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THE DRAMATIC ILLUSTRATION

WHAT can *I* do?, the newscaster asked the humanist economist he had just interviewed on a widely televised program. It was a musing, honest question. "I don't want to join a commune or anything like that," he went on, "but there must be *something* I can do." His inquiry was broadly based, relating to general ecological and energy problems of the time.

Who could answer a question like that without a crystal ball of magical potency? You'd have to know the talents and natural inclinations of the man, and also something about the alternatives of practical possibility m his circumstances. How big was his backyard? If he started a garden, could he keep the weeds down? Who would do the watering when he went off to Texas on an assignment?

So the economist offered a dramatic illustration. "When I was in Denver last week," he said, "I saw an extraordinary house—built from scratch to provide solar heating, for room temperature and hot water." He described the house, which cost no more to build than an ordinary home. He pointed out that in Denver, where it gets pretty cold and where the sun doesn't shine all the time, a homeowner with solar heating still needs a furnace for long drops in temperature. But with a house like that, consumption of externally supplied energy diminishes to much less than that it used to be. Students of solar energy have said that such domestic use applications are the most practicable of all, since they are both modest and local, while enormous installations would be required to collect a lot of power from the diffused rays of the sun. Maybe the solar heated house in Denver was an illustration which wasn't much use to the newscaster. No blueprints came with it. Perhaps nothing happened as a result of this suggestion. On the other hand, it may have had a fertilizing effect. Who can tell?

It is possible, of course, for someone to multiply dramatic illustrations for himself. A fellow could subscribe to the bulletin published by the New Alchemy Institute, with several good ideas of things to do in every issue. He could start taking *Mother Earth News* and *Organic Gardening* and *Prevention.* Hardly a state in the union is without a few determined people who get out little newsletters on how to live on the land while being kind to it; on ingenious intermediate technology copied from what friends of the earth did thousands of years ago, plus some of the improvements our science—which isn't all bad—has made possible. Counter-culture literature is rich in such suggestions; but, again, there are no blueprints (except for constructing useful gadgets or for well-defined schemes like tent-covered fish ponds and privies planned for recycling wastes). Getting started in a career "on the side of life" requires individual invention and resourceful adaptability—and for this there can't be much instruction.

Ironically, what might be an answer for the TV newscaster was given a few years ago by Nicholas Johnson when, as an FCC commissioner, he was a militant attic of practically all commercial TV. In the *Saturday Review* for April 24, 1971, after telling his readers what, in his opinion, is wrong with television—which took a lot of space—Mr. Johnson described the changes he had been able to institute in his personal life:

> . . . my conclusion is that you ought to try to do a *little bit* of all your life-support activities and a substantial amount of whichever one or two of them appeal to you and make the most practical sense for you. I have taken to tending a simple garden, preparing my own simple foods, doing some modest mending of clothes, and providing my own transportation by bicycle. . . . If you start looking

> around for simplification for ways to make you less possession-bound and give you more chance to participate in your life, the opportunities are endless. Start by searching your house or apartment for things you can throw away. Ask yourself, "If I were living in the woods, would I spend a day going to town to buy this aerosol can?" Look for simple substitutes.

Mr. Johnson's suggestions are less dramatic than a solar-heated house, although they might set off some chain reactions in a few readers. But he will almost certainly be accused of "tokenism" by critics quick to point out the socially microscopic dimensions of such changes. For example, in an Open Letter to the Ecology Movement, published in *Liberation* last January, Murray Bookchin pertinently points out that "the real energy crisis at this time lies not in the realm of consumption but in the realm of production." His argument is forcefully put:

> That our needs have expanded beyond any rational dimensions should be explained not by creating any spurious image of the "wasteful American" in the realm of consumption, but by coming to grips with a cannibalistic society in the realm of production that deploys its media to distort needs and creates a logistical situation in the cities and countryside that even makes irrational needs seem "rational." Thus it ill-becomes the ecology movement to lecture a worker on the need to abandon his car for a bicycle when it is not prepared to suggest how his community can be so organized that he requires neither a car nor a bicycle to get to work.

Questioning the advocacy of a "labor intensive" economy, Mr. Bookchin says:

> The ecology movement must begin to speak up for an ecological society. It must bring into question not technology as such but a rapacious centralized corporate or state technology that is designed to exploit man and nature. It must bring into question not consumption as such but a mindless system of "consumption" based on exchange, profit, and media-engineered "tastes" that defile the human spirit. The ecology movement must show that the alternatives are not between energy shortages and scarcity but between an irrational system of production and an ecological society that can amply meet rational human needs with a minimum of onerous toil. We can have all the energy we need if we use the sun and wind rather than fossil and nuclear fuels. And we can use the sun and wind with reasonable effectiveness if we decentralize our cities and create ecocommunities artistically tailored to the ecosystems in which they are located. To make these sweeping changes implies an entirely new social order in which the planet is shared communally rather than parcelled out privately to satisfy competitive, profit-oriented interests.

Obviously, a proposal of this sort would involve a great and daring leap forward by everybody. How will people be persuaded to take it? One can imagine or find already in print the design of an "ecological society," but implementing its realization would plainly require either massive coercion of the people (both the ignorant and the powerful) or an extraordinary awakening on the part of enough of them to *see* the desirability of the changes proposed.

In the *American Scholar* for the Summer of 1971, Peter Marks, who teaches ecology at Cornell, outlined a "Vision of Environment" which gives one version of the practical requirements of an ecological society. It is difficult to argue with what he maintains:

> Any successful blending of urban and rural life must be based on sound and enforceable land-use policy, to prevent the increasingly anti-ecological patterns we see all around us. . . . The combination of private ownership of land and the absence of a genuine land ethic is at the base of the current tendency toward land speculation and subsequent uncontrolled development. Proposals to compensate private landowners for what they would lose by not selling to the speculator are really only gimmicks in that they do not direct themselves to the real problem, which is one of understanding the ecological and aesthetic values of natural, undeveloped land. Such compensation is symptomatic of a deeply perverse value-system, which cannot come to grips with the significance of natural land except by equating an acre of forest with a bowling alley, a supermarket and two parking lots. I would therefore emphatically abolish all private ownership of land.

What other arrangements would Mr. Marks put into effect?

> I would separate all consumables into three categories—necessary, useful and superfluous—ban outright the manufacturing of the last group (electric

> socks and electric toothbrushes), and restrict the manufacturing of all other consumables to two or three brands per product. For a given product, the two (or three) brands could be selected at random from the ridiculously large number now available, and those selected would be replaced only if it could be proved in court that a new product offered something useful not offered by one of the existing brands, or that it was made in a way that did less harm environmentally than the existing brands.

Well, to reverse Captain Ahab's musing self-evaluation, these ends seem sane enough, but the means are practically unimaginable. How, that is, does Mr. Marks propose to get control of all the land, and all manufacturing, and then to win agreement from a majority of the people on his rationing plans? Actually, he doesn't intend anything of the sort; his "Vision" is strictly utopian. Even so, what he says is worth considering. Utopian ideas do get applied, sometimes, although seldom at the time they are first suggested. Years may be needed for a general recognition of the sense behind them.

The basic question is this: Must the Dramatic Illustration—the idea of what one man or a small group can do—be defended against the minimizing criticisms of the advocates of "total change"?

Well, if anyone is foolish enough to maintain that one man's solar-heated home significantly reduces fossil fuel consumption, there is really no defense. But if it is argued that when one person goes one step of the way toward a more self-reliant, less wasteful, cooperative-with-nature sort of life, he is not only changing his circumstances but opening his mind, becoming able to think more effectively about some *further* steps—and helping other people to see what he sees—and if *this* is the defense of the Dramatic Illustration, then it shouldn't be required. Its value ought to be obvious.

After all, when you talk about "an entirely new social order" you are not talking just about "society-changing," but about *mind-changing.* This recalls a story by Charles Gillespie in the *Nation* (Nov. 9, 1970) on the heroic labors of Charles Thompson, a television newsman in Jacksonville, Florida. Invited by his station to do some stories on "pollution," Thompson started out strong, but soon found that local businessmen prominent in political and community affairs headed companies which were serious offenders. This gave him some trouble with the station, but there were no threats against his life until he began to tell about the poisonous wastes which a large paper mill was dumping into the Amelia River and the Atlantic—at the rate of twenty-five million gallons a day. Already the shrimp catch in the area had diminished to almost nothing, and conservationists were charging that 10,000 acres of oyster beds were being destroyed, that the clam population was dying, and countless fish being smothered by noxious oils. It was after the newscaster put all this upsetting information on the air that he began to get phone calls from people who said they worked at the mill:

> They promised to shoot, kill, drop in the river, and otherwise interfere with Thompson's person if he did not lay off that company. "They sounded damn serious," Thompson said later. "When a guy has been working eighteen or nineteen years and the only job he knows is log presser for a pulp mill, and he thinks he's going to lose that job because of a story you've written, he gets scared. Even though he has to breathe that air, drink that water, and can't find any oysters, you can't rationalize with a man who thinks he's going to lose his job. You can't tell him he could have it all if the mill would just live up to the law."

But Thompson didn't quit—he was fired. Musing about the attitude of the media, he said: "They want good topics like crime in the streets, but don't name names. That's like telling people there's been a murder but not telling them who's been murdered or who did the murdering."

It seems clear that if you launch a crash program for mind-changing, you run into problems like that. Yet you want to make a beginning, so you ask yourself where to start. You might decide to start with people who give some evidence of being already on the way to changing their minds, preparing to open up. To

find such people you may have to work backward. Peter Marks gives an example of this approach:

> Increasingly, as one moves from the small Vermont farm to the suburb in the big city, one loses more and more control over his environment, the price paid for convenience in purchasing food and material goods at the neighborhood store. With increasing social, cultural and political complexity, there is increasing specialization of human function, with a consequent increase in the degree to which one person is absolutely dependent upon the activities of others. The rural general practitioner has yielded to a diverse group of medical specialists, each one of whom is competent to handle only a narrow range of medical problems, although presumably with greater efficiency and expertise than the G.P. Similarly, each rural Vermonter is an auto mechanic, at least to the extent that it is he who keeps the truck and tractor running, while in the city we have people who pound out fenders, others who repaint pounded-out fenders, and still others who have evolved to the point where they work solely on Volkswagens. The city dweller is entirely dependent upon the normal functioning of the postal workers, transit workers, truckers, cab drivers, and so on while the Vermonter is, or at least has the potential for being, relatively independent of the activities of others.

The point, here, is not the delighting pastoral simplicity of a Vermont farm—although some might like it—but that people who are helpless without the "normal functioning" of a lot of other people tend to be practically *unable* to change their minds; like the mill worker in Jacksonville, they don't dare. When it comes to far-reaching social change, people habitually dependent on others have to be herded—either politely, as on a 747; or rudely, as in prison. Dependence is of course a relative thing; moreover, no man is an island, and we need one another at various levels of our being; but the importance of self-reliance and daily habits of independence should be plainly evident when it comes to decision-making about the design of a better, more ecologically sound society. William Appleman Williams once said: "America's great evasion lies in the manipulation of nature to avoid a confrontation with the human condition and with the challenge of building a true community." This seems about right, and it follows that the people least affected by the "great evasion" are the most likely to accept the challenge. Such people will have to increase their own number, by whatever means are available, before they can be socially effective.

Well, these are speculations about the varying ways in which human beings respond to pressures and how they conceive and pursue their dreams. But the proposal of the humanistic economist—or his dramatic illustration—of what one man might do, and the reasoning about how such suggestions affect human thinking—surely these ideas are no *more* speculative than the large-scale proposals for total redesign. Who will do the designing? Who will persuade the people? What methods will be used? Can total-change advocates possibly be truthful in what they say about the nuts and bolts of change, when no one really knows how such vast alterations would work out in- practice? And who or what agency would be the receiver in bankruptcy of our rapidly failing system, and then police the intricate and largely unpalatable processes of change? The government? Are the ecologists and environmental reformers—is anybody—really willing to entrust such incalculable responsibility to *government?*

Or would they prefer to go a little more slowly, and put some trust in, say, Robert Swann's Land Trust idea?

But not the *present* government! it will be exclaimed; we mean a better, more responsible government—the kind that a true revolution would install. Well, if that is a prerequisite of the proposal, then we really need a Dramatic Illustration of this ideal Government. We can't think of any, ourselves, outside of the classic Utopias found only in imaginative literature.

At root, the inquiry we have been pursuing—with some skipping around—is the search for ideal models. The social models commonly suggested are both too rigid and too speculative, and would require an absolute dictator to put into effect. At the same time, the individual models, the ones indicated by Dramatic Illustration, are

charged with being ineffectual—no more than plans for private salvation, if that.

People naturally look to "Nature" for a model, and nature is indeed instructive, up to a point. But the guidance of nature doesn't extend far enough up the ladder of evolution to include the puzzles of human development, which involve moral dilemmas as well as choosing among practical alternatives. It is often argued that whatever men do must be recognized as "natural," simply because they do it! If you make this claim, then analogies from nature are rendered almost useless. It seems necessary, in any event, to pick and choose your instructive examples from nature; if you're not careful, you may wind up an advocate of social Darwinism and Naked Ape ethics copied from the special pleading of certain ethologists.

A critic of ecological thinking recently deplored the "fuzzy and misleading exhortations to return to 'organic models,' 'to get in tune with nature'," and of "unspecified demands for limiting growth." Well, we might learn a lot from *some* organic models. Consider the following by Mr. Marks:

> In ecological systems, a general rule states that as energy (or food) is passed from one organism to another in food chains (plants being eaten by little animals that in turn are eaten by bigger animals, *et cetera*), a significant amount of energy *is* lost (as heat) at each successive link in the chain. The greater the length of the chain, the greater the amount of energy dissipated, and thus the greater the inefficiency of the transfer process. In natural systems, the length of these chains is surprisingly short—generally only about two to six links (or species)—owing to these constraints in the transfer of energy.

Mr. Marks then compares the food chains of Vermonters with those of people in New York City, concluding: "From an energetic point of view, life in the city is more expensive than life in the country." All other blandishments aside, the pastoral, labor-intensive life has its statistical recommendations.

Another hardheaded argument for the pastoral life—for, at any rate, more manual, do-it-yourself activities—comes from Ivan Illich:

> Any social structure must disintegrate beyond some level of energy use. Beyond this critical level, education for bureaucracy must take the place of initiative within the law. . . . technocracy must prevail when mechanical power exceeds metabolic energy by a certain ratio.

Illich's conclusions are usually based on careful observation of human behavior and the related circumstances. If this conclusion is correct, then it states some sort of "law of nature," capable of verification by others.

Our space is about gone and we need to cut the Gordian knot with a final simplicity. We found this in Emerson's essay on Domestic Life:

> Another age may divide the manual labor of the world more equally on all the members of society, and so make the labors of a few hours avail to the wants and add to the vigor of man. But the reform that applies to the household must not be partial.
>
> It must correct the whole system of living. It must come with plain living and high thinking; it must break up caste and put domestic service on another foundation. It must come in connection with a true acceptance on the part of each man of his vocation—not chosen by his parents or friends, but by his genius, with earnestness and love. . . .
>
> I think the vice of our housekeeping is, that it does not hold man sacred. The vice of government, the vice of education, the vice of religion, is one with that of private life. There is yet no house, because there is yet no housekeeper. As tenant such will be the abode.

Somehow, it all seems covered, here.

REVIEW
UTOPIAN PUBLISHING

WE commonly call a proposal "utopian" when there seems no conceivable way in which it can be put into practice. Utopia is "nowhere." Thomas More's romance of that name set the meaning of the word, and retrospectively we call Plato's *Republic* a Utopia because it became the model for all subsequent works of this character, including the one by More.

Fortunately, whether or not an idea is "utopian" is sometimes arguable. Arthur Morgan wrote an informative book, *Nowhere Was Somewhere* (Chapel Hill, 1946), to show that early explorations of Peru had supplied More with background on the organization of the Inca empire, on which he drew for Utopia's social structure. Moreover, utopian conceptions may eventually gain factual support from the future, if not from the past. Morgan also pointed out (in his life of Edward Bellamy) that many of the socio-political arrangements envisioned by Bellamy in *Looking Backward* were in later years incorporated in the social system of the United States.

The word "utopian" also has use in suggesting what seems only remotely possible, yet desirable. Simone Weil's book, *The Need for Roots,* written during the second world war to suggest plans for the reorganization of France after the Liberation, is distinctly utopian. Who can imagine setting up a magistrate's court to "try" scholars for statements which distort history? What sort of law would you pass to abolish "group opinion," on the ground that only individuals are capable of having opinions, and that promulgation of group opinions almost always leads to rules imposing conformity—what we call the "party line"?

Evidently, for such writers, the utopian form is a device for setting out ideals which people ought to have before them, whether or not they can be given legal authority. Plato's *Republic* was certainly that kind of book, and conceivably one with greater influence on the minds of Western peoples than any other volume. It follows that we should not try to do without utopian literature, even if, occasionally, we get into trouble from expecting a utopian proposal to work out in life the way it does in the story.

Well, we have a utopian proposal of our own to suggest. We got to thinking about it after reading Ethel Edwards' *Ringside Seat on Revolution,* a self-published and self-printed autobiographical volume about a Cincinnati woman and her life in a neighborhood which went from white to half-white, half-black in a year or two, and about other things that happened in Cincinnati during the past twenty years. (The book can be ordered from Ethel Edwards Morriss, Psyche Press, 3608 Duluth Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45220.) Our utopian proposal is that publishing be abolished as commercial enterprise, so that only those books would appear which the authors feel are worth putting into print, and issue themselves.

No notion of cultural reform gave us this idea; it was the quality of Miss Edwards' writing. (The reform benefits were an after-thought.) The motive for this book is clear: no one else's intentions are mixed into its prose: the writer had something to say. Making the book must have been work, but it must also have been fun, and a great satisfaction. Having written it, she printed it herself by hand-power on a small press, and bound it herself. She says of the venture:

> One of the few good features of my publishing operation is that I can do as I please.
>
> I knew, of course, that limitations were necessary and decided to confine myself to my own experience. Hopefully this would preserve unity, yet provide a depth I could not achieve if I confined myself to neighborhood events. Fortunately I had been active in a number of areas and could speak from experience on social developments on which authorities currently are in wild disagreements. My conclusions may be biased or erroneous, but at least they grow out of events and I do not claim to be an authority on anything. . . . I have tried to resist the

> temptation to generalize. There is as much variation between Negroes as in any other race. All I claim is, that is what happened as I saw it. Some bias is inevitable. One sees what he expects or hopes to see. This is not the whole truth or even the truth. But it is my truth.

The ring of Ethel Edwards' "truth" makes the book good reading. It wasn't so much that publishers would edit out the quality of the book, but rather that, the way Miss Edwards went at it was not the way a writer with a conventional publisher would be likely to go at it. A sturdiness of thought, a color of expression, an independence of opinion, and self-watchfulness and control—you don't often get all this from a book issued by ordinary means. What a joy reading would become if all the books that come out had these qualities! Hence our utopian proposal. The do-it-yourself idea has all-around virtues, but it glows with numerous other bonuses when it comes to publishing.

Ringside Seat on Revolution begins with Ethel Edwards going house-hunting in 1949. Her husband was an Englishman with gardening aspirations so they bought an old house with a big yard and some fine fruit trees. Theirs was not an ordinary alliance:

> Before marriage we had agreed we were past the age for romantic nonsense and ours would be a businesslike arrangement with him supplying money and myself attending to the social end of things. I had no aptitude for either housekeeping or cookery. The plan was to hire a cleaning woman. I was to master plain cooking and Doug would prepare his gourmet creations for guests and special events. We would have two children, preferably a boy and a girl. Well, we had them plus complications neither of us had foreseen.

What about the "social end of things"? Since the country was going into the McCarthy period of painful memory, you can imagine what would dominate the social activities of a woman who regarded Communists as "likely to be either opportunistic snakes or crashing bores," yet believed "they had a right to their theories and the political expression thereof." Because she could write good letters, Ethel Edwards soon rose to chairmanship of the Cincinnati Women's City Club Labor Committee. When the Ohio legislators imitated the national example and formed an Ohio Un-American Activities Committee, the leaders of this body took aim at the United Electrical Workers and announced a local hearing. Soon frightened people were flocking to the Committee, offering to testify against former associates. Those expecting to be called for questioning about their political connections feared ruin.

Miss Edwards attended a strategy meeting of these people:

> I have seen people facing up to death, have done so myself more than once. Never have I seen human beings so terrified. True the inquisitors had moved from unions to schools, colleges and state and local government employees. They might lose jobs or scholarships, but they were young and healthy. My sympathy was with the UEW workers.

Ethel Edwards was a solid citizen, above suspicion, well known through her work with the women's club. She grabbed the phone:

> I found a number, dialed and got my man. . . . "This is Mrs. D. E. Morriss. I sat across from you at the Woman's City Club."
>
> Any politician's reaction to mention of that organization was easily predictable. He certainly did remember me, was overwhelmingly delighted to hear from me. I glanced at my list of suspect activities and got down to business. Better skip Wallace for President and Progressive Party activities as he might know where I had stood on them.
>
> "I hear your so-called Un-American Activities Committee is investigating Friends of the Rosenbergs and I want you to know I was active in that and would be happy to go down to the Courthouse."
>
> "But, Mrs. Morriss," he bleated, "we aren't investigating people like you."
>
> "Well, why aren't you if I'm working for the Communists? And furthermore," I glanced down at the list for direction and declared my membership in the Russian-American Friendship Committee. With the terrified liberals listening, I went down the list declaring involvement and eagerness to discuss same with any blackmailing politician who was interested.

The effect of such interventions is difficult to trace, but none of the persons who were at that meeting was summoned for questioning. "Eventually," Miss Edwards relates, "such subversive hunting by state groups was ruled unconstitutional."

There is a lot in this book besides issues of political struggle. When Ethel and her husband were looking for their house in 1949, she was about to give birth to twins. A few years later the marriage broke up, and sometime after that Doug was murdered. With two small children on her hands, making a living was a problem. She found a solution by becoming an Avon Lady, selling cosmetic products in her neighborhood. She had little interest in the products but walking around the neighborhood didn't require her to buy a car in order to work. Throughout the time in which the twins—a boy and a girl—grew up to college age, Ethel kept on with her social work. While not a religious pacifist, she allied herself closely with the Peacemakers, a militant pacifist group headed by Ernest Bromley. She worked for justice to Black people, but remained her unsentimental self, convinced that people are pretty much alike, regardless of color. When a black woman neighbor, proud of her degree from the University of Cincinnati, said one day, "I'm so glad I'm not white, I'd feel so guilty," Ethel replied,

> "You know, Mrs. Blank, most colored people aren't educated. Does that make you feel ignorant?" I didn't feel personally guilty and the sooner my black neighbors realized it the better we'd get along.

Ringside Seat on Revolution is a spunky book.

COMMENTARY
OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

HAVING noted the press report (*Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 24) of the complete failure of leading American economists to agree on measures for ending inflation—the experts spent six hours of "sometimes bitter debate"—and having read John Kenneth Galbraith's assertion that, "Controls apart, this cycle can only be arrested by a mammoth depression"—we felt justified in turning to other counsels.

We found the following, quoted from Wendell Berry's *The Long-Legged House*, in a recent *War Resistance.*

> Another possibility, equally necessary, and in the long run richer in promise, is to remove oneself as far as possible from complicity in the evils one is protesting, and discover alternative possibilities. To make public protests against an evil, and yet live in dependence on and in support of the way of life that is a source of evil, is an obvious contradiction and a dangerous one. If one disagrees with the nomadism and violence of our society, then one is under an obligation to take up some permanent dwelling place and cultivate the possibility of peace and harmlessness in it. If one deplores the destructiveness and wastefulness of the economy then one is under an obligation to live as far out on the margin of the economy as one is able: to be economically independent of exploitive industries, to learn to need less, to waste less, to make things last, to give up meaningless luxuries, to understand and resist the language of salesmen and public relations experts, to see through attractive packages, to refuse to purchase fashion or glamour or prestige. If one feels endangered by meaninglessness, then one is under an obligation to refuse meaningless pleasure and to resist meaningless work, and to give up the moral comfort and the excuses of the mentality of speculation.

Wendell Berry proposes one way of turning your own life into some kind of Dramatic Illustration.

Another impressive illustration is the work of the Yurt Foundation, carried on by William Coperthwaite, who found us "Voluntary Simplicity," the article by Richard Gregg which appeared in the first two September issues. Bill Coperthwaite has developed ways of building yurts out of various materials, and collects valuable information on crafts and "intermediate technologies." Some people in Denver have designed and produced a beautiful wall calendar, proceeds from the sale of which will support the Yurt Foundation. The price is $3.50. Order from the Yurt Foundation, 4582 Hannibal Street, Denver Colo. 80322. The calendar illustrates (in color) rare handcrafted utensils made by the Alaska Indians, and provides choice quotations for each month.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
QUESTIONS AND MORE QUESTIONS

C. A. BOWERS' new book, *Cultural Literacy for Freedom* (Elan Publishers, Eugene, Ore. 97405, $3.25), is a good one for the reason that the author obliges the reader to examine the over-arching, decisive questions which need attention before there can be either understanding or agreement on the subject of education. It is inevitable that writers on education start out by considering the obvious problems and failures of the schools. It is by no means inevitable that they will go on from these engrossing matters to an attempt to track the problems to their source. But the books worth reading are the ones which do. A quotation from a later chapter in *Cultural Literacy* will illustrate:

> There is a certain tragic irony in the fact that while many educators, who are apparently blind to their own history, are attempting to transform education into a technology that will make control of students more efficient, the students themselves are turning against the technological view of reality because of its dehumanizing effects. Among the more thoughtful, the chief question is, "How shall we live?" They are also asking questions about what constitutes personally and socially meaningful work, whether excessive reliance on technology and the world-view it promotes are partly the source of our alienation, whether our social priorities are the right ones, and what constitutes an adequate sense of personal and social responsibility. If the student looks to the educator for help in clarifying the assumptions and values underlying these pressing issues, he will find that the educator, by training and disposition, can respond only by talking about systems analysis, management by objectives, accountability, performance contracting, and the technology of behavior modification. It should not be a great surprise to anybody when students reject the educators for attempting to turn them into technologists, rather than assisting them in clarifying the assumptions they wish to live by.
>
> I should like to suggest that we begin to think of accountability in terms of what the student needs to realize his fullest potential as a person, rather than of what a diverse public wants—which is often defined in self-serving economic and social terms. The problem can be stated in another way that makes clearer the danger of looking to the public for answers to the purpose of education. Determining the purpose of education is the same as determining the potential and purpose of man. It is an important philosophic question, and thus it cannot be answered by finding out what the consensus is in the community or state. Nor can the answer come from individuals and interest groups who attempt to settle educational questions by using the economic, social, or religious criteria that happen to be pertinent to their own interests.

"Determining the potential and purpose of man" is certainly a necessity of any educational enterprise, and how, indeed, can this be pursued by any governmental institution? Involved are philosophical and religious questions to which only the most general, if not innocuous, replies can be returned by duly constituted authority. One easily sees why Gandhi insisted that the state should have little or nothing to do with education. At issue is an account of the nature of man. To take a position on the nature of man—a position, that is, with some muscle in it—is today an act of faith. Perhaps it has always been an act of faith. We don't want the government to formulate our acts of faith. Political versions of "faith" are inevitably vulgarizing, and often coercive as well.

Independent, individual effort—by parents, or in small. private schools—has hope of meeting this problem with some success, simply because individuals are able to teach with a free spirit instead of following rules.

Consider the sort of circumstances which need changing if we are to have cultural literacy:

> While most public schools today are not particularly susceptible to the influence of lower-status groups in the community, they are nevertheless highly sensitive to the pressure of its middle-class constituency, with the consequence that inquiry in the classroom is usually tempered by an awareness of what the different groups within the middle class will tolerate. The existing structure of the schools has not provided protection for students to examine the really important issues in our society—the nature of work, the efficiency of technology and the mystique that surrounds it, the compatibility between our culture and the natural environment, our attitudes toward consumption and the consequences our standard of living creates for the rest of the world, and our

> assumptions about military defense, competition, success, and community. By not allowing students to confront these and similar issues of fundamental importance, the schools are preventing a realistic encounter between students and their culture and in the process, are presenting students with a set of typifications that contribute to a false state of consciousness. . . .
>
> What is being proposed here is the creation of a school system that embodies the idea of advocacy of the student's right to examine his culture without being punished if he does not reach the same conclusions legitimated by the dominant society. That the student needs a safe environment to sort out his own beliefs and loyalties cannot really be denied when one considers how vulnerable the student is to the pressures of socialization.

Well and good: that is indeed the sort of education we should provide. Why can't we do it? There is only one important prerequisite for providing this sort of education: *the people have to believe in it.* A few teachers believing in it won't be enough. Such teachers might do better starting their own schools, to which the children of parents who also believe in it may gravitate. Who else will want and put up with the requirements of education in fearlessness and daring?

What are the tools for thinking about human beings in ways that make for fearlessness and trust in human potentiality?

Before attempting to answer this question, let us look at the resources which are available and which, generally speaking, have been used in the past. We reprint an account of them from Forest K. Davis' *Journey Among Mountains:*

> Liberal religion does not have a theory of human nature at all, unless a simplified physico-chemical notion derived from naturalistic origins or a semi-religious cloud of unknowing derived from Judaeo-Freudian sources can be said to provide one. Both of these types of theory represent reductionist patterns by which a distinctive individuality or a precise metaphysics of human nature can be escaped through re-description in terms of other disciplines.
>
> Liberal religion education still maintains a progressive approach in which is a residual romanticism expressed in confidence that the individual can learn and be effective. Trust in the individual is then one of its assumptions. Notice, however, that 20th-century progressive education along with pragmatism has adopted a poor-relation of the natural sciences, to wit, physico-social environmentalism, and permitted it to abstract from itself any romantic and rational content. Thus liberalism has been left aligned with determinist philosophies. Environmentalism has seen human nature as the creature of its surroundings. In the education of the child the conditions of learning were in theory varied to produce a desired result. Where adult originality comes from to vary the environment in ways that are educational is less clear. A philosophy of originality is missing. Change is ascribed to random physical and social motions amid selective forces and circumstances.

Lacking the tools we need most, what, then, do we really *know* about the sort of students who, regardless of how they are taught, pursue the kind of questioning that Mr. Bowers believes is essential to education? We know hardly anything about such students except that they come along now and then, and that they grow into the innovators and creators in science and culture. They are few. Mr. Bowers thinks that Summerhill under Neill may be the kind of place where innovators can be more numerous, but that Neill's way of doing things places a heavy responsibility on the students. Is Summerhill, he wonders, "too ideal"? He then asks other fundamental questions:

> A theoretical understanding of praxis is less difficult to achieve than an understanding of what it means in the concrete situations of peoples' lives. Is it a generally rare event like Maslow's description of a "peak experience" or is it an experience that can occur often and easily? What is the relation between praxis and institutional existence? How is it achieved in educational settings involving masses of students and bureaucratic structures? What is the relation between praxis and the values and assumptions we are socialized to accept unquestioningly?

We are stirred by these questions to recall the great models of educational inquiry—the *Bhagavad-Gita,* with its suggestions concerning the emergence of independent search and breaking away from conventional assumptions, and Plato's dialogues—and to ponder the information now becoming available concerning the distinguished autodidacts who have left an ineffaceable mark on history.

A chapter providing a sample curriculum for "Cultural Literacy" is a valuable element in Mr. Bowers' book.

FRONTIERS

On Doing Good

THERE seems broad ground for saying that the best professionals do what they can to de-professionalize themselves, and that the best institutions become socially valuable by deliberate and continual reduction of the institutional filters between capable people and work that needs to be done.

Good psychiatrists, for example, don't talk like psychiatrists but like literate, humane, non-specialized human beings. Good managers don't do much "managing." They effect conjunctions between men and tasks, diffuse attitudes, and enlarge the fields for independent action and decision. They have some sort of sixth sense about the undefinable relationships between spontaneity and order. If you are lucky enough to work under a man like that, you don't feel confined or abused by the System. After all, Nature sets limits, too.

Recently an "editor-in-the-field" (a reader) sent us copies of two excellent interviews—one with Paul Goodman (*Psychology Today*, November, 1971), and one with Robert Coles (*Intellectual Digest*, October, 1972). There is a sense in which both these interviews deal with "doing good." This is an area where both professionals and institutions are commonly guilty of pretentious failures. What Goodman and Coles say gives explanatory clues. Asked why Peace Corps was not more successful in bringing "meaningfulness" to the young, Goodman replied:

> . . . because it was phony in the most profound sense. It was missionary work in the classic sense. We need fewer missionaries, not more. Apparently, if you devote your life to doing "good" your life is somehow meaningful. You end up exploiting the people who according to your philosophy need your help. I personally feel it is impossible to help someone - else. The thing to do is to make better institutions and then let people alone to help themselves. . . . Just give people the autonomy, the freedom to develop themselves in their own way. No, the Peace Corps-Vista enterprises were fallacious to begin with. Moreover, the motives of the young who go into them have always been very suspect to me.

Asked how colleges should function, Goodman said:

> They would be places for people who have got out into the world. When you need to know something—on your own choice and because you are working and now *know* what you need to know—then you go to a school that would teach it to you. You don't need this 2o-year study routine. You need geometry to be an architect, you go to school for six months and learn geometry. The whole high-school and college thing started as an imperialist grab on the part of certain corporations to get the parents and the public to pay for their apprentice training. . . . I mean, if the schools are a lousy idea, forget them. Stop reforming, stop criticizing. We have criticized the school system to death and I mean to death. We should concentrate on making a community structure which is more livable. If you can achieve that, education will take care of itself.

Some of Goodman's clarity comes from ignoring the intermediate or "transition" problems. His proposals have an "all-or-nothing" quality, yet he can hardly be faulted on principle. He admitted his weakness, saying, "don't ask me how to implement my ideas." And his store-front-school idea *was* a practical suggestion.

Robert Coles, who will probably be working on the *Children in Crisis* series for the rest of his life, talks about the writers who have been an inspiration to him, induding Erik Erikson and Anna Freud. He added:

> . . . my real heroes are not, by and large, in psychiatry or psychoanalysis. They are Walker Percy and Flannery O'Connor as novelists, James Agee and George Orwell as social observers, and Simone Weil as a writer but also as someone who lived with and worked with the people she wrote about.

Speaking of those he writes about, Dr. Coles said:

> I look upon myself as an intermediary for them, mediating between them and the powers that be. I say it would be helpful for me to have their voices and their words, and they've been very obliging. Often I've heard speeches, because it's as if they've been given an opportunity to address another world.

We don't give people credit for being as eloquent as they often are. . . . People say to me: "Oh, how do you do it? How do you get people?" emphasizing that word "get." People always want to know about the difficulties I have in coming into contact with the families that I work with, but that's not been difficult at all.

What's difficult is communicating the truth of the experience to the readers, to those who read people like me.

Dr. Coles broods about this:

People always look upon someone like me as someone who's very shrewd at picking up things from other people, but they rarely give credit to the people themselves as being teachers. It's always, of course, the middle-class intellectual who gets the credit for what is being conveyed to the public and who builds his career on it. This is where I am endlessly fascinated by the similar problems that Agee and Orwell and Simone Weil have had. I don't know how this dilemma is solved and I don't think it really should be looked upon as a problem that needs a solution. I think it can be argued that neither Orwell or Agee did very much for the particular people they observed, yet perhaps the writing itself is a political act or an act of affirmation and generosity and kindness toward people one has met. It is an act that moves others to thought and maybe even some action.

The understanding which claims little seems to accomplish the most:

The longer I live and the more I see, the more I admire what Ralph Ellison saw about black people, what Faulkner saw in white people. I'm less willing to trust people who formulate in such a way that all the inconsistencies are removed and everything is very clear-cut and handy in some kind of italicized theory. That's why I hearken back to Walker Percy or Flannery O'Connor, because I think they sense what's happening in the lives of people and try to convey that as perhaps only a novelist can.