

## CITY IN TROUBLE

THE City of New York, from frequent if briefly informative report, is in deep and probably continuing trouble. It lacks the money to pay its bills. Tough-minded critics say that the city has for years been living beyond its means, and must now face up to taking the steps necessary to adjust the cost of its operation to the income received from taxes. Subsidies are only for those with an obvious inclination to improve their ways. And so on.

There are arguments on the other side. New York is more than a very large city. It bears the burdens shifted to the metropolitan area from other regions of the state and country. Its relief rolls are disproportionately heavy, while its services as a cultural center of the nation reach far beyond the city's limits. And so on. One could spend a year or two absorbing the pros and cons of the argument about who and what are responsible for the fiscal crisis of New York. And still be as undecided as before. It is, as most commentators seem to conceive it, a "bottom-line" argument, concerned almost entirely with money or the lack of it.

Some sort of compromise, no doubt, will be arrived at in these terms. It seems likely that almost no one will be pleased by the solution—if what is worked out should deserve to be called a solution. An "ideal" solution is hard to imagine. Cities themselves have become a contradiction in terms. What unbelievable combination of compassion and ruthlessness would be needed to solve New York's problems properly? They have the same incommensurable dimensions as inflation, unemployment, pollution, the energy crisis, and war.

The meeting of such problems with the resources of present-day rationality is imaginable only on the basis of some sort of personification.

You think about a city the way you think about a person who stands almost helpless in the middle of a terrible mess, and you say, out of your best judgment, what you think he ought to do. An alcoholic will have to give up drinking. The man with diabetes must leave sugar and starch alone. He may have to go on insulin—but that is only the management of his disease, not a cure.

What is the real solution? Has the man—the city—some potential health to draw upon? If so, how do you localize responsibility? Whom do you confront with your remedy? The politicians who can hardly survive at the polls if their programs involve a lot of self-denial? Thinking about what is "feasible" in relation to such worsening problems becomes frightening in its implications. From the contemplation of such dilemmas the assumptions of fascist politics are born. The tired and disheartened observer of public affairs—of the housekeeping within cities all over the country, not just New York—eventually reaches the point where he has nothing more to say. He doesn't know *what* to say. For him it comes down to waiting for the people to muddle through, somehow or other, resentfully accepting adjustments to circumstances whose necessities can no longer be concealed.

Well, how should New York be regarded, in order to reach a conclusion worth talking about or doing something about, if that should be possible? An effective muckraker could probably expose enough corruption and mismanagement in New York to totally disgust the rest of the country. Most other cities would be equally vulnerable to, say, a Ralph Nader study of how they are run. Getting off the public payroll the people who shouldn't be there would be almost as difficult as persuading everyone in the city to quit smoking. (Even the symptoms of emphysema don't accomplish this for some.) Well, analysis at this

level has to be pursued, but it can accomplish little more than a realistic statement of the problem. Probably enough studies of this sort have already been made. That we don't know about them—that word of their findings reaches only a small audience of professionals—may be a measure of their practical utility.

Useful criticism, moreover, has to proceed in the light of an ideal. Aristotle said that if you require a good idea of a thing, look at an undamaged specimen. Where? Plotinus proposed that the Platonic archetype should be consulted—the conception as it exists in vision, before it gets mussed up by human beings. We do have to cope with mussed-up affairs, but we shall either adjust to the muss—settle for management of our ills—or reach for the ideal, depending upon our thinking about what is good and ultimately possible for human beings.

What is a workable ideal? It is not, as misconceiving critics of Plato sometimes declare, a static, heavenly perfection. You need to refer to the heavenly perfection, but a workable ideal is defined by the direction of one's becoming. Appropriate achievement is defined by matching potentialities with obstacles, and if you don't know how to measure either accurately, you try as hard as you can, applying what common sense is available at the time.

What, then, is an ideal city? A city is or ought to be place of intensified human growth. It is or ought to be the focus of the excellences achieved by a population—in culture, art, education, and the pursuit of truth and good. It ought to be a place where people congregate in order to learn, where may be found teachers of a sort not numerous enough to be present in every village and town.

There are, happily, people in New York who think of their city and of their work in this way. There are teachers and artists and dramatists and writers and publishers who maintain this tradition and role in New York. They work against odds, but they go on working. They give the city an

attraction felt, if not always understood, by a great many around the country. There are other, less admirable attractions, of course, but now we are considering the potentials for reaching toward an ideal. No doubt there are citizens who are devoted to the public good—men and women who, in their daily thinking, reflect something of the responsibility expressed by Socrates for Athens in the *Crito*. And there are doubtless public servants who work as hard as they can to improve the city's appearance and physical condition. It is probably foolish to name names, but a committed administrator, looking closely at the problems of New York, would probably like to have someone of Robert Moses' stature and determination around. Without intending any particular judgment, it can be said that working for change or just bearable continuity in a city like New York will always bring unpopularity, or even indignant condemnation, from some apparently legitimate point of view. Read for example Arthur Morgan's recently published history of the Tennessee Valley Authority, and what he encountered in the way of opposition from those strongly oriented by what they regarded as liberal virtue. Morgan's somewhat Gandhian ideals about cultural reconstruction and education were branded as "basket weaving" by his opponents, and his insistence upon more than commercial integrity in public life earned him the aggressive hostility of several powerful associates in the project.

How can the activities of such rare individuals be rendered more instead of less effective? How can we keep them from getting fired?

In New York there are serious obstacles to the strong development of community spirit. Three books outline them sufficiently. They are Richard Whalen's *A City Destroying Itself*, Charles Abrams' *The City Is the Frontier*, and Jane Jacob's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. These books are likely to have a depressing effect on the reader, except for the courage and persistence of the writers. Yet Mrs.

Jacobs, for one, got discouraged about New York and moved to Toronto, hoping that there her efforts would have more noticeable effect. Mr. Abrams demonstrates the folly of expecting very much from conventional political action. He shows how the best-intentioned legislation for housing and urban renewal is reversed by administrative processes carried out in submission to the bottom-line principle of private enterprise in the United States. Richard Whalen shows that New York is less of a real community than other major U.S. cities, by reason of the flight of the middle and upper classes to the suburbs, leaving the central metropolitan area an increasingly unpleasant place needed only for earning enough money to live elsewhere. Who *cares* about it?

One more book should be read for its continuing horror story—Julius Horwitz' *The Inhabitants*, which is a long look at relief and public welfare from the inside, by a writer who was once a social worker in New York. (Claud Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* might also be consulted, on the "normal" conditions under which young blacks grow to maturity, and *The Lives of Children* by George Dennison for what happens to Puerto Rican youth in the crowded schools conducted by overworked and often indifferent administrators.)

These books are important—far more important, really, than the latest figures on the costs of running New York and analysis of its bankruptcy—more important than, say, Amitai Etzioni's polished study (in the Summer 1968 *Public Interest*) of how much money it would take to put New York back on its feet. The books are important because they take the reader out of the atmosphere of bottom-line (money) thinking, drawing him into the sphere of people's everyday lives, showing what it means to try to live in New York under the conditions that will probably get worse, no matter what anyone is able to do. These are books which oblige the reader to suspend judgment, stop finding scapegoats, refuse to approve or repeat rhetorical ultimatums to

abstract entities such as "those people in New York."

You see that being a New Yorker, or a Los Angeleno, or a Detroiter, at the level where problems become acute, is not very different from enduring a war. War is filled with the irrational confusions that the old general described so well in *War and Peace*—which the Italian storyteller, Leonardo Sciascia, portrayed in "Antimony": "Perhaps all wars are waged like this, with men who are just men, without flags; perhaps for men who fight against one another there's no Italy or Spain or Russia, only dignity in staking your life honestly and accepting the gamble of death." One thinks of the "emotional apprehension of experience" of a Jane Addams or a Miriam Van Waters (*Youth in Conflict*). Such persons do not talk of justice and right, but only of ways to diminish the suffering they see all about. Hopelessness, filth, faceless indifference, the continuous ache in the heart—these qualities of life dissolve the pretensions of ideology, the façades of legal process, the slogans of right and center and left. In a sense the true reformers become glorious opportunists who deal directly with the needs of the common folk of the world—people who, for the most part, remain untouched and unaffected by the verbal encounters of those who rule, debate, defend, and manipulate.

Our cities are out-sized monsters, giant Gullivers, pegged down in helpless impotence by the countless Lilliputian appetites and self-interests of all the inhabitants, who give to the life and welfare of their "community" (which long ago became something else) only fragmentary and distracted attention at elections in which they now have little and diminishing faith. A city is like an individual in some respects—it has place, age, metabolism of a sort, but behavioral patterns so complicated and ungoverned that a decade of statistical compilation would only begin to characterize what happens there. See, for enlightening contrast, how Danilo Dolci looks at an Italian city, and what he says to others to help

them to see what is wrong (in *Fire Under the Ashes* by James McNeish).

The first thing to do, it seems to us, is to stop talking about the problems of cities in terms of *money*. Money, except for the probability that we have had too much of it for generations, is not the root of the problem. Taking it for the root will make the problem totally insoluble. A paragraph from Prof. Etzioni's paper (*The Public Interest*, Summer, 1968) will demonstrate this:

Mayor John V. Lindsay testified before Congress that he needed \$100 billion to rebuild New York's slums; at the present rate it would take forty years before such an amount would be available to eliminate *all* American slums. And that is housing alone! With regard to all needs, a study by the National Planning Association calculated that if the United States sought, by 1985, to realize the modest goals specified by the Eisenhower Commission on National Goals it would (assuming even a 4 per cent growth rate in GNP) be at least \$150 billion a year short.

What gives a city its quality and atmosphere—stirs a Mary Antin to delighting ecstasy, an O'Henry to unforgettable romance, endows children with memories of wondrous exploration at the Battery, the old Aquarium, throughout lovingly designed parks and in curious neighborhoods? When a city is really lived in and enjoyed, it acquires these qualities from a collective largesse. When they are eroded, no one notices for a while. Again, a half-conscious collective process is at work. Eventually the bottom line dictates the terms of sheer survival—and this all-powerful abstraction destroys the vital organs, the sensitive tissues of normal urban life. No one knows exactly how these things work, but—*look at the city!* Read about its self-advertised disaster, its petulant complaints, its provincial egotisms, its claims with truth in them—the sort of truth that rapidly diminishes with assertion. And all the other indictments and appeals. Then try to say what has gone wrong.

In one of his penetrating studies of the morality of societies, conducted in the pages of

*Politics* years ago, Dwight Macdonald remarked sagely, "If everyone is guilty, no one is guilty." This is the proposition we should start out with in considering the plight of New York or any other American city—they all have their messes, and New York is only bigger and older than the others, displaying for our instruction the advanced symptoms of a common destiny. It is really too late for blame, for moralizing about the people, or even the politicians, in New York. If the cities are to be improved, it will take something approaching the devotion Gandhi said was required to bring health—the foundation of self-support—to the villages of India:

We must have unquenchable faith in our mission. We must be patient with the people. We are ourselves novices in village work. We have to deal with a chronic disease. Patience and perseverance, if we have them, overcome mountains of difficulties. We are like nurses who may not leave their patients because they are reported to have an incurable disease.

If you read *A City Destroying Itself* you tend to agree with Gandhi's diagnosis, and then with his prognosis—what must be done. But New York is so rich! Yes, rich, and in debt up to its ears. Indebtedness is a prestige item these days. Which country has the biggest national debt? Surely the greatest country in the world!

It can be said, of course, that New York is faced with a condition, not a theory, that its bills must be met. Well, some of its bills will no doubt be met, and some will be reduced. And New York will borrow more money as it has to . . . until. . .

But what *is* the condition of New York? If you feel sick, a good doctor doesn't ask about your bank balance. He won't find your temperature given on the bottom line. Many disorders may eventually be reflected in money, in bank balances, but health is never obtained by financial manipulation, not even by great wealth.

The city is too big, it grew too fast, and it is too much devoted to the making of money, which

leads people to measure everything in terms of money, and to regard as empty and unreal the value of everything else. These are the clichés of the diagnosis, and alas, it gets us absolutely nowhere to repeat them. The fact is that for some time, now and in the future, the problems of New York are going to be read off in terms of money, since that is where the pain seems to lie, where we identify our hurt, and remedies have to be addressed to the reduction or control of pain in acceptable terms. But this in no way alters the fact that there may be other, more important things to do, and that only persons of somewhat Gandhian inclination are likely to do them. There are dozens of ways to illustrate the fact that money does not touch most of the human problems of the city, that the trouble lies in the way the money already available is used—and *that* is the old problem of institutionalization and bureaucracy, which is the same under any political regime. We are talking, we should remember, about what happens in the richest country in the world, so money is *not* the problem.

Here is a portion of a report on the mental health facilities of one large American city—not New York:

. . . consider the case of a depressed and defeated workingclass housewife turning to someone for help with a multitude of problems that are overwhelming her: an alcoholic husband who disappears for days at a time; the piling up of pressing debts; an eviction notice from the landlord; two children in diapers and a third who is enuretic, a sickly daughter and a neglected oldest son whose school work worsens daily, headaches and stomachaches, increasing trouble with her neighbors as she becomes more and more short-tempered; and a growing sense of guilt as she finds that she herself is turning more and more to liquor for consolation.

If this woman is viewed in a narrow mental-health context, it is possible that she would be diagnosed as suffering from depression and, if she were so diagnosed or so identified, it is likely that she would be referred for psychiatric treatment. Possibly she might be identified as a person with marital problems and then referred for marital counseling. The question that comes to mind is: how logical is

such a narrow identification? It is likely that this woman would not be viewed as a suitable candidate for psychotherapy and this judgment would probably be correct, since she is neither introspective nor verbal, nor does she consider herself "mental." Most important, she would tend to perceive talking to somebody once a week for a long period of time about her feelings, and her many worries, as a totally inadequate method of helping her solve her problems.

Aside from the probable futility of referring such a client for counseling or therapy, however, one must consider the question of whether it is even appropriate to make such a referral—to abstract, as it were, a "disease" from this complex of problems. Her "depression" is a condition that might seem quite natural in view of what is happening to her. To call her situation a marital problem seems, not only to her but to most people, a rather glaring understatement.

This illustrates by analogy, if it does not begin to cover, except intuitively or in principle, the sort of thing that is wrong with our cities—and wrong *in* our cities as well. Called for are both emergency help—the only kind of help we have attempted for many generations, which is continuously needed and can be left in the hands of experts—and another sort of help: the help that hardly anyone thinks about because at first it seems to deal with "intangibles"—which is needed still more. This is the sort of help E. F. Schumacher is giving in relation to economic questions, when conditions are flexible enough to receive it; the help that nutritionists are giving to an increasingly receptive clientele; and the help that Lewis Mumford and Theodore Roszak and Jacob Needleman are giving, at the level of thinking about the meaning of our lives. The trouble in the cities is a massive symptom of the neglect by American civilization of this sort of self-help. It requires work by us all, a work in which there can be no experts. And it takes time.

## *REVIEW*

### MEN AND MACHINES

THE proper study of mankind is man, Pope said, and we might add that the same maxim enables us to identify a good book. The subject of every good book is really *Man and*. . . . The study of ants, eagles, fish—or bridges, houses, ships—when fruitful, always turns out to be somehow illuminating about ourselves. Our being includes our circumstances, so that wisdom about circumstances gives knowledge about ourselves. Is it egotism or homocentric to say this? On the contrary, understanding the relations between subject and object, between ourselves and our environment, may be the only means of escape from the fascinations or bonds of egotism.

A work of art need not instruct us in how it serves such purposes. Art is precious by reason of the opportunities it affords for discovery. To be told what it does for us makes the discovery second hand, and then, of course, it is no longer art. But another kind of instruction, not less important, requires all the self-consciousness we can muster. This is the study of philosophy—which naturally, and paradoxically, also involves art.

We have for review a fine book which invites us to greater self-consciousness. It is *Computer Power and Human Reason* (Freeman, 1975, \$9.95), by Joseph Weizenbaum, who teaches computer science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Readers who want to know in general terms what computers are, how they work, and the principles involved may find this the best book on the subject (to be available in the stores in February). But readers mainly curious about the similarities and differences between human beings and computers are likely to find it even more valuable, for they will soon realize that this approach to the subject compels at least tentative decisions about the nature of man. And this, indeed, is the author's intent. He says at the outset, in his Preface:

This book is only nominally about computers. In an important sense, the computer is used here merely as a vehicle for moving certain ideas that are much more important than computers. The reader who looks at a few of the book's pages and turns away in fright because he spots an equation or a bit of computer jargon here and there should reconsider. He may think that he does not know anything about computers, indeed that computers are too complicated for ordinary people to understand. But a major point of this book is precisely that we, all of us, have made the world too much into a computer, and that this remaking of the world in the image of the computer started long before there were any electronic computers. Now that we have computers, it becomes somewhat easier to see this imaginative transformation we have worked on the world. Now we can use the computer itself—that is, the idea of the computer—as a metaphor to help us understand what we have done and are doing.

Everyone has *some* ideas about computers. Thinking about them leads to such questions as: "Are men machine-like?" and "Are machines man-like?" Since machines, per se, are no longer especially fascinating, the first question is more likely to occur. More than three hundred years ago, Rene Descartes was enormously excited by the prospect of explaining all behavior, including human behavior, as machine operations. His feeling of optimism is understandable. We make machines and therefore know about them, perhaps all about them. If, then, man is a machine, maybe we can know all about him, too. The expectation was intoxicating; it still is, the more so today because of the wonder of the computer. Mr. Weizenbaum explains:

What is it about the computer that has brought the view of man as a machine to a new level of plausibility? Clearly there have been other machines that imitated man in various ways, e.g., steam shovels. But not until the invention of the digital computer have there been machines that could perform intellectual functions of even modest scope, i.e., machines that could in any sense be said to be intelligent. Now "artificial intelligence" (AI) is a subdiscipline of computer science. This new field will have to be discussed. Ultimately a line dividing human and machine intelligence must be drawn. If there is no such line, then advocates of computerized psychotherapy may be merely heralds of an age in

which man has finally been recognized as nothing but a clock-work. Then the consequences of such a reality would need urgently to be divined and contemplated.

A curious tale hangs from the expression, "computerized psychotherapy." As an exercise the author once composed a program which amounted to a parody of an interview between a Rogerian psychotherapist and a patient. After its publication, he found to his surprise that the program was attracting wide attention. A number of psychiatrists, he learned, took the idea quite seriously, one of them calling for "further work" to make the program ready for clinical use. Mr. Weizenbaum wondered what sort of psychiatrist would be willing, in effect, to see himself "not as an engaged human being acting as healer, but as an information processor following rules." How would such a psychiatrist think of the patients who could be helped by a machine? Would he believe it possible for a machine to enter into the feeling life of a troubled human, participate in his problems, and learn, through empathy, to understand them? Not really. The doctors eager for computer psychiatry hoped it might reduce the case load of busy therapists who are unable to meet the demand for their services. But people generally, Mr. Weizenbaum discovered, too easily became emotionally involved with the computer. This was perturbing:

I knew of course that people form all sorts of emotional bonds to machines, for example, to musical instruments motorcycles, cars. And I knew from long experience that the strong emotional ties many programmers have to their computers are often formed after only short exposures to their machines. What I had not realized is that extremely short exposures to a relatively simple computer program could induce powerful delusional thinking in quite normal people.

This was his reason for writing a book. The almost habitual personification—sometimes approaching "deification"—of the computer compelled him to consider questions that might be neglected on a common-sense basis:

One position I mean to argue appears deceptively obvious: it is simply that there are important differences between men and machines as thinkers. I would argue that, however intelligent machines may be made to be, there are some acts of thought that *ought* to be attempted only by humans. One socially significant question I thus intend to raise is over the proper place of computers in the social order. But, as we shall see, the issue transcends computers in that it must ultimately deal with logicity itself—quite apart from whether logicity is encoded in computer programs or not.

What Mr. Weizenbaum is saying here is that the whole question of technical expertise is at issue—in relation to certain sorts of human problems. This question was first raised by Plato in the *Republic* and elsewhere, in his pursuit of the meaning of justice, and the wisdom behind justice, when he offered the analogies of one practical expert after another in partial illustration of what is involved in true knowledge. Plato's conclusion is that there are *no technical solutions* for ethical or moral problems. Solving them, therefore, cannot be delegated to another—whether man or machine. Technical analogies may help. Expertise may illuminate or frame, but it cannot decide, above the level of finite considerations.

The habitual conversion of moral issues or problems into technical matters having computable solutions is, this author thinks, a major delusion of the age:

The lay reader may be forgiven for being more than slightly incredulous that anyone should maintain that human thought is entirely computable. But his very incredulity may itself be a sign of how marvelously subtly and seductively modern science has come to influence man's imaginative construction of reality.

Surely, much of what we today regard as good and useful, as well as much of what we call knowledge and wisdom, we owe to science. But science may also be seen as an addictive drug. Not only has our unbounded feeding on science caused us to become dependent on it, but, as happens with many other drugs taken in increasing dosages, science has been gradually converted into a slow-acting poison. Beginning perhaps with Francis Bacon's misreading

of the genuine promise of science, man has been seduced into wishing and working for the establishment of an age of rationality, but with his vision of rationality tragically twisted so as to equate it with logicity. Thus have we very nearly come to the point where almost every genuine human dilemma is seen as a mere paradox, as a merely apparent contradiction that could be untangled by judicious applications of cold logic derived from a higher standpoint. Even murderous wars have come to be perceived as mere problems to be solved by hordes of professional problem-solvers.

It is important, the author points out, to understand in what sense computers are "universal" machines, and why they are sometimes said to be able to do "anything." These capacities need to be recognized before their limits can be demonstrated.

One decisive limit lies in what can be told to computers. Superficially, from one point of view—basically, from another—this is a matter of language. Formal language must be used with a computer. No ambiguity is allowed. But human beings, Mr. Weizenbaum shows, know more than they can tell. A hazy feeling cannot be put into computer language, yet a hazy feeling, intimated by myth or metaphor, may be the ore of the meaning we seek. The author puts the matter briefly:

A theory purports to describe the conceptual structures that underlie all human language understanding. But the only conceptual structures it admits as legitimate are those that can be represented in the form of computer manipulatable data structures. These are then simply pronounced to constitute all the conceptual structures that underlie all human thought. Given such a program, i.e., such a narrowing of the meaning of the word "all," it should indeed be possible to prove that the theory accounts for "all" human linguistic behavior!

The first part of this book is informative about computers, telling what they are and how they work, which gives force to the criticism and philosophy of the second part. The book's value lies in the increase of cultural self-consciousness which it provides.

## COMMENTARY

### A FAR-REACHING INFLUENCE

THIS week's "Children" article starts out talking about Establishment attitudes and how the writer was drawn to make comparisons as a result of some reading. But as sometimes happens, the explanation of why this happened and the account of the conclusion reached made the article too long, in an issue that was already "tight" and crowded. So, we have picked up this material and added it here. It has to do with the effect that working with and for children has upon people.

What has all this to do with Establishment attitudes? Well, establishments have various levels, some better than others. The question came up because of the fact that Mr. Alexander was winner of the 1969 Newberry Medal for a book for children—an honor, we are told, than which there is none greater. Who awards the prize? A panel, the local children's librarian tells us, made up of children's librarians and teachers. A nice, establishment assemblage, you could say. A fine children's book, it seems, does not go unsung. The panel is an establishment it seems well enough to trust. Maybe the excellence of a children's book is less ambiguous than the qualities of adult reading. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that those who enter a profession which serves children are likely to have done so out of direct and serious concern *for* children. The dilutions of organization and institution don't seem to matter so much, except for the areas where politics rears its ugly head—in public school systems, for example, although here, too, wonderful exceptions can be found.

Another example: Child psychologists. They are essentially a wholesome crew. What they say usually makes a great deal of sense. They are not heavy on theory, but rich in intuition and fruitful anecdote. They deal in the basic ingredients of childhood health of mind. Perhaps they participate in the wonder of childhood innocence,

and are less spoiled by civilization than the rest of us.

The truths of childhood are like the truths of "folk"—there is deep verity, moving common denominators of feeling in folk songs and tales, very hard to miss and difficult to spoil. The people who work in these areas are *called* to do it, and even their joint "establishment" expressions have reliable quality.

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### MORE ON CHARACTER EDUCATION

A PERFECTLY lovely children's story we read recently led to long thoughts about Establishment attitudes and judgments in comparison with the counter-cultural expressions of Brave-New-Worlders of various sorts. Involved is the hare-and-the-tortoise sort of rivalry, and how you need both of them for finding a region of work that supplies, if not reassurance and euphoria, the feeling that what you're doing won't be altogether wasted or beside the point.

The story is *The King's Fountain* by Lloyd Alexander (Dutton, 1971). Most people who read to small children know Alexander's work, or are likely to, sooner or later. It's too good to miss, and the children's psychic life is enriched by books like *The High King*. In *The King's Fountain* this writer attempted to do something about "the need for the individual to act when life demands action." Well, as we have said before, the artist's way of communicating such ideas is to set up the form of a discovery by the reader or viewer. In this case Mr. Alexander's work seems a superb success.

A proud and arrogant king decides to glorify his kingdom and establish his fame by building a magnificent fountain in his palace garden. But when it gets going it will deprive all in the city of water. The king, apparently, doesn't think or care about this.

A lowly man heard about the plan and was horrified. Someone, he said to himself, must appeal to the king, talk to him about what will happen because of this fountain. Most of the story is devoted to this man's unavailing efforts to find a person with enough status to be listened to by the king. Each one he approached had his reasons for not undertaking the mission. Scholars, merchants, craftsmen—all were busy with other things. They turned him away.

One night his daughter said to him, "Father, you must do it yourself."

Now the man is grievously tested. *Him!* How could he approach the king? He was nobody. Who would listen to such a person . . . certainly not the king! At last it dawned on him that there was no one else to do it. So he set out for the palace, but he has a very hard time reaching the king. Everyone sneers at him, puts him off. Only incredible persistence gains him the interview, and that, alas, goes very badly indeed. Trembling, he blurts out that if the king builds the fountain as he had planned, the people will have no water to drink. The king reacts like a bad old king.

"Enough!" roared the King. "How dare you question what I do? I am the King!"

The poor man wished for a small crumb of the scholar's learning, but he could only stammer:

"Majesty—thirst is thirst, a poor man's no less than a king's."

Then his tongue dried in his mouth and he wished for even one of the merchant's golden words.

The king looked scornfully at him. "You come to trouble me for that? I need only snap my fingers and my swordsmen will cut you to pieces and be done with you."

The poor man wished for one drop of the metalsmith's bravery. With his own last ounce of courage, he answered:

"You have the power to kill me. But that changes nothing. Your people will still die of thirst. Remember them each time you see your splendid fountain."

The King started up, ready to call his guards. But he stopped and fell silent for a time, his frowns deep as his thoughts. Then he replied:

"You are too simple for clever debate with me, but you have a wiser head than a scholar. Your speech is halting but there is more true eloquence in your words than in the golden tongue of a cunning counselor. You are too weak to crack a flea; but you have a braver heart than anyone in my kingdom. I will do as you ask."

There's a little more, but that's the story.

We, in our time, have been more fortunate and less fortunate than that city. More fortunate in having people like Thoreau, unafraid to talk to a king. Thoreau was a "humble" man, but about the most articulate citizen in last-century America. (See *Life without Principle* and *Civil Disobedience*.) And now we have a Solzhenitsyn to tell the king, a spokesman with matchless eloquence. These advocates are a lot better than scholars.

The trouble is with the *kings*, these days. This makes us less fortunate. Today the kings are not individuals but institutions, and institutions do not react like men. They can't reform themselves. You can't get through to an institution. There's nobody there, it usually turns out. Even a somebody can't talk to a nobody.

Well, we have a story about adults to put with Lloyd Alexander's story for children. It's different in the point that it makes, but there are certain resemblances. The story is from Alan Harrington's *Life in the Crystal Palace* (Knopf, 1959)—an inimitable study of the *reductio ad absurdum* of modern corporate life. This author, after working in one of those places for a while, made the king's decision and quit. He finally got through to himself. Then he wrote the book in which we found this tale:

A friend at the Crystal Palace, an exceptionally able man, told me a story about being courted by a large company. They paid his expenses to cross the country for an interview, and he saw that they were pleased with him. They requested that, "as a matter of form," he sit down with a psychological test. It took him about an hour to complete the questionnaire, and they asked him to wait while it was being scored.

His interviewer came back with a long face. It seemed that, amazingly enough, my friend had flunked. He couldn't imagine how it had happened. The interviewer said: "We like to be fair. Let's go through some of your answers and see what went wrong." They did, and my friend calmly justified his responses. He was about to go, when the interviewer's face lit up. "I congratulate you," he said. "We want you to come with us." He then explained that the business of flunking the test had been part of the game. It was a stress situation

imposed on all candidates. My friend had in fact made a high score. "When can you start?" asked the interviewer. "Never," said my friend. "I don't want to work for anyone who cheats in the first round." Although they heaped offers on him, he didn't change his mind.

And neither, no doubt, did the company that wanted to hire him. Companies aren't the same as arrogant old kings who sometimes wake up and behave like human beings. You can have material comfort and conventional decency from rule by committee and board, but no self-discovery, no shock of recognition. There are courage and stress in both stories, but no uplifting moral in the tale of today. Well, there is a moral. "Don't work for anyone who cheats in the first round."

But it wasn't really cheating—that's psychology, isn't it? You find out about character that way.

Did they?

## *FRONTIERS*

### **The Sierras in Pasadena**

A YOUNG man who graduated from UCLA with a degree in film-making, and soon thereafter began making TV commercials and "documentaries" on the excellences of such products as toy submarines, was confronted, about three years ago, with the clear eyes, tanned faces, and unworldly interests of two fellows who were climbing the mountains and taking pictures in Yosemite National Park. Eighteen months later he was wandering around the country, presenting to delighted audiences a film with personal commentary: "John Muir's High Sierra." (Shorter versions with taped narration were made available for other uses )

If you've ever seen any part of the High Sierras, ever read anything by John Muir, the two together make an irresistible attraction—and if people who've seen and heard De Witt Jones's performances say to go, you're likely to obey. He has done other films since—"Robert Frost's New England" for one—but our reporter visited the auditorium of Pasadena City College recently to witness a showing of the faces of John Muir and El Capitan.

Prepared to pay, the MANAS scout found that, unless you buy a season ticket for sixteen lectures on "topics of current interest," presented Tuesday nights at the College Forum, they have a policy of letting you in free after all the ticket-holders are seated. (The season ticket costs \$2.00 for all sixteen events, and some of them sound very good.) Experiences of this sort make you feel kindly toward public education. So does the atmosphere of the place, and the good-humored patience of the crowd. There must have been at least a thousand people in attendance—people of all ages. It was a pleasant and, in some ways, inspiring evening. To see such a film brings contact with two or three worlds that must now be sought out to experience at all. Probably all the worlds really worth experiencing have to be

sought out, but most of today's reformers seem to have the idea that, given enough votes and money, they'll be able to wheel in just the sort of world that will be good for everybody. After reformers recover from this belief there may be a possibility that they'll be able to do a little something for everybody, if they have enough help. For then they will have learned that enduring change doesn't depend upon either votes or money, but on mysterious secrets of human awakening.

Some hints about these secrets are given in the faces of the people De Witt Jones filmed on the meadows, slopes, and trailside resting places in the High Sierras. Not the faces of the young fellows who scaled the perpendicular south face of Washington Column, using pitons, ropes, slings, and other ingenious devices, with movie cameras on their backs—those qualities take time to become visible but the faces of the one or two oldtimers who look as though they are missionaries from some gentler, wiser region than our earth. They are men who have hiked every foot of the John Muir Trail—all 212 miles—not once but many times. They know the habits of the living things at every life-zone. Then there's the visage of Muir himself—in still pictures taken at different times in his life enigmatic, silent, stirring the wish that he could speak to us now. One would like to see the planes of his face ripple with animation, hear his voice renew the vision which for so many has become something nostalgic and melancholy.

Beauty, they say, is in the eye of the beholder. People argue about this. They argue about it as they argue about all brave attempts to say unsayable things. Rousseau, historians tell us, was the first European to notice that the Alps are beautiful and to say so. After Rousseau's writings caught on people began going to the Alps in droves to see the "beauty" there. Shall we agree that it's there, but that not everyone who visits Alpine heights recognizes it?

You see the tumbling cascade of the headwaters of the Merced River in this film. You

see storm clouds forming on a summer's day—four hours of shapely, graceful assembling telescoped to a great marshalling of forces in the sky that lasts thirty seconds on film. It was worth doing. Nature shouldn't object. Given enough patience, one could stare at the sky for four hours, absorbing the dignity, feeling the might compressed in the slowly moving limbs of the storm, coming at last together, then rising like the Golem to its wild course of devastation; but it's better to see it speeded up than not at all.

And the waters—the waters that come from such clouds—give the river an identity more changeable than any Proteus could manage—since the water works at it all the time, while Proteus waits on the inventions of mythologists. You look at the waters and know that out there in the hills, far in the mountains, the ceaseless seethe of Nature is going on and will never be done—molding new shapes each moment, sometimes looking like slow flows of molasses suddenly turned triumphantly active, yet keeping their full-bodied curves; and the spray performing like a thousand hazy naiads, who hum vague echoes of the songs of Ariel, hiding behind the waves. And if you stop listening to their slurring melodies, then the sound of that interminable muttered conversation that always goes on in mountain streams claims your attention. Who is speaking now? What dialogue is this that you can *almost* understand? Are the voices from lost centuries, or only yesterday?

The little tufts of flowers in the meadows—up there at ten thousand feet—do they know? How do you control such unwarranted imaginings? But what is an unwarranted imagining in an environment made entirely of wonders? And what words or images serve suitably to recall the splendor of a world where only Thor and the rest of the Æsir could truly be at home? Yet these oldtimers in the movie seem at home.

Well, enough of these attempts to describe what needs seeing, respectful visiting, and an inviting of the soul.

De Witt Jones answered questions after his program was over. What about the regulation of crowds? He said sensible things. The Park belongs to the people. You can't keep them out. People need this kind of experience. But we must all remember—leave the Park the way you found it, or cleaner, better than you found it. Things like that.

Which brings to mind the tail-end of a letter to the Mid-October *Not Man Apart* in which a correspondent relates:

While standing on a bridge near Pulaski, Virginia (located in the New River Valley), and being new in town, I remarked to an acquaintance that there were minnows swimming in the water below us, and that the water seemed clean.

"Of course."

"Doesn't anyone throw any garbage in?"

"Why would anyone do that?"

I had no answer. . . .