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THE FORMS OF CREDULITY

WHEN Tom Paine died in New York in 1809, at the age of seventy-two, no one came to the funeral. His landlady, a Frenchwoman whose husband Paine had befriended in France, and who was devoted to him, arranged for the transport of his body to a small farm he owned in New Rochelle, and he was buried there, while Madame Bonneville and her two small sons watched, weeping.

But this was not the final neglect. A few years after Paine's death, a political journalist, William Cobbett, having been influenced by a vicious, lying biography of Paine by James Cheetham, decided to research Paine's early life and to study his works in order to refute them. Cobbett even returned to England for this purpose. But when he read Paine's *Agrarian Justice* he decided that he had made a terrible mistake and set out to defend and vindicate Paine instead of attacking him. He started a weekly journal called *Cobbett's Register* in which he urged wide publication and distribution of Paine's writings. Popular hatred of Paine was still common in England, however, and Cobbett's paper had little influence. He went again to America and settled on a small farm near New Rochelle. He found Paine's grave uncared-for, the cottage marred by vandals. He made what repairs he could and passers-by would sometimes see him standing with bowed head at the side of Paine's grave. In 1819 Cobbett resolved to take Paine's body back to England. The precipitating cause of this decision was the news that Richard Carlisle, a London bookseller, had been sentenced to three years in prison for having published and sold Paine's theological writings. Cobbett believed that the common people in England, to whom Paine had been devoted, would raise the money to pay for a new trial for Carlisle, and to erect a shrine for Paine. Ignored in America, surely England would welcome him. The plan was a complete failure. The government frustrated Cobbett's attempt to hold a great assembly honoring Paine and to obtain subscriptions to right the wrong against Carlisle. Defeated by this action, Cobbett kept Paine's remains with him in Liverpool until he died in 1835. Then, it is said, the wood of the coffin was used for another purpose by a furniture dealer, and no one knows what happened to Paine's bones.

What had Paine done to earn such universal neglect? He had been singled out for the highest praise by George Washington, in acknowledgement of his services to the American Revolution. He enjoyed the friendship and admiration of other patriots, including Thomas Jefferson and Samuel Adams. His *Common Sense* had exercised incalculable influence in making the colonists see that independence of England was the only path to the freedom they wanted. During the war, the successive installments of *The Crisis* were the most important force in maintaining the morale of the struggling, ill-clothed and ill-fed Continental army. Hardly anyone was owed more by the newborn United States than Thomas Paine.

What had Paine done? He had published *The Age of Reason,* an attack on sectarian, revealed religion, which immediately made him the target of outraged and vindictive bigotry throughout the Western world. Paine had won all his previous victories by the vigorous exercise of reason, but now it failed him. Men who never read the book condemned him. Men who did not know him hated him. All but his best, his most devoted and intelligent friends deserted him. When he returned to the United States in 1802, after a stay in Europe of fifteen years, he lived for a while as Jefferson's house-guest in the executive mansion. Consideration for his old friend obliged him to leave, since the Federalist press was tearing the

President to shreds because of his friendship with this notorious "atheist," on whom all the excesses and atrocities of the French Revolution were now blamed. That Paine had been almost the only man to oppose the execution of Louis XVI, and had incurred the angry distrust of the Jacobins for his stand, was of course never mentioned. That he barely escaped death himself, during the *Terreur,* and languished in Luxembourg prison for many months, could hardly excite the sympathy of his enemies, since he had written a large part of *The Age of Reason* while incarcerated there!

Paine's sufferings were due to one thing only—his love of truth, and his supreme faith in the power of reason. He was convinced that, sooner or later, men would respond to its appeal. Throughout his career his closest friends urged circumspection and caution upon him. But he would never submit to what seemed to him only degrading compromise. He never stopped demanding of his fellows the best of which they were capable. In the days of the Continental Congress associates told him that the time had not come to declare openly for independence from Britain. He did not listen to them. They warned him that nothing could be gained by the denunciation of human slavery, but Paine would not keep silent.

In America, Paine made the first draft of the Declaration of Independence. In France, he was one of those to draft the Constitution for the government of the people. While in England to see about the construction of the iron bridge he had invented, Paine read Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution.* During a dinner of the English Revolution Society, attended by William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Blake, and others, it was suggested that Paine write a refutation of Burke's book. He was eager to do so, and *The Rights of Man,* an uncompromising attack on the idea of monarchy, was the result. He finally found a printer for it, and then set out for Paris to arrange a French translation. The work sold well in both countries and Paine returned to England in 1791 to attend a celebration of its success. But a gang of hoodlums, armed with clubs, probably government-encouraged, prevented the gathering. Meanwhile Paine composed and had printed a second part of *The Rights of Man.* This, too, enjoyed a large sale, while the British press screamed denunciations at Paine. His publisher was charged with selling seditious literature and Paine also was served with a summons. Meanwhile the book was secretly distributed and could be seen everywhere. There were delays by the prosecution, but one day William Blake and a friend appeared at Paine's rooms to warn him that Crown officers were on the way with a warrant to arrest him and he must leave the country at once to save his life. Paine had just been invited to return to France to enjoy the privileges of honorary citizenship and to serve as a deputy in the government from Calais so he sailed the next morning. At Calais he was welcomed by a public celebration, but that night an old friend, the former nobleman, Anarchasis Cloots, privately warned him of the brutish turn taken by the revolution under Marat and Robespierre. Paine could not believe what Cloots said and went on to take up his duties as deputy from Calais and to serve in drafting the French Constitution. A few months later he dared to oppose the execution of Louis, arguing for his detention and subsequent exile to asylum in the United States. The revolution, he declared had no need for revenge. Saint-Just read his argument, in which he said:

> I voted that Louis should be tried, because it was necessary to afford proofs to the world of the perfidy, corruption and abomination of the monarchical system. The infinity of evidence that has been produced exposes them in the most glaring and hideous colors. . . .
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> Nevertheless, I am inclined to believe that if Louis Capet had been born in an amiable and respectable neighborhood, at liberty to practice the duties of domestic life; had he been thus situated, I cannot believe that he would have shown himself destitute of social virtues.

Sentiments of this sort could only doom Paine in the eyes of the Jacobins. He opposed the *forcible* disestablishment of religion and the carnival atmosphere in the name of "reason" which came after this measure. Such criticisms were resented by the Jacobins and he learned that he had been accused of collaborating with foreign governments. It was at about this time that Paine began to write *The Age of Reason.* In December, 1793, he was arrested and consigned to Luxembourg Prison, once a palace. There he found old friends, such as Cloots, who had already been imprisoned. Few of the men in the prison expected to survive. Paine had watched various executions—the king and Marie Antoinette, Charlotte Corday, and a number of the leading Girondists. Perhaps it would be his turn soon. But Cloots went first to the guillotine, then Danton. Paine, it is said, escaped death only by an accident; but, due to the neglect of Governeur Morris, who disliked Paine, he remained in the Luxembourg until James Monroe replaced Morris as ambassador and was able to secure his release in November, 1794.

Eventually, Paine was obliged to recognize the hatred which publication of *The Age of Reason* had inspired against him. Jefferson sent an American warship to bring him home, but the American press heaped such abuse on the President for daring to honor this "drunken atheist" that Paine felt it would injure his old friend if he sailed for America under these circumstances, and he refused to board the frigate. This was in 1801. Not until a year later, after the Treaty of Amiens had been signed and there was peace between France and Britain, did he agree to leave for the United States. An angry crowd awaited him at the wharf in Baltimore, jeering at anyone who attempted to welcome him. A seething violence seemed under the surface wherever he was recognized. Paine was now practically a man without a country.

What had he done? He had written in *The Age of Reason:*

> I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow creatures happy.
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> All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind. . . .
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> I do not mean by this declaration to condemn those who believe otherwise; they have the same right to their belief as I have to mine. But it is necessary to the happiness of man, that he be mentally faithful to himself. Infidelity does not consist in believing or disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what he does not believe!
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> It is impossible to calculate the moral mischief that mental lying has produced in society. . . .
>
> As to the theology that is now studied, it is the study of human opinions and of human fancies *concerning* God. It is not the study of God himself in the works that He has made, but in the works of writings that man has made; and it is not among the least of the mischiefs that the Christian system has done to the world . . . to make room for the hag of superstition.

This was Paine's view, and regarding it as of great importance to the welfare of the human race, he refused to keep it to himself. He knew what he was doing. He knew, that is, that while more reserved skeptics and unbelievers enjoyed an audience of learned readers, he, Paine, was able to speak to ordinary people everywhere, and to make them understand what he said. He had proved that with his pamphlets and tracts in behalf of the American Revolution. Paine could reach and affect the common man, and he did this so well that it took the Western world more than a century to recover from the shock of his analyses and declarations and to recognize that he was, indeed, a profoundly religious man, filled with natural piety and affection for his fellows.

We can say, today, that Paine's was not a useless sacrifice. And we are able to regard his life as a devotion to principle that has few parallels in history. Paine loved his fellow men and believed in their potentialities. Should we say that he made the mistake of thinking that they were

further along in their development, in their willingness to be ruled by reason and principle, than experience showed to be the fact? We could say that, and it was doubtless said to Paine by some of his more sagacious friends. But the fact that *he* could see the sense of his reasoning, and that some few others could, too, even though they might not admit it publicly, was enough for him. He would do what he knew to be right, and then others would have to do what they thought was right—if they would. There were no relativities, no extenuating circumstances, in the need for a man to be honest with himself, and then with others. So Paine lived the last seven years of his life in his adopted country, the United States of America, almost forgotten, almost friendless, and almost alone.

Why revive these memories of Tom Paine? Because, reading in magazines about the conduct of the affairs of the United States today, one is impressed by the likelihood that Paine would be as poorly treated now, for following his principles, as he was at the beginning of the nineteenth century. We are still far away from the vision that animated his career. One thinks of the recent reviews of B. F. Skinner's *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* and of studies of how opinions are shaped by men in the seats of national power, and how the national press becomes equally responsible through adopting those opinions—often until too late.

Mr. Skinner is undeniably a kind of utopian. He has written a book on the ideal society as he envisions it. But what would he say, one wonders, if a practical problem were set him—such as the task Washington gave Paine when he asked him to keep on writing to give the American troops backbone and hope? How would Skinner go about *that*? Neither Washington nor Paine was in a position to offer the troops "positive reinforcement"! The men could look forward to payless paydays, empty stomachs, and bloody feet on icy marches if they stuck with their commander. "These are the times," said Paine, "which try men's souls." Soul is not a word Mr. Skinner knows how to use. Men, he thinks, don't get any motives out of themselves, but are made to do whatever they do by their environments. Nobility is not a word that Mr. Skinner could find a meaning for, either.

According to Richard Barnet, who writes on "The Game of Nations" in the November *Harper's,* Mr. Skinner has lots of colleagues and followers who work in Washington, D.C. Among the men whom he calls America's "national security managers," Barnet says—

> The official theory of human nature is a hopelessly oversimplified derivative of the rat psychology many of the national security managers learned in college. If you want to motivate a rat, give him a piece of sugar or hit him with a painful jolt of electricity. In international politics, however, it is dangerous to be overgenerous with the sugar; that is "appeasement," which, as the prewar period showed, merely whets rat appetites. But while politicians feel they cannot make very many political concessions without losing the game, their panoply of weapons to burn, blast, poison, or vaporize the rat is practically limitless. Such "negative reinforcement" will make him less dangerous and will be a good example to all other rats. In September 1946, Clark M. Clifford, then Presidential Counsel to Truman, prepared a memorandum on U.S.-Soviet relations that laid out the analysis and policy recommendations that have dominated the last generation of move and countermove. The crucial paragraph perfectly embodies the rat-psychology view of politics:
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> *The language of military power is the only language which disciples of power politics understand.* (*Clifford here means them, not us.*) *The United States must realize that our government is determined to uphold the interest of its citizens and the rights of small nations. Compromise and concessions are considered, by the Soviets, to be evidence of weakness, and they are encouraged by our "retreats" to make new and greater demands.*
>
> So pervasive is this mechanistic view of human motivation that it can withstand a great deal of hard empirical evidence about how human beings actually react to coercion. George Kennan, in an extremely influential memorandum prepared in 1946, while he was chargé d'affaires in Moscow, argued that the Soviet leaders had a paranoid view of the outside world, believing that the nations of the West, in the interests of capitalism, would "encircle" the Soviet

> Union and eventually attack it. The prescribed State Department therapy was to fulfill the paranoid fantasies. Only a few doubters, among them Walter Lippmann and Henry Wallace, admitted confusion with the theory. How, they argued, would threats of mass destruction (American strategy was nuclear from the start) soften the supposed paranoid leaders of an immensely powerful continental empire?

The same psychology has pervaded the policy of the Vietnam war, which we were supposed to win in short order through unparalleled "toughness." However, as Mr. Barnet says:

> Confusion between what is true and what people would like to be true is an occupational hazard in any institution that spends a great deal of time projecting an image. It is a narcotic that protects people not only from public confrontation but from their own consciences. When the truth about the Vietnam war began to come out in 1967 and 1968 and national security managers were forced to defend their policy at dinner parties, the strains associated with the job began to outweigh the thrills. One high-level White House assistant told us he became physically sick at such dinner party confrontations. Forced to face the truth, other national security managers began to show such signs of strain as weeping in public, snapping at subordinates, and succumbing to fits of depression.

In a paragraph dealing with this material, the editor of *Harper's* recalls the confusions of opinion once caused by belief in revealed religion. Then, referring to Mr. Barnet's study of the confident opinion-shapers in Washington, he says:

> The modern age has little taste in religion. We prefer the hard surfaces of technological abstraction, and we choose to believe wise men who come bearing gifts of statistical proof. We are as credulous as before, but we insist upon slide rules and scientific demonstration. Instead of declaring war in the name of Jehovah, we declare war in the name of political freedom. The vagueness of the conception produces the customary babble of interpretations, and more or less the same numbers of people get killed for more or less the same lack of reasons.

The effect of the narcotic of power goes deep—as Mr. Barnet shows, the security managers believe their own propaganda. "Here is the crux of the problem: the men who were ready in the Cuban missile crisis to risk civilization for prestige and to destroy Indo-China to save America's reputation for toughness all believed they were doing right." No more than the men who attacked Paine for calling into question the dogmas of established religion were they in any way conscious that they might be making a terrible mistake. Power has its own insidious justification, and, again, as Barnet says, those who "manage truth in these areas feel little compunction about deception, for they are performing a clear and traditional duty in behalf of the state."

Just as the press of Burke's day shrilly condemned Paine for his blasphemous attack on revealed religion, so the press in our time for many years accepted the fundamental views of the Washington security managers and helped to make the critics seem foolish or dangerous persons. In an article in the *Nation* for Oct. 11, "Vietnam: How the Press Went Along," Susan Welch reports on the major metropolitan newspapers in relation to the issues in Indo-China, finding that only recently have they changed their interpretation of the significance of the struggle there. As she puts it:

> The definitions of the conflict were chosen by the government and echoed by the press, beginning in the early 1950s. We could have seen the war, at that time waged between the French-led-and-supported forces of Bao Dai and the Vietminh, as a civil war, as an anti-colonial upsurge, or even a struggle between Communists and anti-Communists that was not vital to our security. Instead two administrations of the 1950s chose, and the press accepted almost without question, a definition in which Indochina became a "linchpin" in the effort of the "free world" to throw back Communist aggression. . . . By 1960, the assumptions held about the Indochinese situation were fixed, and until disaster befell the United States in its military involvement there, they seemed unchallengeable.

Even now, the folly of the war seems more important than its immorality, and there are still those who defend its intentions, while beginning to admit certain practical difficulties. Yet before us today are numerous moral disasters which are

almost self-evidently the result of the war. Simple honesty is still very scarce.

This was really Paine's major contention. He argued most of all for the need to overcome self-deception. Why have we not had some journalists of Paine's stamp, to help us see the truth about the management of our affairs? The only answer we can think of is that we have not deserved them. As in the case of Paine, we treat such men very badly whenever they appear.

REVIEW
MUSINGS ON LITERATURE

THE world is in shadow and everywhere men are doing hateful things. Expectations have changed. Instead of believing that things will eventually "work out," we are beginning to suspect that even good omens are lined with deceptions. The few optimists who remain are all long-term optimists, depending mainly on some deep-rooted intuitive faith that if human beings can find a way out of the moral wilderness of the present, they will emerge on the other side, not happily or safely, but with only the stark consciousness that radically new beginnings will have to be made.

Good writers bear the burden of such realizations. Lately we have been reading in Harry Mark Petrakis' collection of short stories, *Waves of the Night* (McKay, 1969), noticing, in addition to his remarkable craft as a storyteller, a quality of unrelieved sadness in everything he writes. The reader soon begins to hope that by some magic a little peace or happiness will come to *somebody*, yet knows that this can hardly happen to characters who are unable to create peace and happiness for themselves.

Is Petrakis then a "hopeless" writer? Not really. After some reading in the stories, it seemed that he was writing about the hidden tenderness in human beings, which keeps trying to come out, but is always withered at the threshold. The shells of the artificiality in the common life have no give in them; they crack only in despair, madness, or death.

These are stories about almost lost souls—"almost," because in nearly all of them are characters who have some redeeming tenderness, some secret delicacy and longing to be kind, which emerges either awkwardly and is misunderstood, or too late, and is jeered at. Yet a sturdy immigrant strength gives dignity to many of the Greeks Petrakis writes about, and they have an essential taste in human relations which more sophisticated people lack. Yet most of them become the victims of dreams which can't come true.

Wondering why Petrakis writes such sad stories—why he doesn't ever develop a heroic theme—we decided that his capacity for close observation of life together with his basic honesty limits him to chronicling these sad defeats. Yet there *is* a heroic note in one of the stories. An Indian of middle age is found dead in the streets. He had drunk too much, fallen in a stupor, and lay exposed all night to the winter cold. His body was taken to the Indian center and laid out in a coffin, where his brother, who had adapted more successfully to white ways, brings their father, a Sioux who is nearly ninety. The aged Indian tells his surviving son to leave him alone with the coffin, which is open. There, in the night, he talks to his dead son. The meaning of these musings is that his son could not remain an Indian, but neither could he become a white man. "Not all eagles can become ravens." Sadly, he says:

> "If I had been born thirty years before, and you had been born my son then, you might have become a warrior, one of the great men of the tribes like Black Moon or Crow King or Spotted Eagle. You might have ridden a fine buckskin yearling and followed the winter frost cloud of a buffalo herd."
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> He leaned his back against the wood of the chair. He stared at the white cold ceiling overhead.
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> "You might have known the scent of sweetgrass and sage burning in the council lodge," he said. "You might have hunted the swift antelope showing their white rumps in flight and heard the fall whistle of the mating elk. You might have taken as a wife a daughter of a chief with bracelets of copper and silver on her strong arms. She would have borne you many sons who would have grown up with deep chests and sinewy arms and they would have ridden the prairies at your side. All this you might have known."
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> He rose then and slowly went to open the small box he had carried in with him. There were ashes in the box and a long glistening eagle feather and a slim handled knife. He scattered the ashes across his own head and shoulders and he carefully placed the eagle feather beside his son's head so that it rose like a warrior's plume from his hair.

> He picked up the knife and ran the blade around his left forefinger until it drew a thin line of blood. Then he sat down and put his hands over his son's folded hands. He leaned his head against the rim of the casket and closed his eyes. He began to chant softly, a chant that became a low terrible wail.

Is it that the heroic requires us to look backward, today? This cannot be true. But to have a heroic *literature* requires nourishing recognition of the heroic, and this means the gradual evolution of a culture that cherishes heroic ideals. It means the development of coherent vision, and today our lives are growing formless. There is a loss of cohesion and a breakdown of even useful habit, but there is also something else happening, although hardly perceptible as yet. Conceivably, the coherent forms of the future may not need to be so "formal." That is, they may be closer to act and meaning than the old forms and conceptions. So it is natural that the literature of tomorrow's vision is very difficult to imagine. Its structures may be more inward.

It is not only easier, but sometimes useful, to go back to the past. Mr. Petrakis is of Greek origin and he writes about Greeks. Another book we've been reading lately, also about Greeks, is Mary Renault's *The Last of the Wine.* Miss Renault, we think, is no better a story-teller than Mr. Petrakis, but the age she chose to write about—the last dreary years of the Peloponnesian War—supplies her with very different material. Her book is the story of an Athenian youth who became a soldier in the struggle with Sparta, who knew and loved Socrates, and was the friend of Plato and Xenophon. This is not a great book, but the author is careful not to pretend to too much knowledge. The portrait of Socrates, based mainly on Xenophon, gives no offense, and sometimes delights. The bewildering magnificence of Alcibiades becomes a little more comprehensible at her hands, while the daily life of the young Athenians is made familiar to the reader. The Hellenes, at the time of this story, are in process of losing, forgetting, wasting a great heritage, so there is much sadness implicit in the events of the story. The fate of Socrates becomes evident, although the book ends just before his trial, which is as well, since the indignities visited upon Athens, as much by the Athenians as by their Spartan conquerors, are already sufficient for the reader to bear.

Miss Renault brings within the reader's understanding how the Athenians could condemn Socrates to death; how, little by little, the passions of the crowd gained power over the destiny of Athens, and how emotional impulse was in large part the ruin of the city. Socrates moves among the people as a wise and wholesome power, loved by those who knew him, and hated by demagogues and the resentful conservatives who sought scapegoats for the troubles of the city. At the time of the story, Plato is still a stripling, born Aristocles and nicknamed Plato because of his broad shoulders and his prowess as a wrestler. Yet the promise of his wisdom is shown in the story, while the presence of Socrates lends an unfading glory to even these days of the decline and fall of Athens.

While speaking of the great past of Greece, there is occasion to recall a book that does much to revivify the life of ancient Athens and of the other city states—*Hellas Revisited,* by W. Macneile Dixon. Dixon was the author of *The Human Situation,* a work much quoted in these pages, but his book about classical Greece is not so well known. He was a scholar who taught English literature, which meant that he knew the Greek classics as well. At one time in his life he resolved to go to Greece to visit all the places of which he had read. In this book he takes the reader with him on his journey to the Isles of Greece, weaving in the lore of his learning along the way. In one place he describes the daily life of a Greek citizen:

> Some of the smallest islands in the Ægean contained two or more cities, jealous of their independence. With what result? That in every town, in every village, we may say, the stage was set, as in a mighty kingdom, for high events, for drama,

> in which every citizen bore a part, and no trifling, irresponsible or merely spectacular part. The tiny community to which he belonged dealt daily, as a senate might deal, with great matters—made its own laws, supplied its own necessities, debated policies, provided for its protection against aggressive neighbors, dispatched and received embassies, made war or peace. These were not subjects for idle talk in times when one's country extended as far as a spear could reach, and possessions could only be securely held by men whose hands were firm upon their weapons. Imagine a state of things in which every villager is a statesman, a magistrate, a soldier, involved in all public affairs, and with a share in all responsible decisions. . . . There is no government to blame if calamity follows upon errors of judgment; he is the government. If his city declares war—and quarrels leading to war, quarrels over boundaries or the theft of cattle, are endless—it is he who fights for home, family and property with spear and shield in his own hands. Circumstances like these, and they are universal in ancient Greece, make for activity of mind and call forth whatever power it may possess. They make, too, for communal cooperation. In such circumstances, and under such pressure, thought will burn, if ever, with a clear, intense flame.

These, too, are elements of a vigorous, heroic literature. But how can such determined independence now be regained, without a return to the endless wars of the city states, and to the corruptions to which their victories led? Along with the technological circumstances which have made war insane have come dependencies upon central authority and power which seem to bar the way to local autonomy and those healthful self-determinations of which Dixon speaks. Here, indeed, is challenge enough for several succeeding generations. The literature, we may think, can hardly come first, although we may need a Socrates or two to get us on the way.

COMMENTARY
A BOOK ABOUT PAINE

WE should say that the general outline of the career of Thomas Paine in this week's lead article was drawn almost entirely from Benjamin H. Levin's book, *To Spit Against the Wind*, first published by Citadel Press and now available in a Dell paperback. While this life of Paine has the form of a story, Paine's letters and documents are carefully quoted, and there is no invention of the author that will give offense to the reader. It is really a splendid book—a fine book for young people, or anybody, to read.

Our own experience in reading it reminded us of something said by Arthur Morgan on the importance of the study of history:

> A person without history of the knowledge of the past must see the world as commonplace because, except at extreme times, he is going to live among commonplace people who have come to that conclusion. . . . The only way to get the sum and substance of human experience is to reach out beyond the years we have into the years of the past, into the significant experiences of the human race.

This idea of Morgan's fits perfectly with what John Holt says in this week's "Children" article, in connection with his experience of seeing the artist friend of his father's draw a knight in armor. The impact of reading about Paine's courage and commitment can have a similar effect. As Holt, continuing in this passage, observes:

> They ought to be able to see more of those possibilities. They should at least be exposed to the idea that art can be, not just a diversion, but a very powerful way of getting in touch with and expressing reality. In short, they should meet some people who can make real things appear on paper. No doubt many children would not choose to explore reality in that particular way; they would rather do their exploring through books, or construction, or machines, or experiments in any one of a number of sciences.

And, reading about the threat to Paine's life while he was in London, it is a delight to learn that he had a friend and admirer in William Blake, and that Blake probably saved his life by warning him that officers were coming to arrest him.

Such men are rare, and it is extremely important for everyone to know about them and to gain a vivid sense of the reality of their lives.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
INCIDENTAL LEARNING

IN *How Children Learn*, John Holt has a short section on how speech isn't taught:

> Bill Hull once said to me, "If we taught children to speak, they'd never learn." I thought at first he was joking. By now I realize that it was a very important truth. Suppose we decided that we had to "teach" children to speak. How would we go about it? First, some committee of experts would analyze speech and break it down into a number of separate "speech skills." We would probably say that, since speech is made up of sounds, a child must be taught to make all the sounds of his language before he can be taught to speak the language itself. Doubtless we would list these sounds, easiest and commonest ones first, harder and rarer ones next. Then we would begin to teach infants these sounds, working our way down the list. Perhaps, in order not to "confuse" the child—"confuse" is an evil word to many educators—we would not let the child hear much ordinary speech, but would only expose him to the sounds we were trying to teach.
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> Along with our sound list, we would have a syllable list and a word list.
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> When the child had learned to make all the sounds on the sound list, we would begin to teach him to combine the sounds into syllables. When he could say all the syllables on the syllable list, we would begin to teach him the words on our word list. At the same time, we would teach him the rules of grammar, by means of which he could combine these newly-learned words into sentences. Everything would be planned with nothing left to chance; there would be plenty of drill review, and tests, to make sure that he had not forgotten anything.
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> Suppose we tried to do this, what would happen? What would happen, quite simply, is that most children, before they got very far, would become teamed, discouraged, humiliated, and fearful, and would quit trying to do what we asked them. If, outside of our classes, they lived a normal infant's life, many of them would probably ignore our "teaching" and learn to speak on their own. If not, if our control of their lives was complete (the dream of too many educators), they would take refuge in deliberate failure and silence, as so many of them do when the subject is reading.

Fortunately, no one learns to speak in this way; it all happens more or less by accident, through contact with others who often are entirely free of pedagogic intentions. The child just picks up speaking because of his longing to communicate. Actually, with some children, before they learn to shape words you can see that their heads are bursting with meanings that they want to express, and it bubbles out in a stream of incomprehensible sound, although the intonations are filled with latent meaning and what they say certainly seems "rational" to them, even if you don't know what it is.

How nice it would be if other things could be taught or rather learned in this way! What is it about speech which makes it so natural to learn? Well, everybody does it. And speech is the means of being with other people, of having a part in their lives.

Surely the arts could be taught in this way, too. To some degree. This would mean that everybody would do the arts, which would make them natural for the children to learn. They would be as much a part of the home life as cooking and eating. Art activities wouldn't be something special. The young wouldn't have to go off to some place like an arts and crafts center, or to classes at the museum, to be exposed to the arts; this would happen at home. Of course, if some extraordinary work comes to town in the form of an exhibit, then there is reason for the whole family to go see it, but for the right kind of learning, the best way to teach is for everybody to do the thing and not talk about teaching it.

We got to thinking about this after reading a paper about "Values." The idea, of course, is to have them, and teachers may suppose that it is their responsibility to "teach" them. But talking about "values" may be about the worst thing that could be done—sort of like spoiling literature for children by "teaching" it in high school. Maybe it is possible to enjoy and become devoted to what you encounter in high school, but this is pretty hard to imagine. If it does happen, it is because

someone else, perhaps a teacher, enjoys it so much himself that he can't hide his enthusiasm and his interest becomes infectious.

But "Values"! An experienced teacher once said that he had found it fatal to give his classes (in college) the abstract terms used in his subject before the students had had some first-hand experience of what the terms would represent. Once they have a "title" for the experience, he said, they neglect the reality of the experience, and then just manipulate the titles. Maybe it would be a good idea to ban the use of the word values for a generation—not what it stands for, but the generalization.

We once participated in the first year of the Great Books seminar program, in which Plato's *Apology* was read and discussed. It was years ago and no one in the group found it necessary to talk about "values." But that weekly evening meeting in which the character of Socrates slowly made itself felt was certainly a discovery in the realm of values for everyone present. No "scholars" were there, just a collection of men and women who met in a room the local library provided. As the weeks went by, the argument about whether Socrates was a great man or a fool became intense. For some, this reading was the first time they had ever encountered a historical figure willing to risk and lose his life on the issue of a principle. The *Apology* was followed by the *Crito* and the *Phaedo*, and these books opened up other considerations, such as a citizen's duty to the social community which had supported his life and educated him, and the question of the immortality of the soul.

These are not "ancient" problems, but have to do with identity, role, and obligation, and are presented in a vivid dramatic setting. Drama, after all, is the closest that pedagogic art can come to the real-life situations provided by *paideia.* Its verisimilitude to life makes it a medium for encounter with issues of values, not as titled, but as the motives in human life.

* * *

Children differ. We take two anecdotes from widely separated parts of John Holt's book. First, about a little girl:

> . . . a friend told me a story about his daughter, not yet a year old. She had been given a little plastic whistle, which she loved to toot. It was her favorite toy. One day one of her parents picked up the whistle, and, seeing that it had holes in it like a recorder, began to play a little tune on it. They both amused themselves with it for a minute or two, then gave the whistle back to the baby. To their great surprise, she pushed it angrily aside. At the time her father told me the story, she had not blown it since.

The other story is about Holt himself as a child:

> When I was very young, hardly more than six, if that, my father brought to our apartment, one day, a friend who was an artist. After a while he took out a big drawing pad and a soft pencil and began to draw. Before my fascinated gaze and unbelieving eyes, there began to appear on the paper—a knight! In full armor! It was a miracle. One minute, blank paper; then, a line here, a line there, the hand working smoothly and surely; and there he was, almost as real as life. I would not have been much surprised if he had stepped right off the page. Certainly there was nothing that I wanted, then and for some time, as much as to have been able to do what that man did—put life on a page with a pencil. It seemed a superhuman skill; I couldn't imagine being able to, but I would have given anything to have been able to do it myself.
>
> It is hard to imagine a child in school today having such an experience. It is good that they are allowed and encouraged to paint, big sloppy colorful pictures with poster paint, without anyone leaning over their shoulder telling them to do it this way or that way, or that what they have done is wrong. But there are possibilities in art that they can hardly have dreamed of, as I would never have dreamed of anyone being able to make that knight.

Holt was older than the little girl, of course, which may explain his different reaction. But the natural way of helping children to want to learn is for them to live in a home and community where such exciting influences form a part of their lives.

FRONTIERS

Where Conservation Should Begin

PURSUING his habit of putting first things first, E. F. Schumacher, in a recently published paper, "The Economics of Conservation," contrasts the dangers of population growth with the much greater threat of ever increasing consumption. He makes a very simple argument:

> Let us admit that infinite population growth, by mathematical necessity, would lead to disaster. But let it also be admitted that, first, there is as yet a great deal of room on our Earth for additional people and actual "overpopulation" today exists only at a few clearly identifiable places; second, that the *infinite* continuation of population growth is merely a statistical possibility and by no means a certainty; and, third, that there is nowhere a systematic, deliberate, conscious *policy* designed to further the growth of world population—it "just happens." In the 'twenties and 'thirties, many people were worried that the population of Europe would dwindle away; now they are worried about "standing room only." Meanwhile, all their worries have the immediate effect of diverting attention away from the other "growth phenomenon" which is more powerful in quantity, raises much bigger problems in the context of conservation, and, far from being something that "just happens," is the result of most systematic, deliberate and conscious *policies* pursued with a semi-religious fervor: the growth of consumption per head.
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> Without wishing to deny the self-evident truth that a finite world cannot sustain an infinity of population growth, we should surely have the courage to ask whether a finite world can sustain an infinite expansion of each person's demands. Or, to put the same point slightly differently: if the impact upon the environment of a two per cent growth of population is thought to be dangerous, is it not possible that the impact of a four per cent growth in each person's consumption may be twice as dangerous?

This recalls the contention of Wayne H. Davis, University of Kentucky biologist, who maintains that overpopulation should be defined in terms of human activities which "are most rapidly decreasing the ability of the land to support human life." Arguing, for example, that the people of the United States are at least twenty-five times more destructive of the land than the people of India, he proposes that in what he calls "Indian equivalents," "the population of the United States numbers at least four billion." If the present rate of consumption in America continues, he says, "by the year two thousand any surviving Americans might consider today's average Asian to be well off."

Schumacher, as an expert on the economics of fuels, uses coal to press home his point, adding the distinction between the consumption of the rich as contrasted with the consumption of the poor—a comparison similar to Davis's comparison of the patterns of Indian with American consumption. Schumacher is concise:

> Let us define those people as "poor" who live in countries with an average fuel consumption per head, in 1966, of less than one ton of coal equivalent (c.e.), and let us define as "rich" those living in countries with an average fuel consumption per head, in 1966, of more than one ton c.e. I know, these definitions are somewhat arbitrary, but, as it happens, they produce a fairly plausible classification as between rich and poor.
>
> On this reckoning, the world's population, in 1966, of about 3.34 billion people, divides into just over one billion "rich" and 2.3 billion "poor." The *average* fuel consumption of the "rich" amounted to over 4½ tons c.e. per year, and that of the "poor" to less than one third of a ton, a ratio between rich and poor of 14:1.
>
> Now, assume that the "rich" populations grow at the rate of 1¼% a year and the "poor" at 2½%: the result would be a growth in world population from 3.34 billion in 1966 to 6.9 billion in the year 2000, an increase by just over 100 per cent in 34 years
>
> Assume further that the policy of "raising consumption standards" continues everywhere, with the result that the per capita fuel consumption of the "rich" population grows by 2¼ % a year and that of the "poor" by 4½%: the result would be a growth in average world fuel consumption per head from 1.65 tons c.e. in 1966 to 3.35 tons in the year 2000,—again an increase in just over 100 per cent in 34 years.
>
> The total result in world fuel consumption would be a growth from 5.5 billion tons c.e. in 1966 to 23.2 billion in the year 2000—an increase by a

> factor of more than four, half of which would be attributable to population increase and half to increased consumption per head.
>
> This half-and-half split is interesting enough. But the split between the "rich" and the "poor" is even more interesting. Of the total increase in world fuel consumption from 5.5 billion tons c.e., i.e. an increase by 17.7 billion tons, the "rich" would account for nearly two-thirds and the "poor" for only a little over one-third. Over the whole 34-year period, the world would use 425 billion tons of coal equivalent, with the "rich" using 321 billions or 75% and the "poor," 104 billions.

The results of this analysis, as Schumacher says, are very interesting indeed. They are not of course "predictions," but only "exploratory considerations," yet they nevertheless make certain things clear. For example, even with a modest population growth rate for the "rich," which is only half that assigned to the "poor," it remains a fact that the "rich" accomplish far greater "damage"—consumption of irreplaceable fuels. Even if the population growth of the "poor" were slowed down to match that of the rich, the reduction in consumption accomplished would be only a little over 10 per cent. *But,* says Schumacher—

> if the "rich" decided—and I am not saying this is likely—that their present per capita fuel consumption was really high enough and that they should not allow it to grow any further considering that it is already 14 times as high as that of the "poor,"—now, that *would* make a difference: in spite of the assumed rise in the "rich" populations, it would cut total world requirements in the year 2000 by over one-third.

He concludes:

> A dispassionate consideration of these "exploratory considerations" must, I think, lead us to the unpalatable conclusion that the economies of the "rich" countries are moving on a collision course not only against the "poor" but also against the environment, that is to say, against Nature herself. To pursue this course for only another two or three decades would mean stripping the Earth of such a large proportion of its nonrenewable fossil fuel resources that even a modest continuation of the industrial way of life into the next century might become virtually impossible. Even if the grosser forms of pollution are avoided—and such avoidance is certainly feasible and utterly desirable—certain basic substances, the once-for-all endowment of the Earth with non-renewable fuels and probably many other essential materials, would be so severely depleted that industrialism, now universally seen as destined to conquer the whole world, could survive only in a few specially favored regions.

A final thought which members of the literate and "advanced" societies too easily lose sight of: Two thirds of the world's population are peasants.