

A Word With You

By ROBERT CLANCY

About three times a year we become acutely aware of the younger generation — when the school year ends, when the school year begins, and Christmas time. But the condition is chronic—the children ye always have with you.

As each new generation of children comes along, each new generation of adults and old folks starts worrying over them. "In *my* day, children respected their elders." "We didn't have all these gadgets and mechanical toys." "Children have it too easy nowadays."

There was a similar lament over the rising generation in one of the plays of Aristophanes (fifth century B. C.) and no doubt there was parental head-shaking long before that. Evidently the worry is just as chronic as the children.

Nevertheless, each new generation is not exactly the same as the preceding one. The difference is not so much in the new individuals—for as a new crop comes along we can recognize the same types we saw a generation back. The thing that characterizes a "generation" is its social environment. Thus we had after World War I "the lost generation" — and after World War II we have what one writer calls "the beat generation." The "beat" ones are the children of the "lost" ones.

These epithets are not pleasing to the ear. Are these our children? It is true that responsibility is basically individual—but we cannot avoid the sociologist's conclusion that social environment shapes a child's behavior.

Where's the Initiative?

But here's the paradox: The social environment of "the beat generation" is one in which individual responsibility has been weakened, one in which the individual is becoming more and more anonymous. It is usually a drift from an assembly-line "education" to a job as a cog in a giant corporation, with the gaps filled in by government-assumed welfare, unemployment insurance and pensions—and maybe a hitch or two in the army. One gets ahead through anonymous graft, inconspicuous boot-licking and behind-the-scenes deals.

Our children are not behaving queerly. They are simply obeying their natural instinct for survival in a situation that calls for the above behavior. Those who revolt are behaving even more normally.

Instead of frantically reading psychology books for the answer to Johnny's potential delinquency, or Betty's what-the-hell attitude, par-

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ents need only look out the window at the world they—and their children are living in.

If they start working for a better society with more honest opportunities and a cleaner air, the effects on the rising generation will not be disappointing.