on the other hand, places more emphasis on practical activities, although various enterprises begun by the Ethical Societies—such as the New York settlement house and the excellent Fieldston School—have since become independent. Much attention is paid to education, and to problems such as race discrimination, capital punishment, the atom bomb and world peace.

Traveling means (under certain circumstances) broadening one's view. I learned, better than I knew before, how the same humanist principle can be realized in various ways, according to the national character and historical circumstances. I think it is worthwhile to consider what is essential in the humanist philosophy, and what is accidental. Not that this would make us change our own viewpoint, but it would broaden our view and strengthen our reasoning. Of course, there is much that is the same in all the national varieties of humanism. For example, the eternal quarrel between "rationalism" and "religious" humanism. There is no essential contradiction between them, of course. There is, however, a kind of sentimental religiosity that does not solve any problem. But there is also a narrow-minded "rationalism" that leads straight to fanaticism. The most fanatical faiths are rationalized: Catholicism, Calvinism, Communism. What matters is the readiness for unlimited communication. It can be achieved by those who believe in the humanist idea without fear of traditional faith.

Washington. Of course I made the pilgrimage to Mount Vernon. (The road leads past the Pentagon. Peculiar!) And I paid a visit to the Capitol, where I was struck by the fact that there were public galleries for hundreds of people. (Ours are filled up by thirty people.) This is American democracy. And I noticed again that there is no social distance between governors and governed. Here, democracy really means government by the people; and this is also true in private organizations. But it is not without its dangers; the multiplicity of panels, committees and individuals may frustrate efficient leadership. Either leaders are elected because they are more able, more intelligent, more responsible than the average member, or they should not be elected at all.

The small cities are very pleasant, and so are the suburban residential areas, to a certain extent. But architecture is often not really convincing. And apart from that, there is an enormous waste of land that cannot go on. Hence there is the problem of zoning, already well known in crowded Europe.

I should not be surprised if this country were to pass through fundamental changes in the near future, both in the social and in the cultural field. The insecurity mentioned above is one possible source of such change. The parent-child relationship is another, and the school system still another. I know America does not fear changes. The great attraction of this country is the lack of prejudice and the readiness to face problems realistically. Europe has its own one-sidedness. There must be a way in between. Let us hope that humanism can point that way, viewing real human needs and longings and looking toward the future of humanity, without the weariness that paralyzes Europe.

Chicago is a city with character. It has many beautiful buildings, quite a few parks, and a lovely lake front. Maybe this is partly the result of political corruption, justifying and maintaining its power by public works that "the people" could see and enjoy. But honest democracy should match the challenge of corruption. (And what about the slums behind the modern buildings in Chicago? Or the Puerto Rican tenements immediately behind the luxurious dwellings on Central Park West in New York?)

One might despair of a solution to these problems. But then one meets someone who makes one believe again in our possibilities. I am thinking of Edith Sampson, the Negro woman (she did not like the phrase, "colored people") who presided over the Ethical Society banquet in Chicago. She is, I should think, one of the outstanding personalities in the field of Negro emancipation. She told me about an occasion when she went to keep an appointment in a fashionable club, and the doorman asked her where she was going. "Inside," she replied; "I am a lady, and I don't go anywhere unless I am invited." With justified pride, she spoke of the efforts to educate her race, for example by the foundation of vocational schools. Meeting people like her convinces one all over again that there is a future, if we but have belief and courage.

"What do you think of America?" people were already asking me, eight hours after I arrived. Well, what do I think about America? It's fascinating, it's abundant, it's generous, it's daring. But what do I think about it? To be honest: I don't know. In thirty days, I traveled through a small part of the country, and met mainly humanists. But I know that America is an amazing country. Between Forty-second Street in New York and the high-quality universities, between the almost tropical impressiveness of the Mississippi River and the Pentagon, between the superficiality of mass living and the uneasiness of responsible people, I saw men and women striving toward a satisfying way of life. The idea that life can be worthwhile is found all over the world. We

feel less lonely, knowing that there are people everywhere who cling to the ideal of true humanity; and we feel strengthened by finding that the same longings inspire all of them. We have to travel the same arduous way—the way of all generations before us, who struggled and failed as we do, and sometimes conquered.

THE HUMANIST FRONTIER

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The Angry and the Beat

Never averse to publicity—good or bad, as long as it is not indifferent—the off-Broadway producers of *The Making of Moo* let it be known that New York was about to see “its first atheist play,” and further made it known in a paid advertisement that they were implacably determined to present it “to an adult audience regardless of how controversial, amoral, or ‘uncivilized’ it may be!” In the play which is the subject of all these brave and defiant words, three Britishers in the primitive East invent a new religion of the god Moo, complete with ritualistic mumbo-jumbo, to replace that of the water-god Agar, which they have destroyed by building a dam. During the process they manage to convert themselves, and the new faith ultimately becomes fat and prosperous, attracting gifts from pious millionaire converts overseas. In the words of Brooks Atkinson, Nigel Dennis, the playwright, “is being beastly about religion” by showing that “educated people will believe any nonsense, although the illiterates have to be convinced.”

Whether correctly or not, the appearance of the play with its “schoolboy impudence” regarding hitherto sacred subjects has been credited to Britain’s Angry Young Men, believed by some to be the counterparts of our own Beat Generation (another debatable point). Thereupon, some Humanists seem to have reasoned thus: “The AYM and the BG are highly critical of religious orthodoxy; and so are Humanists; therefore, the AYM and the BG are Humanists.” This is known in logic as the fallacy of the undistributed middle term. As a matter of fact, the relationship of the various representatives of the two groups of rebels to established religion and to Humanism is an extremely complicated one.

In the first place, neither the AYM nor the BG are organized, uniform groups. In fact, their members are almost as critical of each other as they are of their common enemies, the Insiders or the Squares. What they have in common is disaffiliation and its consequence, social irresponsibility. As John Osborne’s caddish hero Jimmy Porter says (in *Look Back in Anger*): “There are no good brave causes left.” As for joining any crusade whatever, in the