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PLATEAU OF UNDERSTANDING

THE critical self-consciousness of modern thought is now well established. One need think only of such books as Floyd Matson's *The Broken Image,* Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge,* and A. H. Maslow's *The Psychology of Science* to recognize this. These are books concerned with the presuppositions of science and with the reforms in scientific thinking that need to be undertaken. There is a similar maturity in works that may be described as psycho-social investigation. These would include Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd* and his more recent *New Reformation,* Theodore Roszak's *The Making of a Counter Culture,* Charles Reich's *The Greening of America,* and Lewis Mumford's latest, *Pentagon of Power.* The Mumford volume belongs in both categories.

There are other works of importance, of course, but those named are peculiarly valuable in consolidating the mature critical awareness of the present. They go a long way toward explaining how modern man has shaped himself, and are therefore books which, by freeing us from the past, engender new responsibilities.

We have been a long time getting to this sort of self-awareness. A key figure in early labors to bring about the awakening is Edwin A. Burtt, modern philosopher and historian of ideas, whose seminal book, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science,* was first published in 1994, with a revised edition in 1932. The influence of Burtt's studies has been seeping into the minds of serious students of the structure of scientific thinking for almost fifty years. Burtt pointed out the practical consequences of Galileo's separation of the attributes of nature into primary and secondary qualities. The "real" qualities, for the Italian discoverer, were "number, magnitude, position, and motion," which could be abstracted from objects and treated mathematically to obtain exact and certain knowledge. The secondary qualities included the confused and undependable impressions we have through the senses. They are "subjective," being the effect of our senses and not really part of the objects themselves. Burtt comments:

> Till the time of Galileo it had always been taken for granted that man and nature were both integral parts of a larger whole, in which man's place was the more fundamental. Whatever distinctions might be made between primary and secondary man was regarded as fundamentally allied with the positive and the primary. . . . Indeed, to all important ancient and medieval thinkers, man was a genuine microcosm, in him was exemplified such a union of things primary and secondary as truly typified their relations in the vast macrocosm, whether the real and primary be regarded as ideas or as some material substance. *Now, in the coarse of translating this distinction of primary and secondary into terms suited to the new mathematical interpretation of nature, we have the first stage in the reading of man quite out of the real and primary realm. . . .*
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> The features of the world now classed as secondary, unreal, ignoble, and regarded as dependent upon the deceitfulness of sense, are just those features which are most intense to man in all but his purely theoretic activity, and even in that, except where he confines himself strictly to the mathematical method. It was inevitable that in these circumstances man should now appear to be outside the real world; man is hardly more than a bundle of secondary qualities. Observe that the stage is fully set for the Cartesian dualism—on the one side the primary, the mathematical realm; on the other the realm of man. And the premium of importance and value as well as of independent existence all goes with the former. Man begins to appear for the first time in the history of thought as an irrelevant spectator and insignificant effect of the great mathematical system which is the substance of reality.

Alfred North Whitehead, perhaps the most distinguished philosopher of our time, devoted a small but very useful book, *Nature and Life* (1934), to examining the effects of "Cartesian dualism." This was a further illumination of the confinements of scientific thinking. Whitehead wrote:

> The mental substances are external to the material substances. Neither type requires the other type for the completion of its essence. Their unexplained interrelations are unnecessary for their respective existences. . . .
>
> The effect of this sharp division between Nature and Life has poisoned all subsequent philosophy. Even when the coordinate existence of the two types of actualities is abandoned, there is no proper fusion of the two in most modern schools of thought. . . .
>
> The doctrine that I am maintaining is that neither physical Nature nor life can be understood unless we fuse them together as essential factors in the composition of "really real" things whose interconnections and individual characters constitute the universe.

But Whitehead was only one man, while Descartes had been "teacher" of numerous generations of men who became in turn the shapers of the intellectual life of their times. And ideas *do* rule the world, even the world of men who do not believe ideas have any importance—who are convinced, as was Thomas Huxley, that thought is an "epi-phenomenon," a mere side-effect of the mechanistic functioning of bodies. So it was not until the cultural effects of the exile of man and his human qualities from the real world began to be noticeable on a massive social scale that the claim that Descartes "poisoned all subsequent philosophy" was taken seriously. In *Pentagon of Power* Mumford develops this sort of criticism in greater particularity:

> What Descartes lacked the perspective to see was that his interpretation of life as a purely mechanical phenomenon, comparable to the strictly regulated motions of an automaton, was not as transparently rational as it seemed to him and to many of his successors. Note, finally, the implications of his mechanistic absolutism. For the sake of clarity and predictable order, he was ready to set aside the most characteristic function of all organisms: the capacity to enregister and hoard experience and continuously to reinterpret present experience in relation to both remembered and prospective or imagined events—above all, to act for themselves without outside instruction or control in pursuance of their individual purposes or those of their species or group. For the same reason, Descartes was oblivious of all those complex symbiotic interactions that demand empathy, mutual aid, and sensitive accommodations, of which Aristotle could at least have given him homely illustrations.
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> True to the principles of absolutism, Descartes preferred a predetermined design, laid down by a single mind, to fulfill a single end at a single point in time, and he thought that in matters of mind as well as in government the best communities "followed the appointments of some wise legislator." . . . By his penchant for political absolutism, Descartes paved the way for the eventual militarization of both science and technics. He did not perceive that the complex processes and singular events of history are no less important manifestations of nature than mass phenomena that are open to observation, experiment, and statistical description. As a result, mechanical order, with its clarity and predictability, became, in the mind of Descartes' followers, the main criterion of reality and the source of all values except those that Descartes preferred to leave entirely in the care of the Church.

Why did the "machine" interpretation so fascinate the awakening minds of Europe? Because it *worked.* They were tired of scholastic arguments. After all, "our disputes," Galileo had said, "are about the sensible world, and not one of paper." The truth about nature turned on "demonstrations." Newton's laws of motion had the same appeal. As Whitehead put it:

> Newton's methodology for physics was an overwhelming success. But the forces which he introduced left Nature still without meaning or value. In the essence of a material body—in its mass, motion, and shape—there was no reason for the law of gravitation. He thus illustrated a great philosophic truth, that a dead Nature can give no reasons. All ultimate reasons are in terms of aim at value. A dead Nature aims at nothing. . . . Thus for Newtonians, Nature yielded no reasons. Combining Newton and Hume we obtain a barren concept, namely, a field of perception devoid of any reason for the concurrence of its factors. It is this situation that modern philosophy from Kant onward has in various ways sought to render intelligible. My own belief is that this situation is a *reductio ad absurdum,* and should not be accepted as the basis for philosophic speculation.

Mumford devotes a long section of his book to Francis Bacon, because of his extraordinary influence through defining the role of science.

"Knowledge," Bacon declared, "is power." His lack of background in mathematics and physics made him "readier," Mumford thinks, "to extend the scientific method to every department of life."

> Thus, in the characteristic vein of British empiricism, he outlined the pragmatic justification for society's commitment to modern science as technology. No sky-gazer like Galileo, no sun-worshipper like Kepler, Bacon brought science down to a workable level.

Curiously, Bacon was apparently the first European to speak grandly of the "conquest of nature." He found this an ennobling objective, by comparison with other usages to which scientific advance might be put. Man has three sorts of ambition, Bacon held. One is personal aggrandizement; next is national expansion; and finally there is the longing to enlarge the dominion of the human race "over the universe of things." This last desire lacked the covetousness of the other two and would have dignity, since "the empire of man over things depends wholly on the arts and sciences." Mumford comments on a self-deception that Bacon could hardly anticipate:

> What is embarrassing in the social application of power is that once energy is released from its organic setting, escaping the limits imposed by habitat, by other parts of its own nature, and by other organisms, it knows no limits—it expands for expansion's sake. Thus the vulgar form of imperialism, which resulted in the temporary subjugation of the major territories of the planet by Western industrial and political enterprise had its ideal counterpart in both science and technics. The nobler ambition that Bacon approved has in fact never been free from the baser egoisms of the individual and the tribe.

Well, we have now quite a collection of the "bad boys" of our intellectual past. These are the men, we may say, whose exceptional talents gave particular power to their theories and explanations, and shaped the modern mind. They provided its enthusiasms and its rationalizations, and their weaknesses or omissions and mistakes have become our grave defects. Yet, with a little more effort, we could explain them as easily as we use them to explain ourselves. We could go back into history and find, in the psychological environment Galileo broke out of, ample reasons for his partisanship of the "primary qualities." We are compelled, also, to admire the courage and genius of these men, who made pioneering discoveries against the grain of their times. They were both children of and rebels against their times.

There is also a sense in which our present understanding of them makes us responsible for what we are, and most certainly for what we do next. They, being understood, are no longer "guilty." It is time, in short, to apply some "reality therapy" to ourselves. We can no longer make an excuse of our "conditioning," since a past understood is a past abolished as a controlling cause.

Yet the difficulties remain great, since critical analysis of intellectual history tells us only what we have lost, or ignored and set aside, not how to get it back. Nor would we, actually, want it back in the same form, since along with the philosophical disasters wrought by the scientific revolution we have gained a number of important and indispensable qualities—the heightened critical sense, for example, which makes our analysis of intellectual history possible. Then there is our present psychological insight into the multitude of forms of emotional self-deception—no one would want to regain all those susceptibilities.

One could say, quite simply, that the problem of modern man is to give up and replace the metaphysics of science without relinquishing the practical lessons of its discipline. Yet this proves a vast undertaking.

How long did it take for Western civilization to accustom itself to the scientific notions of "reality"? How long did it take for the common speech to adjust itself to "subjectless" discourse? By this we mean the popularity of language which gains its chief impact and significance from impersonal "process" words. Today's speakers delight in importing into ordinary speech the latest expressions of technological jargon; this gives a special bite to what they say. Even the various "liberation" movements of the times embrace this tendency. The young talk about being "turned on"—a totally mechanistic

image! Faucets get turned on, and not by themselves. The middle-aged talk about "input" and "output"—it makes them seem knowledgeable. Why? Because it is *machine* language. These are sharp, precise words with finite connotations and associations. They have a certainty-certifying engineering background.

Today's reformers of modern thought have an enormous task ahead of them. The problem will be to create and spread a new language of values reflecting the spontaneous concerns of people as human beings—not the values of a machine civilization. At present the reformers have only the pallid language of academic philosophy, or the surviving truisms of tradition. To make these or new words come alive with enduring meaning requires that the meanings be lived before they are embodied in words. The difficulties involved here are well revealed in George W. Morgan's *The Human Predicament*, published in 1968 by Brown University Press. In a chapter on art, Mr. Morgan is considering the peculiar contribution of art in the communication of value, which is that it shows the universal in an individual matrix:

> It is fundamentally important to realize that this universality, which is essential to art, is obtained without forsaking individuality. The universal is in the particular, and the beholder of art apprehends it only if he attends to the particular with the immediacy and intimacy it invites. Thus, looking at an Impressionist canvas we apprehend the harmony, iridescence, and colorful richness of things bathed in light, by experiencing these qualities in contemplation of that particular work. A tragedy—say, *Hamlet*—shows us the weakness and dignity of particular men. Music explores and enhances man's inner life, not by giving us universals removed from individual contexts but by presenting us with particular occasions of immediate experience. Generic words for experience, such as *affirmation, longing, fulfillment, sadness, exuberance,* and *joy,* are indispensable in the totality of our mental life but they are only thin, abstract indications of what we can apprehend in music by immediate personal response to a highly individualized, sensuous form. It is permissible to speak of music as being abstract if one means by this that it does not refer to specific objects and events of the world; but it is not at all abstract in the way science or, even more pertinently, mathematics is. A mathematical work completely lacks the powerful and penetrating sensuous value of music. It is not an individualized entity inviting immediate experience; it has no vital effect on us, no personal impact; its words, terms, or written notations, expressing its logical relations, are not interesting in themselves. They do not arrest us. We look through them, so to speak, to the universal meaning they convey. In music, on the other hand, as in all the arts universality is not seized directly but reverberates within our vital, sentient experience of the individual work. A great artist so shapes the work in all its particularity that its universal significance shines forth and can be grasped by the beholder.

This quotation goes somewhat beyond our purpose, which was to illustrate the problem of reanimating our common language with key words rich in felt meanings of man's part in life—a language at last free of the partisan mono-functionalism of machinery. Emerson wrote in such a language, and it is found in all great classics and many scriptures; and the arts, one could say, are one of the means for giving such meanings vital currency in daily human life. This, it is plain enough, would involve an art which belongs to daily life, an art more akin to craftsmanship than the "fine arts" in the present notion of them, an art of amateurs rather than of professionals.

Mr. Morgan's book, incidentally, is one of the best of the current summations of the modern self-consciousness. It gathers in the fruits of the work of many historians of thought and distills a clear summary of the human predicament in the present age. This book could be taken as further evidence that we have indeed reached a plateau of self-consciousness which makes us free from the past, free to change, free to repair old mistakes and abandon inherited prejudices. (The Brown University Press edition is $7.50; a Delta paperback edition is available at $2.45.)

REVIEW
"I CAN TELL YOU WHERE IT WAS"

EDWARD ABBEY is a wrathful champion of nature, a Wobbly for the cause of mountain and stream. He is rough, tough, and shy in his affections, yet there are passages approaching grandeur in *Desert Solitaire,* his latest book, now available in a Simon & Schuster paperback ($2.95). Reviewing the earlier edition, Joseph Wood Krutch called it "a hymn of hate;" and "bitter, extravagant." This seems extreme, yet the book does have a sullen core of distaste for many of the familiar works of man. In his earlier books, this feeling is contained by the simplicities of characters in stories. *The Brave Cowboy* was fun and excitement from beginning to end, and *Fire on the Mountain* had the strength of people who knew only that the "progress" invading their lives was an evil thing, and resisted it to the end. They did the best they could.

But Mr. Abbey himself is a man of sophistication and taste. He is widely read and can speak knowledgeably of many things. That the wilderness speaks to him intelligibly, finding warm resonances in his mind, makes what he writes worth reading, yet there are moments when the reader may wonder if he is really doing the best he can. His occasional sourness has a noticeable zest. He "apologizes" for such things in his introduction; then says:

> It will be objected that the book deals too much with mere appearances, with the surface of things, and fails to engage and reveal the patterns of unifying relationships which form the true underlying reality of existence. Here I must confess that I know nothing whatever about true underlying reality, having never met any. There are many people who say they have, I know, but they've been luckier than I.

Well, Mr. Abbey is not the sort of man you preach at. He has his own worship, anyhow, and it helps him to write some very fine prose. Out on a desert in Utah, early in the year, he is alone with the stars, bright Venus, and his crackling fire:

> The fire. The odor of burning juniper is the sweetest fragrance on the face of the earth, in my honest judgment, I doubt if all the smoking censers of Dante's paradise could equal it. One breath of juniper smoke, like the perfume of sagebrush after rain, evokes in magic catalysis, like certain music, the space and light and clarity and piercing strangeness of the American West. Long may it burn.
>
> Go thou my incense upward from this hearth
> And ask the gods to pardon this clear flame.
>
> I wait and watch, guarding the desert, the arches, the sand and barren rock, the isolated junipers and scattered clumps of sage surrounding me in stillness and simplicity under the starlight.

There are certain emancipations available only to a man on speaking terms with the natural world. Mr. Abbey tells about them:

> Again the fire begins to fail. Letting it die, I take my walking stick and go for a stroll, down the road into the thickening darkness. I have a flashlight with me but will not use it unless I hear some sign of animal life worthy of investigation. The flashlight, or electrical torch as the English call it, is a useful instrument in certain situations but I can see the road well enough without it. Better, in fact.
>
> There's another disadvantage to the use of the flashlight: like many other mechanical gadgets it tends to separate a man from the world around him. If I switch it on my eyes adapt to it and I can see only the small pool of light which it makes in front of me; I am isolated. Leaving the flashlight in my pocket where it belongs, I remain a part of the environment I walk through and my vision though limited has no sharp or definite boundary.

People worried about education talk a great deal about reforming the "curriculum." What about a year-long course devoted to expanding the meaning of Mr. Abbey's observation about flashlights? When do convenient forms of illumination turn into "blinders"? What sort of tools or helps limit our horizons the least? How do you keep on seeing the world as whole as you can while using a tool which has only tunnel vision? Almost any child can understand Abbey's analysis, and the substitution of mechanical means

for natural human capacity is admittedly one of the manias of the age. He continues:

> This peculiar limitation of the machine becomes doubly apparent when I return to the housetrailer. I've decided to write a letter (to myself) before going to bed, and rather than use a candle for light I'm going to crank up the old generator. The generator is a small four-cylinder gasoline engine mounted on a wooden block not far from the trailer. Much too close, I'd say. I open the switch, adjust the choke, engage the crank and heave it around. The engine sputters, gasps, catches fire, gains momentum, winds up into a roar, valves popping, rockers thumping, pistons hissing up and down inside their oiled jackets. Fine: power surges into the wiring, the light bulbs inside the trailer begin to glow, brighten, becoming incandescent. The lights are so bright I can't see a thing and have to shade my eyes as I stumble toward the open door of the trailer. Nor can I hear anything but the clatter of the generator. I am shut off from the natural world and sealed up encapsulated, in a box of artificial light and tyrannical noise.
>
> Once inside the trailer my senses adjust to the new situation and soon enough, writing the letter, I lose awareness of the lights and the whine of the motor. But I have cut myself off completely from the greater world which surrounds the manmade shell. The desert and the night are pushed back—I can no longer participate in them or observe; I have exchanged a great and unbounded world for a small, comparatively meager one. By choice, certainly; the exchange is temporarily convenient and can be reversed whenever I wish.

Abbey insists on this reversibility and continually tests to make sure that he is capable of it. He knows that much of the falsity of the modern doctrine of progress lies in the claim that advance is accomplished by replacing human with mechanical functions. Yet there *is* an advantage in many mechanical and other inventions, the question being, where do you draw the line? How do you distinguish between developments which make a man more competent, and those which make him less, simply as a human being? Gandhi had an answer to this: machines which do not make men into mere machine-tenders may be useful and desirable. Ellul distinguished between technological systems which enslave and tools which extend individual human capacities.

This is obviously a very large question, and not to be settled by any quick, generalizing answers. Yet many important philosophical issues are implied by asking it. The *neglect* of the question, rather than the unavailability of a simple answer, is responsible for much of our present weakness and confusion.

Mr. Abbey came to the Utah desert near Moab to take a season job as a ranger in the National Park Service. He lived throughout the summer in a trailer provided by the Service. His book is a record of his experience as caretaker of a natural splendor called Arches National Monument, which was then more or less unspoiled by tourist invasions. But wide paved highways were being built when he left in the fall. He ended his introduction:

> Do not jump into your automobile next June and rush out to the canyon country hoping to see some of that which I have attempted to evoke. . . . you can't see anything from a car. . . .In the second place most of what I write about in this book is already gone or going under fast. This is not a travel guide but an elegy. A memorial. You're holding a tombstone in your hands. . . .

Elsewhere he writes of what he feels about the wilderness and what is happening to it:

> Wilderness. The word itself is music.
>
> *Wilderness, wilderness*. . . . We scarcely know what we mean by the term, though the sound of it draws all whose nerve and emotions have not yet been irreparably stunned deadened, numbed by the caterwauling of commerce, the sweating scramble for profit and domination. . . . The word suggests the past and the unknown, the womb of the earth from which we all emerged. . . .
>
> But the love of the wilderness is more than a hunger for what is always beyond reach; it is also an expression of loyalty to the earth, the earth which bore us and sustains us, the only home we shall ever know, the only paradise we ever need—if only we had the eye to see. Original sin, the true original sin, is the blind destruction for the sake of greed of this natural paradise which lies all around us—if only we were worthy of it. . . .
>
> Some people who think of themselves as hard-headed realists would tell us that the cult of the wild

is possible only in an atmosphere of comfort and safety and was therefore unknown to the pioneers who subdued half a continent with their guns and plows and barbed wire. Is this true? Consider the sentiments of Charles Marion Russell, the cowboy artist, as quoted in John Hutchens' *One Man's Montana:*

"I have been called a pioneer. In my book a pioneer is a man who comes to virgin country, traps off all the fur, kills off all the wild meat, cuts down all the trees, grazes off all the grass, plows the roots up and strings ten million miles of wire. A pioneer destroys things and calls it civilization."

Others who endured hardships and privations no less severe than those of the frontiersmen were John Muir, H. D. Thoreau, John James Audubon and the painter George Catlin, all of whom wandered on foot over much of our country and found in it something more than merely raw material for pecuniary exploitation. . . .

No, wilderness is not a luxury but a necessity of the human spirit, and as vital to our lives as water and good bread. A civilization which destroys what little remains of the wild, the spare, the original, is cutting itself off from its origins and betraying the principle of civilization itself.

If industrial man continues to multiply his numbers and expand his operations he will succeed in his apparent intention, to seal himself off from the natural and isolate himself within a synthetic prison of his own making. He will make himself an exile from the earth and then will know at last, if he is still capable of feeling anything, the pain and agony of final loss.

So, the spirit of *Desert Solitaire* is found in the response of the man of the desert to the question of a visitor:

Ranger, where is Arches National Monament?
I don't know, mister. But I can tell you where it was.

COMMENTARY
THE MEANINGS OF WORDS

IN a now forgotten article published in Paris in 1929 (in *This Quarter*, July, August, September), D. H. Lawrence gave an example of the meaning and use of words which helps to show what George Morgan is talking about (see page 7), illustrating how a writer may give rich content to a "generic" term. Lawrence said:

> When it comes to the meaning of anything, even the simplest word, then you must pause. Because there are two categories of meaning, forever separate. There is mob-meaning, and there is individual meaning. Take even the word *bread.* The mob-meaning is merely: stuff made with white flour into loaves that you eat. But take the individual meaning of the word *bread:* the white, the brown, the corn-pone, the homemade, the smell of bread just out of the oven, the crust, the crumb, the unleavened bread, the shew-bread, the staff of life, sourdough bread, cottage loaves, French bread, Viennese bread, black bread, yesterday's loaf, graham, barley, rolls, Bretzeln, Kringeln, scones, damper, matsen—there is no end to it all, and the word bread will take you to the ends of time and space, and far-off down avenues of memory. But this is individual. The word bread will take the individual off on his own journey, and its meaning will be his own meaning, based on his own genuine imagination reactions. And when a word comes to us in its individual character, and starts in us the individual responses, it is a great pleasure to us. The American advertisers have discovered this, and some of the cunningest American literature is to be found in advertisements of soap-suds, for example. These advertisements are *almost* prose-poems. They give the word soap-suds a bubbly shiny individual meaning, which is very skillfully poetic, would, perhaps, be quite poetic to the mind which could forget that the poetry was bait on a hook.

Mr. Morgan suggests that art has safeguards against the manipulation of "mob-meanings"—a term which we could easily use to represent single-valued, objectively defined meanings—yet it seems evident that individual meanings must also be thought of as *lived* meanings. The effective writer, even when he uses a *generic* term, gives what he says the glow and resonance of experienced reality. This would apply not only to mundane items such as bread and other articles of daily use, but to the language of transcendence. Maslow's discussions of the peak experience and the Being aspect of human life communicate his own sense of reality for the range of actual experience behind these words. Such words may fall into metaphysical categories but they are not *just* metaphysical categories. The reader has the sense of the individual and the universal meaning being joined in them when they are well used.

Lawrence.also says:

> For every man has a mob self and an individual self, in varying proportions. Some men are almost all mob-self, incapable of imaginative individual responses. The worst specimens of mob-self are usually to be found in the professions, lawyers, professors, clergymen, and so on. The business man, much maligned, has a tough outside mob-self, and a scared floundering, yet still alive individual self.

Well, it is easy to locate offenders. The task is rather to restore the strength of individual experience to the language of universal meanings, so that, little by little, the mob-meanings to which so many of the words of our language have been restricted will be recognized as only coarse, outer shells. This would be to make literature and art both rich and responsible, and it would help people to gain a protective immunity to the perversions and imitations of individual meaning in advertising, which dresses up a mob-meaning in stolen finery. This is a long and arduous undertaking, and it should be noted that the shortcuts attempted by Lawrence and Ezra Pound did not work very well.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
ONE ROOM SCHOOLHOUSES

THE trouble isn't with the schools, it's with the community; and the remedy isn't in the schools, it's in the teachers. This seems the thing to say, over and over again.

Two months ago a young man named Pat Conroy was fired from his job of teaching eighteen students in a one-room schoolhouse on Daufuskie Island, on the coast of South Carolina, near the city of Bluffton. His offense was "insubordination." Last July he challenged the county school board to think less about budgets and more about children. He had already been warned that the cost of operating the little boat that took him from the mainland to the island every day was an excessive expense.

Daufuskie is populated by 125 black people who are impoverished and themselves had little or no education. When Conroy first took the job, he used to spend his nights in a sleeping bag on the floor of the school. Later, he moved to the mainland and began using the boat. He also used it to take the children on trips, to bring visitors to add to the educational program, and to transport children to the doctor or a hospital when emergencies occurred. These children, Conroy's South Carolina colleagues in education insisted, were hopelessly illiterate. But he taught them to read. In his indictment of the school board's policies, he said:

> "We read poetry together. Most of them can now read Langston Hughes, E. A. Robinson, Alfred Noyes. They know the fifty states, the capitals. They know the continents, the countries of Europe, Asia, South America and Africa. They can talk about politics—Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, Spiro Agnew, moratoriums, and the rising cost of living. They can identify more works of the major composers from Beethoven to Tchaikovsky than most of the members of the Board of Education. They have watched over 200 films ranging from the rise of Mussolini to a rodeo in Canada. They know that the first man to die in the American revolution was a black man. They discovered this year to their amazement such obscure facts as Balboa's discovery of the Pacific Ocean. Of course, I had to tell them first that there was a Pacific Ocean. They found out about a relatively important document called the Constitution.

They were *not* hopelessly illiterate. Once, on a privately financed tour, he took the children on the boat to the mainland and then to Washington, D.C., where they *saw* the Declaration of Independence, visited the Capitol, and gazed at the Washington Monument. A year before they had heard of none of these things. The school board was also informed that—

> They learned how to use a newspaper: find a job, get the weather, read the "want ads," or see if the Yankees beat the White Sox in a twilight double-header. There has been no place in this county where such excitement in the pure joy of learning has been generated.

The teaching record of Pat Conroy was apparently of little interest to the county school superintendent. Invited to comment on the discharge of this young teacher, he remarked only that the boat was obviously "an unnecessary expense." Conroy is suing to get his job back, and the Los Angeles *Times* (Nov. 15) story by Betty Fancher, on which we have drawn here, may stir up some public opinion, but these measures, after all, are not a solution for such problems. When he came the eighteen children couldn't recite the alphabet, didn't know that the ocean which surrounded the island was called the Atlantic, were ignorant of the state and county in which they lived and of the name of the President of the United States. Fifteen of the eighteen were below the first-grade level of reading and most of them thought that Savannah was the largest city in the world. Now Conroy is gone and the parents of Daufuskie Island are in despair. Their petition to the school board was ignored.

My Country School Diary (Delta paperback, $2.45) by Julia Weber Gordon is a delighting contrast to the experience of Pat Conroy. Miss Weber also had a one-room schoolhouse, but there, except for both teachers' concern for the

children, the resemblance ends. In a foreword Miss Weber says:

> In our county we have the superintendent of schools who is appointed by the State Department of Public Instruction to direct the work of the schools. We have, also, three Helping Teachers, as rural supervisors in New Jersey are called, who work closely with the teachers. These four people have provided a sound and forward-looking leadership. They have studied and experimented and have taken the initiative in trying to find better ways to provide for the wholesome development of boys and girls. There has been the closest cooperation among them in serving the children of the county.

This book is a day-by-day record of four years of teaching in the one-room schoolhouse of a mountainous region of New Jersey. It is filled with the details of encounter with everyday problems, and of the solutions found by the teacher. In one place the author says:

> The group living reached its highest quality in the fourth year. This could not have come about without the struggles of the three years preceding it. Perhaps in reading about the difficulties we had in arriving at this level of growth, you will find something of interest, some help, and perhaps even some inspiration.

It is the grain of the daily activity that makes the inspiration, while the achievements of the children show what can happen with such a teacher. Actually, books about imaginative teaching are not so much valuable for "suggestions" as they are for provoking a similar resourcefulness. This, one could say, is the difference between science, or much of science, and creative activity. In the creative act, as Gaston Bachelard has said, only the first time counts, while in science, the first time doesn't really count at all—validity lies in confirming repetition. So good teaching cannot be put into a formula; it cannot be "copied."

Miss Weber had support:

> Stony Grove was a good place to be in. I did not have to conform to anything. I was in a state and county whose educational program for years had taken children into account. It was a developing program in which I could have a share. When I began to teach at Stony Grove I was ready to learn and free to experiment to find out how a group of children and their teacher may reach a high level of creative and democratic living. If I have succeeded somewhat, it is because all the roads were open to me. I had every opportunity and invaluable help to discover for myself what mental hygienists have been telling us, that human nature and the situation in which we find ourselves are not fixed but, to an important degree, are what we make them and that they can be changed. We *can* arrive at a social arrangement through which each individual can realize to the fullest his potentialities and through which, all together, we can experience a high level of human living—if we only will!

John Holt is a champion of this book and writes the introduction to the present edition. It first appeared in 1946, but it is not "dated" in the least. *My Country School Diary*, he says, "tells what one teacher was able to do when given a chance and a little help." The external circumstances were not inviting:

> Her school was a small, one-room country school in a poor and declining rural community, serving a group of children most of whom were poor and many of whom were in other ways handicapped. She had very little money and only those materials she or her students or friendly outsiders could make or what she could get various educational services to lend her.

What can be learned from this book? From the community point of view, one learns:

> We do not need enormous, centralized schools in order to have quality education. This is the reverse of what we have been sold and sold. All over the country we have destroyed small schools in which it might at least have been possible for teachers to do some of the things Miss Weber did. In their place we have built giant school-factories, which we run, for the most part, like armies and prisons because they seem too big to be run like anything else. The idea behind this was that in small schools we could not have, could not afford to have, the kinds of equipment, materials, and specialized teachers that we thought we had to have to get enough variety and depth in the children's learning. Miss Weber shows us that even in the late '30s this need not have been so. In less than a month she and her pupils were already able to make their tiny school in its

> impoverished rural community a more beautiful and richer learning environment, more full of interesting things to look at and work with and think about, than most current schoolrooms ever are.

Why did this become possible? As Mr. Holt says:

> What children want and need in the adults they work with, and what the adults who work with them have to have, is, above all, competence—the ability to *do* things. One of the extraordinary things about Miss Weber is the great number and variety of things that she was able to do and thus help the children do. She may not have been and probably wasn't, an expert in any of these. What was important was that she knew enough to get the children interested, get them started, and give them some help.

Not long ago a young person asked Holt where he could find a school to work in that would really give the children "freedom." Holt asked him what he could do, what he could teach children to do.

> He seemed puzzled. I said, "Can you sing, dance, speak foreign languages, play games, play musical instruments? Do you know sports? Can you do any of the arts and crafts, even a little? Can you make things, run things? No, none of these. Perhaps, though I assured him I did not mean this, he thought I was asking if he was expert at anything. At any rate, he didn't think he could do any of these things. All he has was goodwill and a little academic book learning. Not a bad beginning, perhaps, but not enough, nowhere near enough.

Teachers are indeed the remedy.

FRONTIERS

Wars Will Cease . . .

THERE are various theories of how to get peace, but there is one rule upon which all can agree, and to which workers for peace periodically return as to a home base: "Wars will cease when men refuse to fight them." A leaflet, *On the Resistance,* jointly published by Resistance of Philadelphia and the War Resisters League (headquarters, 339 Lafayette Street, New York, N.Y. 10012), is an especially good illustration of the strength and appeal of arguments based on this principle.

The authors are Mike Ferber and Dave Harris. Ferber was a co-defendant of Dr. Benjamin Spock and others, being found guilty of conspiring to violate the Selective Service Act, but later the Court of Appeals ordered the indictments against him and Spock dismissed. David Harris, once president of the student body at Stanford University, is now seeing a three-year prison sentence for refusing induction. Both men have been active in Resistance, a loosely organized draft resistance movement without national headquarters. Together, they make a strong case for refusing to be drafted.

Both point to the paramilitary purposes and effects of the draft law. Ferber quotes a memorandum on "Channeling" by General Hershey. It was, he says, available for the guidance of draft administrators for about three years, but was withdrawn upon the discovery that draft resistance groups were reprinting it by the million to show how the Selective Service System conceived its function and used its power. The memorandum pointed out that getting men for the military services was only a small part of its work. The larger view was of a system of subtle coercion which was able to direct the talents of millions of young men to activities conceived to be "in the national interest." "Loss of deferred status" was the fate of those who did not follow the paths indicated by the SS version of "national interest." Harris speaks of the draft card as an "educational mechanism" which indoctrinates in "a way of thinking about yourself," and leads people "to live under structured fear."

Speaking of recent political disappointments, Ferber writes:

> Some see the bankruptcy of strategy, a kind of non-strategy ahead of us, and that I think is leading a lot of us into a personal despair, or a great frustration. I think this despair exists because we don't really understand what strategy can be, that there's a different kind of strategy, that strategy is people working very hard and making their own lives a commitment to something. It is making a personal revolution right now in one's own life, and with one's own friends, and with one's own small groups that one knows, so that if there is to be a social revolution that comes through a strategy, it will be a strategy that builds something from beneath, so that if things do break, if there are changes that we want to see, it won't be just a colossal sweeping away in a vacuum, but there'll be something that already exists, that we have made, that we believe in, that we can respect, that we're not in despair over, but feel dignified in.
>
> Martin Buber said something extremely important for all of us, which is that the problem with certain kinds of revolutionary thinking—the kind of strategic thinking which I think can lead us to despair—is to wait for the revolution to happen and *then* make our lives over, and *then* make the new institutions. . . . What Buber described is a kind of building of institutions from below, communities that we can live in and care about, and love one another in, so that if a revolution comes it will be only the final incident, a kind of sloughing off of the shell, to allow space for what has grown up from underneath. That, it seems to me, is what we must do.

Dave Harris begins by speaking of each man's life as his tool for changing the world—for living in it and changing it. "What matters is how that life is lived from day to day." The conscript for war delegates the use of that tool to the state. In effect, he "belongs" to the state. Therefore—

> The first problem that you and I face is the problem of repossessing that basic instrument called life. That life all of you have signed over to the state. And it is only when we begin to repossess those lives that you and I can ever talk about those lives having meaning or about living in a society that was really shaped by the meaning of those lives. . . .

> I think that what you should understand . . . is, first, all you've got is a life, all any man is given is a life, and it's time for you—instead of dealing with the abstract notion of social problems and sitting down in all your academic regalia and presenting analyses about the various social problems in America—to understand that the social problem in America is people. It is time to understand that you are people, and that there is a very direct connection between those problems and the way you choose to live. For those social problems are nothing more than the way Americans choose to live and if you want to speak to those people's lives, then you have to speak to them with your life.
>
> The second thing you should remember is that you can do that. This is not an abstract program for someone else. It's something that each of you can do. I think what faces each of us is a question about allegiance. What we in the Resistance have said is very simple. We owe allegiance to no piece of colored cloth. We owe allegiance to no musty set of political principles, or any musty set of people that may run those political principles. What we owe allegiance to is the fact of people's lives around the world. . . .
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> What we've said is that it's time to stand up. It's time to stand with your brothers around the world. It's time to jump off the merry-go-round. It's time to stop letting your shoulder be used as a hoist for death into the saddle. It's time to stop sharpening his sword. It's time to stop carrying his shield. It's time to stop watching him run down the road with bloody hoofprints. It's time to stand up.
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> It's time to say, I'm given one thing on the face of this earth. That is my life. I intend to use it as a way to build the lives of my brothers.
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> It's time to say, I'm given a choice in the modern world today. That choice in a way is a simple choice. It's a choice between all those forces in the society and in the world that have become synonymous with man's death and oppression, and those forces which really offer help and life for people. You must choose between them. You only get to choose one of them. You can't serve a god of militarism and war and serve a god of brotherhood and love. You choose and you serve one or the other, but the existence of one is the absolute contradiction of the existence of the other. That's the choice you and I get to make.

This is a leaflet of sixteen pages. It has a good foreword by Igal Roodenko, Chairman of the War Resisters League, who points out that in 1930 Albert Einstein said that if 2 per cent of the drafted young men of the world would refuse to serve, wars would cease. While that may have been an optimistic prediction, it is true that when small numbers stand up for moral principle, large numbers begin to think it possible to stand up for moral principle, and take heart. The strength in this leaflet is the same sort of strength that is found in Tolstoy's writings against war. The price is 20 cents a copy.