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LITERATURE AND LIFE

THE encounter of the hero with the obstacles barring his way to fulfillment is the gripping part of any story. And if you want to know how people conceive the meaning of their lives—what they regard as self-realization, and who or what they identify as the "enemy"—you find out by going to the stories people like most.

Of course, in a psychologically complicated period such as ours, more than one kind of story is needed to feed this hunger. Many are by no means sure, today, what they want to do with their lives, but they do know, beyond question, that what they *are* doing is not it. The name for this sort of self-consciousness is "frustration," and there is a sharply etched and brilliant literature which speaks to this condition—starting, say, with the novels of Franz Kafka, and represented in the present by the no-action dramas of the Theatre of the Absurd.

One could take this situation as a starting-point for discussion of the role of the Myth in human life, making an attempt to classify the different myths which serve the various segments of the population, but such an undertaking might soon degenerate into a classification of people and a somewhat scholastic chart of the self-imagery of the twentieth century. It would be better, perhaps, to get into the subject by examining the sort of story which touches the heart for many different kinds of people.

We are thinking of Edward Abbey's *The Brave Cowboy* (Dodd, Mead and Pocket Book), which appeared a few years ago. Now this was by no means a "typical" western story. The author must have had a great deal of fun in writing it, since he gave it the most unlikely spread of ingredients—the anarchism of Henry David Thoreau, modern conscientious objection to war, and stubborn opposition to the intrusions of the State on the privacy, freedom, and way of life of "natural" men. The story had practically everything, including a heroic stand for principle, a jailbreak, a legendary bar-room brawl, and a man-hunt that reached its climax when the brave cowboy lost his life in a meaningless accident—adding Quixotic pathos and splendor. No wonder Kirk Douglas, when he discovered it, turned this story into one of the best films he ever made. (It is a conceit of the MANAS editors that they first attracted serious attention to *The Brave Cowboy* by doing a review under the title, "Did They Really Read the Manuscript?" At any rate, other reviews appeared after ours—in *Peace News* and elsewhere—and then Mr. Douglas' movie came out.)

Edward Abbey's first book came to mind easily as an illustration of this role of literature in relation to life for the reason that he has, we find, done another one—*Fire on the Mountain* (Dial Press, 1962). Again, the theme is "natural man" in a contest with Technology, and this time Technology's insane blood brother, Nuclear War, is in the cast. *Fire on the Mountain* will not tickle radical funny-bones as much as *The Brave Cowboy* did, but it has other virtues. It is better written and has more touch with "reality." The story is told by an eleven-year-old grandson of an old geezer who has a ranch in the mountains right alongside a missile target range. The Government wants the old man to move away so the weapons experts can pelt his land with explosives. But he won't go. Government lawyers, Army officers, and federal marshals argue, plead, cajole, but he just sits there with a twelve-gauge shot gun and tells them to get off his land. The Government men are all so "reasonable." They offer him a big price for the ranch, and at last work out a compromise that any reasonable person would accept—they'll let him stay, if he will agree to go visiting somewhere eight days out of each month, so they can drop their missiles. But he won't agree.

It is a good tale with a good ending. There is a good boy who is fiercely loyal to the old man, and a good friend who sticks by the rancher, even to risking his life by another sort of heroic act. From the beginning to the end there are acts of defiance

which cannot possibly succeed, and yet, for the reader, they *do* succeed. Mr. Abbey manages a classical denouement. There is death and transcendence.

What we should like to pursue, here, is an explanation of the emotional satisfaction that is gained from Quixotic triumph. When we wonder about Mr. Abbey's hero, about why we admire him, want to know him personally, long to sit around the campfire with him and hear him reminisce, we are asking for some kind of translation of the language of the heart. We want this explained, and we want it without looking the matter up in either Aristotle or Joseph Wood Krutch (*The Modern Temper*).

Some men waste their lives bucking impossible odds. But the Quixotic hero is no waste. He knows what he is doing and he feels its meaning, even though he cannot justify it in what we call "practical" terms. And we know he knows, and honor him as we honor no other man. When Socrates gets up before the Five Hundred, tells them what second-rate, morally blind, and self-betraying men they are, and practically challenges them to put him to death (which of course they do), we honor him with all the wonder of our hearts. When Giordano Bruno stands before his judges of the Holy Inquisition and declares that they fear him and what he stands for more than he fears their condemnation of him to die by fire in a public square—we think that he shines in his manhood as brightly as any star. When we read about a lonely Spanish Loyalist who rises from the crouched huddle of his vanquished platoon and walks slowly toward the aimed machine guns of Franco's troops—to show that a man's body may be downed, but not his spirit—we say to ourselves that this is an ultimate communication of man to man. And so, when Mr. Abbey's old rancher rejects even the Government's kind adjustment to his "eccentric" love of his land, we wonder what kind of country this would be if all our citizens were like that.

The thought is a good one. It has a similarity to the kind of thinking we do when we feel proud of the way the West Germans welcome an East German who gets by the Berlin Wall, and is at last "home free." In this limited situation, some men honor a fugitive for what made him hunted by other men. And *that*, we say to ourselves, is what makes a good society.

But there is even better thinking to be done about such acts of heroism. Our love of the hero says something about death. The hero's death did not reduce his greatness, but enshrined it. Our love of the hero denies the ultimacy of social objectives—even when his death happened to come in a struggle for a social ideal. What our emotions say to us is that social objectives should never be permitted to overshadow authentic individual fulfillment. We don't know how to give this feeling scope in a design for living; we don't know what to say to the Atomic Energy Cornmission when it puts a distinguished human being like A. J. Muste in jail for insisting through acts of civil disobedience that the land is not for missile launching pads, but for men and their gardens, for farmers and their fields, and all the natural and civil joys of being alive on a beautiful world that lends its surface to human beings for a while.

We don't know what to say about these things because we are *not sure*. Our love of heroes is not the only feeling we have. We have ancestral longings which make us honor heroes, but we also have ancestral timidities which pack away in unattended garrets of the mind the questions about the meaning of such longings.

Could we have a religion, a philosophy, which gives the acts of heroes, and our love of the acts of heroes, something more than emotional approbation?

This is a way of saying that perhaps we ought to conceptualize our deepest feelings as the ground for a rational way of life. Now the trouble with conceptualization is that it suffers from competition. Feeling, except in cases of mental illness, enjoys a total reign. It takes over. When you blush, your whole body blushes. When you love, you give all your heart. But when you.start to reason, you get into various arguments with yourself—yourself and others. Action becomes difficult; again, you're not "sure." Marx, they say, lost his first job as editor of a German economic journal because he couldn't make up his mind about a certain question. Unfortunately, he got over this difficulty later on. The *Communist*

Manifesto, at any rate, was a potent marriage of feeling with conceptualization, and the angry progeny of this union are with us yet.

The point, however, is clear. If there is no positive articulation of thought with feeling, the culture falls into a slump of blindly habitual behavior, and the forces of change have "no choice but to exploit primitive, unschooled emotions. So you get a strong, silent, old man sitting on his porch with a shot gun, defying the bland but determined compulsions of the State. You love the old man, because there is no one else left to love in this ugly, blemished world. His Quixotic victory is your vicarious atonement and your practical defeat.

Change the scene to a New England river where they are launching a Polaris Submarine. A young protester against the inhuman purposes of this mobile sprayer of nuclear annihilation climbs out of the frigid water, onto the hull, and kicks the steel plates with a sneaker-shod foot. He probably hurt his toes. So they arrest him, try him, imprison him. It is almost completely incredible that the confrontations of the individual with the obstacles which oppose him should be so impractically arranged—so distant from any rational plan for the good life and the good society. But suppose *nobody* objected to those infernal electric boats—what then? Suppose it was left to the theologians to tell us in their gentle rhetoric that a nuclear burning up of the world may be an expression of God's Will—which, as we know, moves in mysterious ways. Naturally, many of us prefer the old man with his shot gun to *this* return to religion.

Why do we have such trouble articulating thought with feeling? Well, for one thing, we don't wholly trust our feelings. We trust them personally, but not in behalf of system-building theory. And the first step in the practice of science is to get rid of prejudice (which is a bent of the feelings toward a predetermined conclusion). So it follows that our love of the heroic act makes an unhandy beginning for a scientific hypothesis about the meaning of this feeling. Our cognition of what is to be understood is itself an *affect;* and our theory is to be made with a view to our own salvation. What an assignment for a scientist!

But, scientific or not, this is indeed the razor's edge that all human beings must walk, sooner or later. We are beginning to realize, from the closures and impasses of history, that a man cannot build a life without betting on his heart, and he cannot trust his heart without conceptualizing his feelings and seeing what they mean and where they lead. That is our situation.

We built all this great structure of scientific knowledge *sans* emotions to avoid, to prevent, to make *impossible,* the deceptions which human longing invites; and now, after more or less completing the structure, we find that we have locked ourselves out of any universe with human meaning. We have sterilized ourselves as individuals in order to get a "safe" society constructed. We made the society, but it is not safe.

Now what is a hero? It is a man who has wholeness and nobility. What does this mean? It means that an individual can make his life into a climactic expression of humanity regardless of circumstances. This is almost a scriptural view of man. It asserts that spiritual reality is non-historical. Or it asserts that *any* historical situation will serve as a matrix for the heroic life. It agrees with the dramatist who says, through his work, that the elements of encounter, struggle, growth, crisis, and resolution, are always present in human life. It agrees with the philosopher who says that the dramatist is right because these factors of self-discovery are the components of all human beings, and they are bound to emerge in any field of human experience.

What, then, may be the definition of the good society? The answer must be, any society which insists upon these realities about man and his quest for meaning. A society which suppresses these truths, or has never known them, is a bad society. It is a society which tells nothing but lies to its people. It defeats them by hiding the true avenues of crucial experience. It makes vulgar substitutes for the challenge of being human. It perverts the spiritual longings of people with all the shoddy gimmicks a practiced harlotry can devise. And it does all these things, alas, in "good faith." The marshal who came

to dispossess the rancher *liked* the old buzzard, and was real patient with him.

Of course, Mr. Abbey will not make it with the popular press. A movie of his latest book might, since a movie usually dehorns and stereotypes the "message" of a good book, but the "resistance" that the commercial press delights in is better illustrated by a successful woman in business who decides that she won't take any withholding tax out of her employees' pay and declares that she'll go to the Supreme Court in defense of Amurrican freedom. This is the sort of celebration the human spirit gets in popular culture—only slogan-approved Quixotry will be patronized.

Our point—or the point we are getting to—is that careful and systematic exposure of such perversions of meaning, while useful, only increases the void in our lives. What is wanted is the positive affirmation of the human spirit, and while we may have a lot of illustrations of this spirit in action—from history, from novelists, from courageous acts of individuals in the peace movement and in the civil rights movement—this affirmation needs to be understood, so to speak, at its ground floor.

Writers, naturally enough, draw their materials from particular situations. They argue from *some* existing and acknowledged values. Mr. Abbey uses a set of American *mores* which have intuitive validation from very nearly all of us. What more admirable than a Westerner who loves the wild things and hates the drunken hunters who drive over the hills in their goddam jeeps, just shooting because they like to kill? *His* grandfather built that ranch house, and he had wandered the range since boyhood. He knew every draw in the mountains, and was even kind of friendly toward the only mountain lion left in the country. Now come these stupid army people and tell him to get off his land. And they don't just want to take his land; they want to *gut* it with missiles.

The fact, however, is that this version of man-versus-evil is externalized enough for us to recognize it with familiar emotions, when what we ought to be after is recognition of the minute-to-minute confrontations in daily life. And we can pursue this sort of quest only by having a clearer understanding of the self and of the human situation. Our emotions need a more delicate schooling, our feelings more practice in identifying what is good for the human spirit. To prepare for this, we have to *think.*

We have instruction in the nature of our being from two emotional sources. We have feelings of wanting, and feelings of "ought." There is, you might say, spontaneous goodness of life and morally controlled or second hand goodness of life. Now the people who set up as authorities on such questions usually specialize in telling us about the "ought" feelings. After all, it is easy to catalog sins. It is easy to preach, to tell other people how to behave. And it is difficult in the extreme to invoke a spontaneous love of the good—in oneself, in others.

What makes spontaneous love of the good arise? A conceptually constructed answer to this question is obviously quite impossible, yet you have to try. Well, you may see someone in pain, and then, without thinking, move to help, to take away the cause of the pain, if you can. You didn't do it because someone told you to; you did it because you felt the hurt yourself. Now it gets complicated, since if you are a surgeon you have to cut in order to heal; or, if you are a teacher, you may turn away from a child's wants in order to help him see other values—and you hope *he* will see them without making you talk about what he *ought* to see. Why do you do this? You do it because it is your nature to do it. You love the child.

You might say that conceptualization about the good life becomes a treatise on the discipline of loving wisely. And that, of course, is what John Calvin thought he put into his *Institutes,* and what the authors of *Malleus Malelficarum* had in mind in explaining how to question a witch in order to get the goods on pathetic old women and hysterical girls.

So, after thinking it over, you get conceptualization on two levels. There is the ready and rough (as rough as thermo-nuclear weapons) doctrine prepared for use by the managers of nation-states; and there is the tender hypothesis of the individual who is determined to find his way as a free and responsible human being.

The pinch, today, is in the encounter between the doctrine of the managers and the tender hypothesis of the individual. This is where the agonizing encounter between good and evil takes place, most of the time. What must be seen is that there is no contest at all unless you have a personal hypothesis. It is getting to be the case that if you don't have a personal hypothesis, you are not really a man.

How might the hypothesis begin? Well you could say: I am moved by the heroic in other men. I like that old rancher. Damn it, he was right; he had spirit! And his "spirit" somehow triumphs over death. These men who stand up to be counted when it costs to do so—they are somehow part of one another. And we are in it, too, from the spontaneous longing of our hearts. Tomorrow *we* may speak out in some small way. We may sound like a man instead of an echo of the voice of the Establishment. And what pleasure it is to be with someone who is actually an individual! And so you say, for hypothesis: *That* is what I am! That is the "soul" part of me. I have other parts, but that is what I want to be, more and more. And then there is the question of intruding "oughts." Why do you talk like that to yourself? For it *is* a dialogue. Obviously, there are two of you. Yet sometimes they merge; and then they come apart.

But if the members of a family manage somehow to keep this dialogue alive, each within himself, something wonderful happens to the family life. It may take on the dignity of high drama, now and then. The members are lifted and, without plan or program, they lift one another. And the family is the model of the community. This is an alchemical process which, as Rachel Pinney said in another connection, *works.*

But is there a model of the original hero? The models are various. As Joseph Campbell puts it, the hero has a thousand faces. The trouble with the heroes in the great myths is that they are all in the past. The trouble with the heroes of history is that they are not ourselves. The best model is the one you design yourself. The best self actualization is the sequence that comes to you.

We happen to like the peregrinating monad of Plotinus and Leibniz. A hero, it seems to us, is a man who is, more than anything else, a living light. He is born, lights a way for a while, then dies; then is born again. He is a spirit and a soul. He never dies. That is our view, or one that seems very good just now.

The difficulty seems to be that when you say "I" you don't quite believe that there is an I, and you want a charter from the home office. And the solution seems to be that the "I" becomes unmistakably real and its course enviably heroic when the charter is some kind of autobiography. What is philosophy for? It is for setting this problem. What is philosophy not for? Solving this problem. The self solves this problem by becoming the hero.

REVIEW
ANOTHER "STRUNK AND WHITE"

A SMALL reference book filled with valuable information, written succinctly and clearly, with a touch of practical wisdom, is as rare as useful advice. Although it may seem difficult to justify taking space to review a book of such an apparently specialized nature, *Literary Scholarship* by James Thorpe (Houghton Mifflin, 1964) serves a wider audience than its title would seem to indicate—and it meets the above requirement of rarity: usefulness. For readers familiar with *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White (Macmillan, 1959), *Literary Scholarship* is similar in style and effect, but more complete and with emphasis not so much on syntax and style as on literary research and scholarship: the major problems inherent in literary scholarship with suggested means of solving them, a complete and practical list of key reference books and suggestions for their use, a chapter on form and documentation, and a final non-technical chapter on graduate training. This last chapter is easily the best advice this reviewer has seen for potential graduate students in all fields. Such blatant enthusiasm probably arises from having waded through too many tomes which made unnecessarily complicated and turgid the brief and simple outline and suggestions so usefully and pleasantly presented in *Literary Scholarship.* And it is a paperback.

The author, Mr. James Thorpe of Princeton University, has written not only for the graduate student—the subtitle is *A Handbook for Advanced Students of English and American Literature*—but for undergraduates, and for anyone who might some day be doing and writing up research in these fields, and for the general reader of English and American Literature whose interest penetrates the superficial.

If Brevity is the Soul of Wit, it is also the Body of Clarity. From the Preface to *Literary Scholarship:*

> This manual is an effort to point the way toward the study of literature as it is carried on by literary scholars. By explaining the principles which underlie their work, I hope that their purposes will seem worthy of emulation; by setting forth their basic method, I hope that their procedure will appear capable of employment.

This kind of writing easily satisfies William Strunk's requirements for good writing. E. B. White quotes Strunk on brevity in White's introduction to *The Elements of Style:*

> Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.

There is not much a reviewer can say about the technical sections of the book—all but part of the first and all of the last chapters. The author's allegiance to clarity is fulfilled by an uncompromisingly thorough treatment of his subject: from the difficult and amorphous task of beginning and organizing research, to the niceties of footnote usage. Of more general interest, but no more nor less valuable than the technical sections, is the final chapter in which the author discusses graduate level study. Avoiding the clichés and tired myths about what graduate study is—and is not—Mr. Thorpe manages to pass on really useful advice:

> Some people go to graduate school in the hope that they can make their life's work the writing of fiction or poetry or plays. This may be called the Great American Novel theory. Their reasoning sounds plausible: I want to write; I don't know whether I have the capability to make a living at it, the demands of graduate school, dealing with literary works, will parallel my main interests and give me models and time for my own writing; if I am successful as a writer, my graduate work will allow me to make my choice between the profession of teaching and the profession of letters; if I am not successful as a writer, I will have had training in the alternative profession of teaching to fall back on.

> Plausible, but sound only under special conditions. Creative writing and the advanced study of literature can be made compatible by some people—and it has sometimes been done—but it takes an unusual person with a dual commitment. For writing requires a commitment, and the study of literature requires a commitment; and the commitments are not identical. Each is a hard job, and each requires its own kind of concentration. The person who is driven to write will write, and he will usually resent or treat casually or take in his own terms the expectations of graduate work. On the other hand, he may sometimes become so involved in study that he loses his commitment to writing.
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> The advanced study of literature as it is conducted in graduate schools is certainly an uneconomical and ridiculously indirect way of training oneself as a creative writer. Graduate schools do not, for the most part, even pretend to be able to train writers, indeed, most members of the profession are skeptical that the writer can be academically trained beyond the elementary levels of his craft. Further than that, the things that seem to help writers most are encouragement, sympathetic criticism, free time, and financial support.

In addition, Mr. Thorpe is a fearless and unself-conscious idealist:

> . . . the animating impulse of a graduate education—what gives it meaning and final significance—is the development of a continuing love of learning. The pursuit of learning has to be undertaken with a spirit of adventure and a love for the search; it cannot be carried on passively or vicariously. A tremendous amount of hard work is required: it is a large enterprise to attain a working acquaintance with one's own field the exploration of special topics involves much that is dull and much that is routine and much that is difficult; and it is easy to lose the way in the forest of detail. These are inevitable parts of the progress of learning, however, and the effort to side-step them usually leads to superficiality and the gay deception of amateurishness. . . .
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> A commitment to learning is the first requisite for professional competence which will be of a continuing nature. This is the practical consequence. Actually, it is the personal intellectual rewards which make that consequence possible and make it have meaning. A *devotion to learning yields satisfaction by giving scope to the creative imagination.* It is our insights, perceptions, and discoveries which liberate our minds from the shackles of routine thought and free us from our prison of time and place . . . (italics added).

It is reassuring that books like *The Elements of Style* and *Literary Scholarship* come along often enough to act as counterpoise to the committee report, the television ad, the digest, and other sources of the stultification and perversion of our language.

COMMENTARY
CRITIC OF CARREL

A READER writes to object to our references to Alexis Carrel's *Man the Unknown* (Harper) as an important book. "I wonder," he says, "if the MANAS writer has ever *read* this hodge-podge of dangerous nonsense—the last chapter especially." He finds Carrel guilty of approving the "social ascension of those who possess the best organs and best minds." He remarks that business journals and reviews were laudatory of the book, when it came out, in 1935, and that an advertising agency executive expressed great admiration for Carrel's "social doctrine," which included "favoring the strong" and helping natural selection along with a eugenics program.

We shall not defend Carrel's social views, which, we must confess, we had practically forgotten. Carrel was a scientific specialist in biology and medicine, not a distinguished social thinker. Perhaps we should have warned readers of this advocacy of Social Darwinism, even though it has no relevance to the point usually made in these pages regarding his work, which is that Carrel's conception of health and healing involved study of man as a whole. He wanted medicine to give attention to *people*, not disease entities. In forwarding this view with authority and persuasiveness, he became a pioneer of reforms in medicine which are now taken almost for granted.

We can hardly evade the admission—if our correspondent is approximately right in his quotations—that Dr. Carrel had some bad social ideas. It should be added, however, that many men with "correct" social doctrines have had very bad ideas about the nature of man; and even bad ideas about how to go about righting social wrongs. The delusions of the Left are no more admirable or excusable than the delusions of the Right.

Carrel's socio-political ideas were not unique, nor were they, as his ideas, especially influential, whatever the propagandists of the business community thought of them at the time. But his ideas about the wholeness of the individual, and the need of doctors and scientists to deal with human beings *as* individuals—these conceptions were a definite break with the status quo in medical thinking. Despite the flaws noted by our correspondent, this book was a major classic and has had a far-reaching influence. Carrel's naïve political inferences from his background in biology will hardly survive his generation, whereas his challenge to the scientific dogmas of the mechanists in biology and the materialists in psychology will be remembered as the courageous utterance of an independent mind.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

THOREAU—CRITIC OF EDUCATION

A RECENT quotation from Thoreau concerning the obligation of teachers to awaken a revolutionary spirit in their pupils makes an occasion for sampling more of the Concord rebel's thoughts. We find them applicable indeed to many aspects of the present educational situation in the United States.

At the outset it is useful to absorb Thoreau's philosophic outlook, which is deeply opposed to the confining effect of institutions. Thoreau first began teaching as a Harvard undergraduate, attempting with his brother John to establish a private school in Concord, but due to the latter's ill health this project was abandoned. Young Henry, however, accepted various temporary teaching positions, from Kentucky to Maine. As a result of discouraging experiences—he wanted more from teaching than a living—he exclaimed:

> How vain to try to teach youth, or anybody truths! They can only learn them after their own fashion, and when they get ready. . . . There may be one or two in each hundred, prematurely old perchance, who approaches the subject from a similar point of view to his teachers, but as for the rest, and the most promising, it is like agricultural chemistry to so many Indians. They get a valuable drilling, it may be, but they do not learn what you profess to teach. They at most only learn where the arsenal is, in case they should ever want to use any of its weapons.

And the institutions, of necessity, were to be discounted. Harvard College, as well as the Church, was interested in transmission of a heritage of other men's convictions. Education, for Thoreau, was something quite different—as one writer put it, a "preparation for a rigorous existence." In this connection, Thoreau wrote: "I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil,—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. I wish to make an extreme statement, if so I may make an emphatic one, for there are enough champions of civilization: the minister and the school committee and every one of you will take care of that." True education, Thoreau believed, involved an endless series of self-discoveries, spontaneous movements toward depth penetration which could neither be predicted nor governed. So it is of course impossible to systematize Thoreau's thoughts, but his general attitude vis-à-vis institutions is plain enough. Take for example the following from his *Journal:*

> Always you have to contend with the stupidity of men. It is like a stiff soil, a hard-pan. If you go deeper than usual, you are sure to meet with a pan made harder even by the superficial cultivation. . . . Men are more obedient at first to words than ideas. They mind names more than things. Read to them a lecture on "Education," naming that subject, and they will think that they have heard something important, but call it "Transcendentalism," and they will think it moonshine. Or halve the lecture, and put a psalm at the beginning and a prayer at the end of it and read it from a pulpit, and they will pronounce it good without thinking.

Bearing in mind the need for broadening our approach to "religion and values," we note that Thoreau's biting criticisms of the Church were in no sense a derogation of philosophical religion. The Christian view, Thoreau held, had become altogether provincial. In *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, Thoreau reflects on the depth of Eastern philosophy, in contrast to Christian preoccupation with the sins of creatures of prescribed destiny upon a single planet. Thoreau derived a wider philosophy from *The Bhagavad-Gita:* "As wide as the world, and as unwearied as time. These philosophers dwell on the inevitability and unchangeableness of laws, on the power of temperament and constitution, and the circumstances of birth and affinity." He continued:

> In every one's youthful dreams philosophy is still vaguely but inseparably, and with singular truth, associated with the East, nor do after years discover its local habitation in the Western world. In comparison with the philosophers of the East, we may

> say that modern Europe has yet given birth to none. Beside the vast and cosmogonal philosophy of the Bhagvat-Geeta, even our Shakespeare seems sometimes youthfully green and practical merely. Some of these sublime sentences, as the Chaldean oracles of Zoroaster, still surviving after a thousand revolutions and translations, alone make us doubt if the poetic form and dress are not transitory, and not essential to the most effective and enduring expression of thought. *Ex oriente lux* may still be the motto of scholars, for the Western world has not yet derived from the East all the light which it is destined to receive thence.
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> It would be worthy of the age to print together the collected Scriptures of Sacred Writings of the several nations the Chinese, the Hindoos, the Persians, the Hebrews, and others, as the Scripture of mankind. The New Testament is still, perhaps, too much on the lips and in the hearts of men to be called a Scripture in this sense. Such a juxtaposition and comparison might help to liberalize the faith of men. This is a work which Time will surely edit, reserved to crown the labors of the printing-press. This would be the Bible, or Book of Books, which let the missionaries carry to the uttermost parts of the earth.

High philosophy and appreciation of the "natural world" blend in Thoreau's thinking about education. Gandhi revealed that he had derived inspiration for *Satyagraha* from Thoreau, and these two were also in rapport in their attitudes toward nature. Both, perhaps, had learned what balance and harmony could mean at the most elemental level and therefore became acute in detecting disharmonies in social organization. At any rate, some sort of "religion of nature" is apparent in both Thoreau and Gandhi, helping them to campaign for principles in the affairs of men with the same serenity as that which grows from knowing relationships with nature-forces, or knowing use of the simplest tools of daily life.

The Gandhian program for education was built upon the assumption that what Western psychologists call "integrated personalities" will develop best if children are urged to live according to facts of nature and society which they can thoroughly comprehend. Gandhi's intent was to foster men and women who would always stand on solid ground before putting the next foot forward, and he thought that there could be no solid ground unless one had first mastered and then learned to feel at home in his natural surroundings.

And so it was with Thoreau. This view was also appreciated by Emerson, who, after hearing Horace Mann talk on education in 1839, wrote:

> It was full of the modern gloomy view of our democratical institutions, and hence the inference to the importance of schools. . . An education in things is not. We all are involved in the condemnation of words, an age of words. We are shut up in schools . . . for ten or fifteen years, and come out at last with a bellyful of words and do not know a thing. We cannot use our hands . . . our legs . . . our eyes, or our arms. We do not know an edible root in the woods. We cannot tell our course by the stars, nor the hour of the day by the sun. It is well if we can swim and skate. We are afraid of a horse . . . a cow . . . a dog . . . a cat . . . a spider.
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> Now here are my wise young neighbors [the Thoreaus] who, instead of getting, like the woodmen, into a railroad-car, where they have not even the activity of holding the reins, have got into a boat which they have built with their own hands, with sails which they have contrived to serve as a tent by night, and gone up the Merrimack to live by their wits on the fish of the stream and the berries of the wood. My worthy neighbor Dr. Bartlett expressed a true parental instinct when he desired to send his boy with them to learn something.

FRONTIERS

Part of a Letter

[Full title of this fragment by Jeanne S. Bagby is "Part of a Letter I have always Been Writing." It comes as a response to Frederick Mayer's contribution, "Art and Civilization," in MANAS for March 18.]

SOME people seem to be born knowing what they are and what they must do. Others go through vast tribulations just to get an inkling, and some never find out at all. Useless to try to account for such a disparity—all we can do is accept it as a working principle and try to discover ways to help people out of their individual darknesses. Leaving aside the small, fortunate group who know themselves, or at least know what they are capable of, one ponders the fate of the vast majority to whom self-realization is an impenetrable jungle, a terrifying struggle often relinquished as soon as a reasonably well-fitting role turns up. Education, of course, is supposed to "lead us out" and discover ourselves to ourselves along with the process of learning. But it rarely does this; nor does religion in its primal connotation "bind us back" to universals. Along with the death of ritual and rise of reason we have lost the key to self-discovery. We are lucky indeed if we come across some teacher or friend who can help us unlock the prison gates.

The recent example of a friend's arguments reminded me again of the elusive nature of the goal I have professed for many years: world service. As an idealistic young creature I took for granted that every intelligent person shared this goal, and that in due time everyone would come to see that cooperation for mutual welfare and fulfillment of the individual were two mutually agreeable aspects of this one ideal. But I soon recognized that many intelligent people pursue other goals, and that the unselfishness necessary for cooperation is relatively rare. While struggling to realize a modicum of this virtue myself, I learned that it is one of man's most difficult lessons.

My friend has the sort of unselfishness which enables her to devote her life to social work under depressing conditions I could not stand a week. She tells me it must be my sheltered youth that has given me such a shocked response to the filth and corruption of "real life," and says I should stop protesting and devote myself to improving whatever little sector I can.

Well, I can admit I lack her type of courage, but I tried to tell her there were more ways to serve the world than any one person can imagine. Some people can just sit around being glowing examples of kind human beings. Others serve not only through the helpful professions, but even inadvertently, as TV has done by raising the level of verbal and imagistic awareness. Others dedicate themselves to the world by leaving it, through religion and art. It is rare indeed that one person can be effective in more than one area.

Hence my happy response to Frederick Mayer's March 18 piece on the value of art. My social work friend, like many realists, feels that art is not much more than a pleasant avocation carried on by childish persons afraid to come to grips with the real problems of life. How can one convey to such people the depth of the artistic experience, the totality of commitment to seeking and expression? As Mayer says: "Art demands allegiance to a cause which illuminates and intensifies all feelings and all occasions." This intensification renders most artists too sensitive for the work of social healing; in the immediacy of their response to any given situation, its qualities are raised to the infinite and register among the eternal verities. A single pain becomes magnified into an archetypal and everlasting wound, a joy into an ecstasy. While this may seem psychopathic in relation to the demands of everyday life, it may be a necessary exacerbation for the creative response. The artist after all does not seek to heal but to ennoble. A social conscience is not standard equipment, though occasionally artists like Ben Shahn may possess it. But as Mayer says: "Art is more than an

expression of social reform. It points to a new universe. . . transforms experience. . . ."

Perhaps part of my friend's perplexity lies in the fact that of all the striving artists, so few become recognized, so many remain relatively unknown. There are no criteria for appointing a person "artist." Many try and many fail. But even the mere fact of trying to make use of a delicate and dedicated sensibility is worth something in this economically motivated society. For the same sensitivity which discerns the aesthetic value of lines, forms, words also perceives more deeply and openly the problems which prevent people from growth and health. So that while I can listen to my friend and feel guilty at all the instances of healing I could not accomplish, surely I can still point out to her the directions and the quality that are necessary for human beings to recognize if they are to emerge with any permanence from the primeval mud.

This reader addresses herself to a field of human pain that is not identified by physical ills or material want. You might even say that it involves the psychological deprivation or impoverishment which is at the root of the causes of social and economic injustice. Some time ago we reviewed a book which described the life of many of the Puerto Rican people who have come to New York in recent years—*The Inhabitants*, by Julius Horwitz. We cannot remember reading a more heart-breaking book. We imagine that, working in this area, even our correspondent's unselfish social worker would feel like throwing in the sponge—although she probably would stick at it, despite all discouragements. On the surface, the problems were economic, but underneath they were much more. There were others besides Puerto Ricans in trouble, of course—people of all races; but the milieu was shaped by the misery of the transplanted Puerto Ricans. Looked at in some context other than that of a relief worker, the situation might have seemed less hopeless; perhaps some impressionistic picture of a few people who were able to find a place and role, despite the cold wall of indifference of New York's metropolitan culture, would tell a story Mr. Horwitz was unable to recognize in the slice of life he encountered daily in his work.

But the real point is that the self-centered, acquisitive existence of American cities gives no welcome to anybody who does not or cannot fit himself into the prevailing functions. Here are many thousands of warm-hearted and often talented people who left a hard life in the hope of finding circumstances with more promise for the future, but are now members of a depersonalized mass known mostly to the rest of the people of New York as a "problem." Everything about their lives is marginal. How can they identify with the American democratic way of life? Money—relief money—is there and is used, but it is no solution. The question is how to help these Puerto Rican and other citizens to be members of the socio-political community instead of objects of anxiety and desperation. It can't be done with money. It can only be done with human attitudes which see all people as ends in themselves, and then turn the available economic resources into such practical means as can be found.

The problem is basically one of self-respect. If the people of the metropolitan communities of the United States had genuine self-respect, they would not tolerate for a moment the ghettos of various sorts which are found in cities throughout the country. They would be overwhelmed by shame. Mothers would be including instead of ignoring the children of the dispossessed minorities. They would be relying on the basic humanity of all other people, instead of fearing the external signs of degradation. They would be using their extraordinary ingenuity to turn American cities and towns into generous and hospitable communities, instead of worrying about how the slums are spreading all around.

The connection between these brief suggestions and the letter our correspondent is "always writing" is the connection between truly

human behavior and the feelings and life of the artist. The artist, in William Blake's and Leo Tolstoy's use of the term, finds it necessary to turn all his relationships into ends in themselves. As an artist, he must find good in even the casual encounter. People, to him, are never means. The artist sees with a consciousness that responds only in terms of ends. If you have the good fortune to go about with an artist, or spend a day with him, this quality comes out pre-eminently. He does not think in terms of using or exploiting.

Thus the artist has a great lesson to teach the philanthropist. There is more to the good life than little girls with rosy cheeks and crisp gingham dresses and boys playing basket ball at the local community center. Such things are good, but those who would build a good society have to think further than this. The grim reality is that in a society which has no explicit ideals beyond material acquisition and which has turned the meaning of freedom into the right to pursue acquisition according to a particular set of political and economic rules, the real poverty—the poverty of soul as well as of things—will always outrun the do-gooders, however energetic. There is an irreversible law of diminishing returns which overtakes people who think that they can solve all problems with money. Finally, a day will come when the money will be no good at all.

We already have a lot of people whom money cannot help. They are sick in their minds and emotions. They can't stop hating or fearing or drinking. These are another sort of displaced person, another sort of refuse cast aside by our society. Sometimes they get well, but never because of money. They get well because they begin to see other peoples' needs and to try, however falteringly, to forget themselves.