VOLUME XXIX, NO. 12
MARCH 24, 1976

BEYOND GOVERNMENT

HISTORY—the history most worth remembering—is made in spurts. Since this is a year for remembering the beginnings of American history, there should be value in recognizing in particular the pace of the extraordinary changes which took place during those early days. In the *Saturday Review* for last Dec. 13, Henry Steele Commager, probably the historian best qualified to recall that time, writes of the achievements of the Founding Fathers of the United States—what they did within the compass of a single generation.

> The Revolutionary generation [he says] translated its rhetoric—the term is inadequate—not only into policy but also into institutions. Nothing, indeed, was more impressive in that generation than its ability "to realize the writings of the wisest writers"—that is, to take ideas and principles to which philosophers had subscribed for centuries and institutionalize them. And what is most remarkable is that the institutions which they created were not parochial. As the Founding Fathers drew upon the heritage of the past, from Greece to 17th-century England, for their inspiration, so they contrived institutions that were valid everywhere and that spread over the globe.

While these men were distinctly American, fully aware of the qualities which set them apart from the people of Europe they were, as Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur said, "freeholders, the possessors of the soil they cultivate, members of the government they obey, and framers of their own laws"—they acted with a strong sense of mission in behalf of the rest of the world. They often spoke of Posterity as the inheritor of what they set out to do. In *Common Sense* Paine called upon those "that love mankind" to help prepare an asylum for all oppressed by tyranny, while Jefferson spoke of "the sacred fire of freedom" that would be lighted from the American torch in "other regions of the earth." This feeling about the American struggle was widespread: "'tis a common observation here," Franklin wrote from Paris, "that our Cause is the Cause of all mankind, and that we are fighting for their Liberty in defending our own." Jefferson told his friend, Joseph Priestley, "It is impossible not to be sensible that we are acting for all mankind."

These were unusual and sometimes great men, to be sure, yet it also seems that, taken together, they were lifted above themselves by a thrust of vision. The idea of Independence burst suddenly upon them, largely as a result of Thomas Paine's fiery appeal in *Common Sense.* After the war was won, when a Congress troubled by Shays' Rebellion voted to hold a constitutional convention, the common expectation was that nothing more than a revision of the Articles of Confederation would be attempted. "The people of America," a Virginian remarked, "don't appear to me to be ripe for any great innovations."

Yet what resulted from that gathering of delegates from the thirteen states was justly called by both Washington and Madison a "miracle"—an achievement the dimensions of which Mr. Commager helps us to appreciate:

> First they created a nation—something no other people had ever done before, for heretofore nations had simply grown. And they did so without benefit of all the insignia and stigmata of Old World nationalism—a monarch, a ruling class, an established church, an army and navy, and even a historical past. What is more, they cast the nation into Republican form—something Montesquieu had asserted was quite impossible except in a small territory or a city-state.
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> They solved, almost overnight, two of the most intractable problems in the history of government: colonialism and federalism. No Old World nation had known what to do with colonies except to exploit them. The new United States was born the largest nation in the Western world and was, from the beginning and throughout the 19th century, a great colonizing power. . . . By the simple device of transforming "colonies" into states, and admitting

these states into the union on the basis of absolute equality with the original states, the Founding Fathers taught the world a lesson which it has learned only slowly and painfully down to our day. . . . In little more than a decade, Americans worked out proper principles of federalism and welded together a federal union which is today the oldest and most successful in history. . . .

The Founding Fathers invented the constitutional convention as the appropriate instrument for making, altering, abolishing, and remaking government; that is, they legalized revolution. And, like federalism, the constitutional convention has spread throughout the globe.

For the first time, too, the Americans institutionalized the familiar principle that government was limited. . . .

Thus this generation—incomparably the most creative in our history—was responsible for launching the most important political institutions of modern history. . . . Equally significant—and equally influential—were the innovations in the realm of social institutions.

Thus for the first time, Americans of the Revolutionary generation not only established complete religious toleration but also separated church and state with its corollary principle of voluntarism in religion. Thus—for the first time in modern history—they formally subordinated the military to the civilian authority. They realized the principle that men were "created equal" in a larger measure than did any other Western society, though they failed, tragically, to extend that principle to blacks: their failure here was a failure not so much of leadership as of following.

Where did these bold conceptions of a great social order come from? They came from the philosophers of that time and of the past. The founders of the American public were cosmopolitan thinkers as well as patriot statesmen. They were men of the Enlightenment, followers of Newton, Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Montesquieu, and Locke. They believed in the but lately formulated laws of nature and in freedom of mind, and they embodied humanitarian purposes in all their endeavors. Depending upon knowledge and freedom, they looked forward to the golden age of the future. In Europe, revolutionists were severely punished and reforms were rudely suppressed, but not in America. Europe, as Mr. Commager elsewhere says, invented the Enlightenment, and "America absorbed it, reflected it, and institutionalized it." In America there were—

No kings, no church in the Old World sense of the term, no bishops, no inquisition, no army, no navy, no colonies, no peasantry, no proletariat. But they had philosophers in plenty. . . . And if philosophers were not kings they were something better—they were the elected representatives of the sovereign people. In America, and America alone, the people had deliberately chosen to be ruled by philosophers: Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison in the presidential chair; a Bowdoin, a Jay, a Jonathan Trumbull, a Franklin, a Clinton, a Pinckney, a Livingston in the gubernatorial—and you can go on and on. Now that we are busy celebrating the traditions of the Revolutionary era, this is one tradition we would do well to revive—philosophers as kings.

This was among those rare times in history when doers are also thinkers. The Founders had read Plato. They knew his warning that there would be no end to trouble if rulers were not also thinkers or philosophers. Actually, they not only studied the classics of the Enlightenment but were acquainted with many of its leaders and corresponded with them. They read Montesquieu, Rousseau, Voltaire, Helvetius, Hobbes, More, and Machiavelli. To prepare himself for the constitutional convention, James Madison asked Jefferson, then in Paris, to send him any books that would "throw light on the general constitution and *droit public* of the several confederacies which have existed." Then, as Catherine Bowen relates in *Miracle at Philadelphia* (Little, Brown, 1966):

The books arrived not by ones and twos but by the hundred: thirty-seven volumes of the *Encyclopédie Méthodique,* books on political theory and the law of nations, histories works by Burlamaqui, Voltaire, Diderot, Mably Necker d'Albon. There were biographies and memoirs, histories in sets of eleven volumes and such timely productions as Mirabeau on *The Order of the Cincinnati.* In return Madison sent grafts of

> American trees for Jefferson to show in France, pecan nuts, pippin apples, cranberries, though he failed in shipping the opossums Jefferson asked for, and the pair of Virginia redbirds.

Madison proved a doughty defender of the new Constitution, since he came to the conference table armed.

It is well to remember that the men who made the Constitution were comparatively young. Hamilton was then thirty, Pinckney twenty-nine, and Madison, later called the "father of the Constitution," was thirty-six. John Adams was only thirty-seven. Yet they were all experienced men. As Mrs. Bowen says:

> Nearly three-fourths had sat in the Continental Congress. Many had been members of their state legislatures and had helped to write their state constitutions in the first years after Independence. Eight had signed the Declaration, seven had been state governors, twenty-one had fought in the Revolutionary War. When Jefferson in Paris read the names he said it was an "assembly of demi-gods."

Small wonder that Milovan Djilas, the Yugoslav writer and philosopher, when recently asked to comment on the early period of American history, replied: "the American Revolution is the only major revolution that never betrayed the hopes of its children."

This just and enlightening observation by a man who has always had the courage to say what he thinks—who served some eight years in Yugoslav prisons for declaring the betrayal of its children by a modern revolution—makes a good place to stop for reflection. While it would be easy, and wholly appropriate, to repeat the numerous self-reproaches in the articles in the *Saturday Review* for Dec. 13, another line of inquiry may prove more fruitful. Instead of a painful review of all that went wrong with the high intentions of the American Revolution, we can ask if the present is also a time ripe for change, and consider the possibility that another great spurt of progress is in the offing.

The present is certainly different from 1776 in a great many respects. If we look at Mr. Commager's summary of the accomplishments of the Revolution, it is evident that they were mainly of a *civil* character. They removed oppressive political restraints and provided freedom for a wide range of activities natural to an energetic and resourceful population. They invented new tools of self-determination in public affairs and devised regulatory mechanisms that would be under the control of the people. The Revolution was a war to remove political interference with livelihood, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This indeed was its genius—it established order while removing obstacles in the way of intelligent men who knew what they wanted to do with their lives and their abilities. The purposes to which the founding of the United States gave opportunity for fulfillment were both practical and moral. They were broadly defined by the great dream of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment—to institute continuous human progress through science, education, and social emancipation. The ideals ranged from expectation of rapid material advance through science and invention to the less definable goals suggested by "the pursuit of happiness," which usually meant philosophical growth and realization to the leaders of that time.

How, then, does the present differ from the circumstances of two hundred years ago? First of all, the immediate goals envisioned in 1776 were commonly understood, well defined by articulate thinkers, and shared by a large number of people. This is not the case today. There is no foundation of common understanding of the human situation such as the philosophers of the Enlightenment supplied to the leaders of the American Revolution. There is no external political enemy, such as George III, to symbolize the oppressions of the old order. Nor is there a vast continent awaiting settlement, development, and expanding use. The problems of the present, in short, are not easily identified in either political or economic terms. True, we have both political disorder and economic dislocation, but not because of a lack of political freedom or economic power. Our troubles arise from misuse of freedom and an

excess of economic activity. *Balance,* in short, has been missing from our lives. The revolution provided fine ordering principles for government, but we did not assure ;that they would continue to work by developing other principles to order our motives and our goals.

We have thoughtful critics, today, who point these things out. There are philosophical historians of ideas who show by cultural analysis what was absent in the Enlightenment inspiration—or missed or neglected by the men who collectively brought modern civilization into being, and to its present mess. We enjoy a heightened if melancholy self-consciousness from the work of these critics. But most valuable of all, it may be, has been the massive reaction from Nature herself—a reproach that cannot be ignored. Nature keeps on declaring in unmistakable terms that our theory of progress won't work any more. The planet is *not* an endless supply of raw material for us to do with as we please. We are *not* privileged characters, star boarders, talented freebooters who are licensed by nothing more than adolescent egotism to feast forever on choice meats, burn up fuels accumulated over millions of years, and discard mountains of junk in all directions, while spilling poisonous wastes into the oceans, lakes, and streams. This, Nature informs us, in a dialect become plain, is *no way to behave.*

One thing we can surely say about the Founding Fathers is that they were in tune with the human needs of their times. Paine knew what the colonists were longing for—what was legitimate and right in what they wanted—and he set it down in language all could read. There was authentic vision in what he wrote—in what other distinguished men of that time had to say. Together they declared a vision of social order which affirmed the potentialities and promise of all human beings. The vision fitted what the people felt, and its expression by Paine, Jefferson, Adams, Hamilton, and Madison explored various practical dimensions, indicating where and how to go to work, what to do.

If there is to be a similar spurt of historical progress in our own time, the vision will have to come first. A vision of what? Surely, a vision that speaks directly to felt need—a vision of ourselves as living, thinking, and exerting ourselves in other and better ways, and for purposes *beyond* the political and economic needs which loomed so demandingly in the eighteenth century.

There is a sense in which a real vision always involves a *leap*—you leap with your mind, with your heart, then pull your organism and mundane relationships after you; and then you find ways of applying the meaning of the vision to the practical realities of daily life. Realizing and working for a vision means living in two worlds at once—today's and tomorrow's—and being willing to trust to the precarious balances which such bridge-building makes unavoidable.

We speak of vision, but the fact is that we don't have one—not yet—not in the sense of a vision mulled over, talked about, enlarged, consolidated, and worded in the best prose of the time by a modern Paine or Jefferson. Where indeed shall we look for our vision—to find one that might lift us out of our commonplace, compromised selves? This, surely, is what is called for, what we need, since our everyday selves seem so securely chained to processes that are going to have to change, radically, and soon.

How does one recognize a worthwhile vision? The best visions, it seems, all have family resemblances. They come at various levels but have underlying unity. There have been several in the past, the one Americans know best being well described by Mr. Commager in the *Saturday Review*—the one we've used up. Can there be others, more suited, perhaps, to our present need, and possibly more useful because they are left incomplete? A finished vision is of no value to anyone except the person who completes it. The unfinished ones await fulfillment, and they are the

ones that afford inspiration. They are the ones which may be able to help us decide what we ought to do with our lives—what we ought to dream of doing—and then settle down to work with confidence and hope. There are a number of reasons—we won't stop to list them—for taking the start of a vision from the thought of great dreamers, so, here, we present a vision of a nineteenth-century poet—John Keats. It's more of a sketch than a vision—a sketch *for* a vision—but it may contain elements we can use. It has to do with the meaning, and therefore the priorities, in human life.

In a letter John Keats wrote, two years before he died, to his brother in America, the poet said he couldn't regard the earth as a "vale of tears." The idea seemed belittling to him. Our world is rather, he declared, "a vale of Soulmaking." Humans, he proposed, are "sparks of divinity in millions," but they "are not Souls till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself." That, Keats thought, is what we are really doing here, and what we should give attention to. He went on:

> The point I sincerely wish to consider because I think it is a grander system of salvation than the Christian religion—or rather it is a system of Spirit-creation—This is effected by three grand materials acting the one upon the other for a series of years—These three Materials are the *Intelligence*—the *human heart* (as distinguished from intelligence or Mind) and the *World* or *Elemental space* suited for the proper action of *Mind and Heart* on each other for the purpose of forming the *Soul* or *Intelligence* destined to possess the sense of Identity. . . .
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> I will call the *world* a School instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read—I will call the *human heart* the *born Book* used in that School—and I will call the *Child able to read, the Soul* made from that *school* and its *bornbook.* Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul? . . .
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> This appears to me a faint sketch of a system of Salvation which does not affront our reason and humanity—I am convinced that many difficulties which christians labour under would vanish before it—There is one which even now strikes me—the Salvation of Children—In them the Spark or intelligence returns to God without any identity—it having no time to learn of, and be altered by, the heart—or seat of human passions—It is pretty generally suspected that the christian scheme has been copied from the ancient persian and "reek philosophers. Why may they not have made this simple thing more simple for common apprehension by introducing Mediators and Personages in the same manner as heathen mythology abstractions are personified—Seriously I think it probable that this System of Soul-making—may have been the Parent of all the more palpable and personal Schemes of Redemption. . . .
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> I began by seeing how man was formed by circumstances—and what are circumstances?—but touchstones of his heart—? and what are touchstones?—but provings of his heart?—and what are provings of his heart but fortifiers or alterers of his nature? and what is his altered nature but his soul?—and what was his soul before it came into the world and had these provings and alterations and perfectionings?—an intelligence—without identity—and how is this Identity to be made? Through the medium of the Heart? And how is the heart to become this Medium but in a world of Circumstances? . . .

We see no reason to apologize for or to justify the transcendental metaphysics Keats seems so confident about. If you look at the structures supporting the great civilizations of the past—other civilizations worth remembering—they all seemed to rise from just such mind-born foundations. They were towers in the mist of human longing, majestic conceptions of the drama of the human soul.

For Keats, apparently, all this was clear. That seems a result of the best of visions. They endow envisioners with what feels like clear seeing. Obviously, there are a great many steps—seven-league steps—from where we are to the realization, or even the beginning of the practice, of such a vision. But is it conceivable that the good stuff of our present being—what real identity we've already achieved—was created or born in us from just such steps, taken somewhere, in the past?

REVIEW
THE NEW REVIVALIST

WHAT comes of expecting too much of artists? The same thing, no doubt, that comes of expecting too much of rulers and priests. We corrupt their role. Rulers find themselves unable to tell people the truth and stay in office, while the demands made of priests can turn them into grand inquisitors.

Expecting too much of artists makes them either ineffectual or ridiculous. An artist cannot be at once a visionary prophet and a decorative encyclopedist of the conventional life. In order to tell one truth you have to leave out something else. Who, after all, could persuade us of the *whole* truth in an age so loyal to contradiction?

Fortunately, we have critics aware of this situation. In the *Yale Review* for the autumn of 1975, Abbott Gleason begins an article on Solzhenitsyn with this report:

> On Sunday, March 3, 1974, the *London Sunday Times Weekly Review* published an extraordinary document, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's "Letter to the Soviet Leaders." In this remarkable appeal Solzhenitsyn called upon the Soviet leadership to abandon Marxism-Leninism as an ideology, break up the Soviet Union into its constituent national parts, and make a concerted attack upon the ecological blight now apparent in Russia, as elsewhere in the developed world. Unlike many previous programmatic statements from Soviet dissenters that of Solzhenitsyn did not hold up Western liberalism and democracy as models from which Russia should learn. On the contrary. He had very few kind words for the bourgeois democracies of the West and he envisaged an authoritarian government as most suitable for his country in the future. He clearly regarded Western Europe and the United States as decadent. Rather than looking to them for guidance, he turned to his own country's past and to a point of view that most historians, economists, and students of political theory would call romantic.
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> Reactions to Solzhenitsyn's "Letter" have been various but in my limited experience, almost wholly negative. He has been called reactionary, crazy, utopian. One friend, with whom I discussed the letter over lunch, observed that if Russian leadership had been smarter, they would have shipped him out long before they did, so that he could fully discredit himself before the world. Another intelligent radical said with a smile that he could just see the editors of the *New York Review of Books* quietly picking up their counters from the Solzhenitsyn square and moving them over to the Sakharov square. And William Safire in the *New York Times* spent some time preparing us for the "inevitable" anti-Solzhenitsyn reaction which he felt was sure to burst upon us.

Artists do not make good politicians, as John Reed hinted, remarking that the revolution "played hell" with his poetry. D. H. Lawrence was labelled a "proto-fascist" a few years ago, and Ezra Pound compounded personal disaster for himself, if not something a great deal worse, during World War II. But what, besides advocating a pre-Peter the Great sort of society (for Russia), does Solzhenitsyn have to say? His present attack is on the materialism of the Enlightenment, on the *Progressive Ideology* which reached a logical climax in Marxism. For Russia this meant, Solzhenitsyn says that—

> we had to be dragged along the whole of the Western bourgeois-industrial and Marxist path in order to discover, toward the close of the twentieth century, and again from progressive Western scholars, what any village graybeard in the Ukraine or Russia had understood from time immemorial and could have explained to the progressive commentators ages ago, had the commentators ever found the time in that dizzy fever of theirs to consult him: that a dozen worms can't go on and on gnawing the same apple *forever;* that if the earth is a *finite* object, then its expanses and resources are finite also, and the *endless, infinite* progress dinned into our heads by the dreamers of the Enlightenment cannot be accomplished on it. . . . All that "endless progress" turned out to be an insane, ill-considered, furious dash into a blind alley. A civilization greedy for "perpetual progress" has now choked and is on its last legs.

Solzhenitsyn, Mr. Gleason observes, defends the Slavophile enthusiasm for a "separate path" for Russia because it rejected Western industrialism and frantic progress. He is only incidentally political, his main concern being for the mood of daily life, for the integrities of the

human spirit. Other fine writers have expressed the same concern. There are these melancholy reflections, set down in 1934, by the Japanese novelist, Tanizaki Junichero:

> . . . I always think how different everything would be if we in the Orient had developed our own science. Suppose for instance we had developed our own physics and chemistry: would not the techniques and industries based on them have taken a different form, would not our myriads of everyday gadgets, our medicines, the products of our industrial art—would they not have suited our national temper better than they do?

The nostalgia of this Japanese artist—given rich play by his imagination—helps us to understand the outbreak of emotion in Solzhenitsyn's Letter. What might have happened if the Americans had not compelled Japan to become "modern"? This was Tanizaki's dream:

> If we had been left alone we might not be much farther now in a material way than we were five hundred years ago. Even now in the Indian and Japanese countryside life no doubt goes on much as it did when Buddha and Confucius were alive. But we would have gone in a direction that suited us. We would have gone ahead very slowly, and yet it is not impossible that we would one day have discovered our own substitute for the trolley, the radio, the airplane of today. They would have been no borrowed gadgets, they would have been the tools of our own culture, suited to us.

It is no minor irony that Japanese cars are now displacing the Detroit monsters at an alarming—or delighting—rate, and that Tokyo is reported to have more smog than Los Angeles!

What Tanizaki cared so much about is now everywhere missing from our own impoverished lives:

> Western paper is to us no more than something to be used, but the texture of Chinese paper and Japanese paper gives us a certain feeling of warmth, of calm and repose. Even the same white could as well be one color for Western paper and another for our own. Western paper turns away the light, while our paper seems to take it in, to envelop it gently, like the soft surface of a first snowfall. It gives off no sound when it is crumpled or folded, it is quiet and pliant to the touch as the leaf of a tree.

What were Tanizaki's political opinions? We don't know. He might have been some sort of medievalist, considering his feelings and longings. For him to have "correct" political opinions and to give up, in consequence, his sense of the elements of a worth-while life would be a very poor exchange. The question is rather—what does he *value?* Are not his opinions a form of public service with humanizing implications for all the world?

Solzhenitsyn is apparently so backward that he emerges somewhere in the new vanguard:

> How fond our progressive publicists were, both before and after the Revolution, of ridiculing those *retrogrades* (there were always so many of them in Russia): people who called upon us to cherish and have pity on our past, even on the most Godforsaken hamlet with a couple of hovels, even on the paths that run alongside the railway track; who called upon us to keep horses even after the advent of the motorcar, not to abandon small factories for enormous plants and combines, not to discard organic manure in favor of chemical fertilizers, not to mass by the million in cities, not to clamber on top of one another in multi-story apartment blocks. How they laughed, how they tormented those reactionary "Slavophiles" (the jibe became the accepted term, the simpletons never managed to think up another name for themselves).

Solzhenitsyn makes it seem almost as important to preserve the honor of the Slavophiles as it is to champion dolphins and whales; we may need such old-fashioned Romantics for the same reason that plant geneticists warn us to maintain seed banks to preserve less productive but hardier strains of grain. The day may come when peasants and their antiquated arts will show us how to survive.

The issue is really one of priorities, not ideology. Political philosophy, as its current literature discloses, has reached a stage of scholastic sterility. There are still bright young men, such as Robert Nozick, writing treatises on politics, and equally bright critics reviewing them (see George Kateb in the Winter *American*

Scholar), but these debates are dead-end phenomena, not platforms for renewal. The creative energy of the age emerges in engagements on very different fields.

With practically no political announcement, there is in America today a fervent campaign for deliberate retrogression—celebrated with camp-meeting emotion and developing skills in band-wagon promotional techniques. In one of the new and rapidly growing back-to-the-land magazines a full-page advertisement by a book publisher tells how to be righteously backward. There is a full-dress manual on homesteading, a text on canning, curing, and smoking meat, fish, poultry and game, a book with directions for building stone walls, one on how to raise chickens, how to make soap, and techniques for producing cheese and drying vegetables. How to live in the eighteenth century in a few easy lessons.

Talented people trapped by economic necessity in the processes of high technology are taking up symbolic hobbies. Industrial designers spend their free time collecting examples of ancient tools and in backyard experiments with adzes and drawknives. There is a society for the preservation of early American customs, and lots of young people who not only make tepees but live in them. All these new "progressives" are putting their ears to the ground and hearing the reverberations of what Solzhenitsyn is declaring, in his own way, to the Russians. As Abbott Gleason puts it: "But the importance of Solzhenitsyn's message, both to Soviet and Western readers, lies in his fundamental point, related both to Russian Slavophiles and contemporary environmentalists—that the egoistic, restless, dominating rationalism of modern man is offensive not only to certain important older values but perhaps to life itself."

COMMENTARY
A SYSTEM "WHICH DOES NOT AFFRONT"

DREAMS and visions are the theme of this issue. A passage quoted from Mr. Carne-Ross speaks of the technological paradise Americans dreamed of only a few years ago "the vision of the City of Tomorrow"—now turning into what Henry Miller called the "airconditioned nightmare." Solzhenitsyn refers contemptuously to the goal of "endless, infinite progress dinned into our heads by the dreamers of the Enlightenment."

Contrasted with these anticipations are the musings of Tanizaki (see Review) about what might have happened for Japan if she had been able to reject the ends and means of the invading West.

Then there is John Todd's conception of the communities of the future—holistic, self-sufficient, making "a world unlike the one we have known," in which both practical and cultural activities will have been "created within a framework of ethical and moral considerations."

The dreams of human beings are the means of calling up energies to work for goals beyond material sufficiency. Without the framework of ethical and moral considerations, the dreams are transformed into merely vulgar anticipations. No matter how embellished with high-priced artistry, the acquisitive drive produces only the ostentations of possessiveness, the self-conscious displays of luxurious self-interest. Visit any large city for the evidence. Unless you pick your approaches and neighborhoods with care, and have some blinders handy, the ugliness grows overwhelming. While the affluence that was promised came about, the moral and ethical vacuum surrounding what we dreamed about is most in evidence now.

What will call out the energies needed to support the vision John Todd and others outline in the terms of a new science to be developed for the benefit of all?

We may not be especially attracted by Keats's language—although it is really very fine language but his *idea* is surely one that can be taken to heart. The meaning of the world, he said, is that it is a place for *soul-making*—for the creation of identities of which we need not be ashamed.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
A TURNING ABOUT

THERE have been many articulate defenses of the Humanities, but unless great literature exercises leverage—unless we use its power to change things in our lives—it is still written in a lifeless language, however excellent the translation into a modern tongue.

This is an idea which works to the surface in an article by D. S. Carne-Ross, who teaches at Boston University, in the *Boston University Journal* (No. 1, 1975). For too many teachers and students, looking at works by men of the past is no more than elaborate genuflection:

> Our culture regards the past as a junkyard of scrapped devices; as a burden to be shaken off, if we are to live freely; or as a kind of reservation in which a mutant breed known as scholars may ruminate, a quaint preserve to be visited on sentimental or ceremonial occasions. We have lost a sense of the past as a shaping, creative force within the present. Our world is the property solely of the living, we feel little that can be called piety towards the dead. Nor, though we talk a great deal about the future, do we have a real sense of piety toward the unborn, for we see the future at best as a blank on which our good, our aims, are to be inscribed, more often as a faceless region whose claims must not be allowed to impinge on the pursuit of today's pleasures.

But the true role of great literature is to pry us loose from this narrow provincialism—"to free us," as Prof. Carne-Ross says, "from its tyrannous stranglehold." He continues:

> And the way to do this is to show that the reality proposed by our present culture is no more than a social construct, a restricted selection from the large possibilities of human being. It is not the whole of reality; much is missing here. Nor is it the only reality. Literacy teaches us that there are other valid realities, other ways of being man in worlds other than ours.

The books are one thing; *using* them is another:

> This, you may say, is what we profess whenever we study the older humanities. Consider, though, what happens when we teach a classic text from the past—say *Divine Comedy.* To read the *Comedy* at all demands some scholarship, some knowledge of Dante's world. To read it properly demands more than that. It requires us to bring ourselves into a relation with Dante's world *which calls both into question.* This is not what normally happens in the classroom. What we say there is that the text must be approached in its own terms, the terms of its own world view, and not judged by today's standards. This sounds enlightened but what is in fact assumed is that the old work has to be *protected* against today's standards which are tacitly taken to be correct. Such an attitude does not force us to treat the past seriously. If we read truly, we are bound to read and judge our texts in the light of our own beliefs and sense of life—what else do we have? And we must go further and reverse this process: we must *expose* our own beliefs and sense of life to those of the old work and its world. The past must not patronizingly be guarded from the present, or it loses all its power. Equally, the present must not be shielded from the challenge of the past. . . .
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> A great text reaches probingly into the world we inhabit and the reality it proposes, this "stiff and stubborn man-locked set" which holds us so tightly and shuts out so much. And teaches us that it is not a *donnée* like air or the law of gravity but rather an arbitrary imposition. Subverting our confidence in today's reality, literature can point to other realities which we have no access to and whose very existence is denied.

Yet this "probing" accomplished by a great text is but one of many possible modes of self-discovery. Even the ordinary round of daily experience now brings unexpected challenges to what the psychologists call our "presumptive world." We are obliged to cope with an existence which batters away at inherited illusions, forcing us to take into account elements of reality which we have ignored. This was the role, we might recall, deliberately personified by Socrates; he cast himself as a "gadfly" for the Athenians, although he was, from Plato's account, a gentle if persistent provocateur. Books like *Silent Spring* and *Small Is Beautiful* serve as probes at other levels, while the invasion of our cities by smog, power shortages, and miscellaneous disorders are signals

of alarm found plainly intelligible by those who have been studying the grammar and rhetoric used in the Book of Nature.

How does the probe of literature differ from these orders of "natural" experience? A great book, while it lacks the compulsion of environmental disturbance, and cannot of itself supply the vital interchange of dialogue, may still serve as a Socratic observation post in a particular domain—the realm of literacy, which is inhabited by people who are or can become influential in human affairs as teachers or writers. But the book has to be read and studied with this use in mind. Its challenge must be sought and made explicit:

> To make literature take sides, to make it combative and subversive, we . . . must first detach ourselves from the surrounding culture and what I called its corruptions. Let me say that by corruptions I do not mean wickedness. There is no occasion to suppose ourselves less virtuous than the people of any other age. Yet for reasons that began in man's action but have since passed largely out of his control, we are peculiarly exposed today. We are exposed to the corrupting power of *things,* the astonishing number and variety of things produced by the processes which we ourselves created: the supposedly neutral things which we *consume,* as the interesting word has it, and which enter into our substance and hold us in bondage. Technological dominion turns everything—the works of man and man himself—into things, into marketable commodities.

The effect of these "corruptions" has been most of all on the mind. They have produced what Prof. Carne-Ross calls "a beautiful modern dream," from which we are at last awakening:

> Let me remind you of one of its simpler forms, the vision of the City of Tomorrow. Along the traffic-free boulevards of abstract and intentional megalopolis strolled men and women in stylish, hygienic dress; above, worm-like trains carried ranks of smiling passengers in silent, rapid comfort. Huge airships nosed their almost instantaneous way to Tokyo or Paris amid the gleaming skyscrapers, one of whose windows looked into Tomorrow's odorless kitchen where carefree woman turned a switch for Tomorrow's instantaneous meal. We know now that none of this will happen. We have learned that we lack the skills needed for life in large modern cities. . . .

Remember the days when people *believed* all that? Today these glowing anticipations, where they exist at all, appear in only shoddy and vulgar caricature. Air travel is, as this writer says, "very much at the mercy of the deranged youth with a bomb in his satchel."

There is, he notes, much talk of the need for a "change of heart," but even heart-felt admonitions now remain imprisoned pieties:

> The material set of our lives holds us too tightly, countless inherited habits of thought, which we cannot voluntarily relinquish without becoming barbarians, hold us no less tightly. But what if a radical simplification were *forced* upon us through the failure of our technical apparatus? We could, we would have to, learn to accept it. And might in time learn a way to a simpler, more essential living and thinking, and learn to look away from our tiresomely complicated selves which now claim too much attention.

Literature, for those able to use it, could help to transform such an ordeal of apparent deprivation into a welcome change:

> It is literature and the rest of the dusty half-despised humanities that keep telling us about the gods and the sacred earth and that strange prodigious creature, man. A great work of literature speaks to our whole being, it can get into the fabric of our lives and change the way we live. Education, Plato believed, should lead to a turning about of our whole mind and spirit, a conversion both moral and metaphysical, and though he was certainly not thinking of literature and the arts, they have this power no less than philosophy.

Because, we suppose, they contain the seed of philosophy.

FRONTIERS

The New Applied Sciences

MUCH has been done by effective critics to show the direct relation between the assumptions of Bacon, Descartes, and Locke and the overtaking disasters of modern civilization. The cry for new beginnings is increasingly heard, and there is already a plateau of intellectual understanding of the need for far-reaching reform. Yet for the established cultural and economic institutions of the time, this cry is still only a voice in the wilderness. And the everyday activities of countless people, shaped by these institutions, are perpetuated by habits strongly resistant to change.

How, then, can people generally be helped to loosen up the framework of their daily decisions, opening the way to recognition that changes are not only morally desirable but broadly necessary?

The work of the New Alchemy Institute can be regarded as a practical attempt to answer this question. Addressing the "Limits to Growth" conference in Texas last October, John Todd, one of the New Alchemy founders, described the sort of science he and his associates have begun to practice at their headquarters at Woods Hole, Massachusetts. It is science in behalf of individual and family life designed to a human scale. One could call it science guided by enlightened common sense, in anticipation of the day—which may not be far off—when vast numbers of people will be constrained by a series of unavoidable compulsions to redesign their lives, their means as well as their ends.

Mr. Todd said at this conference:

> Beyond the need for limiting growth lies a need for a conceptual change in the way we use the resources of the planet. Present-day economies including their power requirements, food production, shelter, heating and/or cooling, transport and manufacture are predicated on finite substances including fossil fuels and potentially dangerous nuclear materials. There is no precedent in human history for whole civilizations based upon non-renewable fuels.

The increasing scarcity of those fuels, along with various related warnings, points to the brute fact that exhausted resources will soon become an irresistible stimulus to individual change, and this pressure is likely to develop long before the lethargy of existing institutions can be overcome. John Todd suggests that individuals may have to act independently, now or very soon, simply to survive. He suggests that they will need not only philosophic preparation, but also to arm themselves with a practical program in order to create the basis for another kind of life. There is, moreover, a powerful reciprocity between the daily activities of life and the conclusions thinking people reach concerning the meaning of their existence.

The New Alchemy Institute has deliberately set out to provide new paradigms for daily life-support activities suited to both the ethics and the material needs of the future. As Mr. Todd put it:

> A number of years ago a few of us, most of whom were scientists, began to explore tentatively the possibility of redesigning and restructuring the vital support elements of communities with the hope of coming more into line with the laws of nature. Once built, such communities would function almost exclusively upon renewable energy sources, particularly wind, the sun and biofuels. We were seeking an adaptive future that could be widely applicable throughout the world. It was critical that our thinking be wholistic and that our designing and science be integrative, encompassing from the outset energy, food, shelter and eventually manufacture and transport. All of these would have to be linked in turn to social and human concerns. . . .
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> We envision a world unlike the one we have known, in which biological systems driven by renewable energy sources and orchestrated by people and micro-computers will provide us with the essentials for full and creative lives. Such a future involves in essence a transformation from this society which is hardware intensive and exploitive of the planet, to one that is informationally extensive, working in close partnership with nature.

Thinking together along these lines, the pioneers of the New Alchemy Institute concluded that the science of the future would have to be

grounded in wholistic philosophy, and they found in Taoism and ancient Hermetic tradition insights that seem to link up with present ecological discovery and cybernetic thinking. They then began to design "on a micro-level while maintaining a planetary perspective and a concern for linkages between levels of organization."

What does this mean, in practical terms?

It means the design and testing of highly productive backyard-size gardens; small fish-farms for protein supply; diverse uses of solar energy, devising and proving in practice the required intermediate technology; and the design of windmills appropriate for application at various levels of energy need. The ramifications of these developments—which include ingenious recovery and use of household and garden wastes and small production plants for fish food—have climactic synthesis in a single complex which provides solar-heated and wind-powered bioshelter "encompassing a house, laboratory, greenhouse, and aquaculture facility." This unified complex has been named the "Ark," and the New Alchemy scientists have designed an ark that meets the rigorous weather conditions of Prince Edward Island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. They are recommending to the Canadian government that, instead of installing a nuclear power plant on Prince Edward Island, to plan there "a gradual shift to a coal-wind-solar energy future." In consequence, a hydro-wind power plant of New Alchemy design will eventually be installed on Prince Edward Island.

The interest and cooperation won by the New Alchemy Institute at this level suggests that effective and soundly based scientific invention on wholistic assumptions can gain response, not only from forward-looking individuals, but also from administrators of public institutions which have the required independence or flexibility. Of similar import is Nicholas Wade's report of the Texas "Limits to Growth" conference in *Science* for Nov. 7, in which he called John Todd's paper one of "the more practical offerings at the conference" and suggested attention to the conditions which would make the New Alchemy proposals "relevant."

Mr. Todd concluded his address by speaking of the "growing awareness that new strategies are required and urgently." Explaining, he said:

> In part this realization is arising out of a waning confidence in the ability of science and technology to salvage an industrialized growth-oriented society in an ultimately finite world. It is becoming apparent that a science of steady states is needed to prepare us for the future. It will be different from the one we now know, having been created within a framework of ethical and moral considerations.