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# PATTERNS OF POWER

YEARS ago, a man who combined intimate personal experience of alcoholism with exceptional talent as a writer said to a friend: "I can't write anything about alcoholism that any magazine will publish." Asked how this could be, he explained, "I know too much about it." He meant that always there were wheels within wheels in any serious investigation of a human problem or abuse, while the editors wanted simple articles offering "solutions" or programs that could be adopted. Walker Winslow, author (as Harold Maine) of *If a Man Be Mad,* could no longer write such articles.

Winslow's comment has a moral which extends in every direction. Take for example the abuse of political authority. It is easy to make a case for the anarchist position. Plato understood this. He pointed out in the *Statesman* that men and conditions change, while laws remain the same, so that injustice is sure to result from legal systems. The ideal government is that of a wise and just ruler who will adapt his decisions to circumstances and human needs; but because wise men are so rare, societies must have constitutions and schemes of government embodied in law. Plato concludes, therefore, that a government of law, while necessary, is inevitably *second-best.* Among legal systems, the one that will be best is the one which serves to remind the people of the ideal, which they should seek to realize, however imperfectly. The familiar rule, the best government is the least government, is based on this conception.

If Plato was right, then every law is, so to speak, both a reminder and evidence of the failure of the ideal; yet it is not a complete failure so long as it serves an educational function. The law as reminder of what ought to be a spontaneous response to the general need or good is both necessary and valuable. One might even say that the man who is not essentially an educator has no business in being a lawmaker.

Evidently, Plato had in mind a fairly small community for this combining of law with education. Only a little reading about the application of law by the modern nation-state makes this depressingly clear. We have a couple of recent examples of how modern bureaucratic authority may affect ordinary citizens—in one case a farmer, the other a storekeeper.

First the storekeeper. Actually, four stores were involved, a chain of health food stores in Detroit. The following event is reported by Omar Garrison in *The Dictocrats' Attack on Health Foods and Vitamins* (1970). The crime of this dealer was the sale of honey in proximity to a book which praised honey as a food and a medicine, beyond the claims allowed by the Food and Drug Administration. The "prosecutor" was thus the FDA. As Mr. Garrison tells it:

> An FDA agent, posing as a customer, entered one of the stores and asked the clerk whether he had any reading material on the subject of honey. In response, the clerk pointed out a book entitled *About Honey* by P. E. Norris, located in a separate book section of the store.
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> He was also given a free newspaper leaflet containing various articles of general educational interest, including an article entitled *Eat Honey and Increase Your Vitality. . . .*
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> The Norris book had been published in England and referred to no honey by brand name. It did not advertise any product of any kind.
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> Nevertheless, on November 8, 1961, at exactly 9:01 a.m. four *pairs* of U.S. marshals, in Elliot Ness fashion, swooped down on the chain's four stores and, accompanied by Federal and State Food and Drug inspectors and acting on an FDA libel, seized large quantities of honey—every last jar they could lay hands on regardless of places of origin and manufacture.
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> In court, the federal agency argued that the leaflet was shown to the FDA inspector who was posing as a prospective customer, to induce him to buy any brand of honey that the retailer was offering. This despite the fact that in his entrapment procedure, the agency spy had

> asked for information about honey generally. He was not solicited to buy any.
>
> The book, *About Honey*, said the Government, was part of a plan of the accused to distribute the seized honey.

The charge against the health food retailer was that by associating what was said in the book about the virtues of honey with the honey on his shelves, his stock of honey was "misbranded"! Mr. Garrison, unfortunately, doesn't tell how the case came out on appeal, although he does say that the lower court ordered the government to return the stock seized in the other three stores.

The second example is taken from an article by Dorothy Thompson in the *Ladies' Home Journal* for December, 1958. Miss Thompson described the misfortunes of Stanley Yankus, a Michigan farmer, who dared to defy the ASC (Agricultural Stabilization Conservation) authority. This is the agency within the Department of Agriculture which has the power to tell American farmers how much wheat they are permitted to grow. Mr. Yankus was told he could plant twelve acres.

But he was a poultry farmer, not a wheat farmer, and he believed he could grow poultry feed for his chickens for less money than the government-supported price for this feed. He had the land so he went ahead, violated the *ASC* decision on how much he could plant. Then, as Dorothy Thompson reported:

> And in walked the FBI. And followed the penalties. Mr. Yankus never had a trial, let alone a jury trial. He never even had a formal hearing. Part of his bank account was seized by court order.
>
> Under this allotment plan a Federal agent can invade a farmer's premises without a warrant, measure off his acreage, investigate his assets in the bank, and go around and warn his customers that he is under surveillance. The local banker who divulged Mr. Yankus' assets to an FBI agent, *did not need to do so.* But an FBI badge is a mighty persuader. Nobody wants to be in trouble with the FBI or "mixed up" with anyone who is.

Such cases could be multiplied indefinitely. There are for example the various families which have been prosecuted for teaching their own children instead of sending them to public schools—prosecuted and punished, even though the children may in some cases be better taught than they would be in the schools.

The war in Vietnam was unquestionably the most extreme example of the abuse of power by governmental authority, although to say this is to over-simplify the numerous factors which lead to military excesses. Involved is an entire manifold of compulsions, such as the needs of industrialist expansionism, an increasingly paranoid style in international affairs, righteous missionary emotions ("Manifest Destiny") brought forward from the nineteenth century, the egotisms of power, the fears of the people coupled with their need to have confidence in their leaders, along with the alleged "impracticality" of any and every alternative to continuing the war. Finally, there is the mindless brute strength of the institutions of power and aggression, in contrast to the emotional ambiguities and intellectual uncertainties of the forces which oppose the war. Many who honestly long for an end to war are subject to the searching criticism of Thomas à Kempis, who said that while many men desire peace, few men desire those things that make for peace.

Last November 22 we reprinted from *G.K.'s Weekly* a (1925) comparison between Gandhi and Henry Ford which seemed to offer the same criticism in twentieth-century terms. The writer said:

> Gandhi's pacifism is of his essence. It is all of a piece with his other ideals. There is no conflict between his pacifism and the other things he believes in, for if men could be persuaded to follow him entirely peace would certainly reign on earth. But with Ford it is different. His pacifism is not something that arises from his belief in industrialism and his acceptance of human distinctions, but exists in spite of it. It can only be explained on the assumption that Ford suffers from that alternating consciousness from which business men and industrialists invariably suffer; for it has nothing to do with the major activities to which he devotes the most of his life. On the contrary, they do not move in the direction of pacifism but of war. This follows naturally from his ideal of industrial expansion, for such expansion not only brings industrial nations into collision with each other but leads them to exploit small and alien peoples. There is no doubt about this. The quantitative standard of production which on the one hand leads society to degrade men to the level of machines, is on the other a

> source of international mischief by the need it creates for foreign markets to dispose of surplus production. What are all our foreign politics but the complications resulting from over-production, foreign loans and oil? The latter today is a serious question. Every additional motor car Ford makes increases the demand for oil, and much of foreign politics today is concerned with struggles for the possession of oil fields. Yet Ford is a pacifist, and I do not suppose it has ever occurred to him there is anything contradictory about his position. Our war-mongers talk a great deal about the peril of the East. But if there is any peril it will be because the East adopts Western ideas. There could be no peril if it follows Gandhi.

Acceptance of this analysis need not lead to questioning Mr. Ford's sincerity. This sort of contradiction is a common human problem and there is no novelty in pointing out that habitual human behavior often becomes a barrier to achieving the ideals men proclaim. This fact is the basis of the Socratic idea that ignorance bars the way to virtue.

What then is the moral to be drawn, in relation to abuse of the power obtained by political authority? The answer seems simple enough. The affairs and responsibilities of the enormous nation-states of our time are so complicated and far-reaching that people lose their capacity to see the relation between cause and effect. The very complexity of administration hides from even well-intentioned men the changes in circumstances which turn once useful laws into instruments of injustice. Who could know that the application of the skills of technology to food production would in time lead to the adulteration of food and the devitalization of the diet of the American people? Lower prices are obtained through mass production, and this seems like a boon to everyone so long as we overlook what happens to food when preservatives are added to give a longer "shelf-life" and to make possible shipments of a nationally distributed product over many thousands of miles. Then the sales promotion required by national distribution creates a great deal of unnecessary spending, but even this is justified in the name of the counter-value of full employment and general economic growth.

Massive scandals seem to be necessary to overcome the ignorance which develops on so vast a scale; meanwhile, the bureaucratic regulatory agencies are, so to say, caught in the middle of tortuous process of change, subject to pressures from both sides. The conclusion is that we have a society which, because of its size and complexity, raises ordinary ignorance to a higher power.

Most of the muckraking books and articles overlook this built-in multiplier factor which comes with size. As Walter Lippman pointed out years ago, journalists cannot change things by their shock-producing methods. They are men with searchlights; they point first at one bad thing, then at another. They look for the places where tensions are extreme, where infections have burst, or are getting ready to. But the trouble is not local; only the "objective evidence" of the trouble is local.

Take the question of war. It is comparatively easy to find various scapegoats for the continuation of the Vietnam war. But according to Samuel Lubell, unemployed assembly-line workers in several states are now saying that war may be a good thing since it makes jobs—it put a stop to the depression, didn't it, back in the 40's?

This seems a rather dreadful sort of ignorance ignorance of what war does, what it means—yet we, the human race, have found no magical means of erasing ignorance. What we *might* be able to do is to control the multiplier-effect of bigness and power and complexity, as a kind of second-best measure while we continue to work on the larger problem of human enlightenment.

The irony of our "progress" is that it has not made any real inroads on ignorance of this sort. Modern man, we are told, has achieved extraordinary advances in communication; but even the most literate of us may be surprised and horrified by a simple tabulation of what the present war is costing in destruction and human life and suffering. *That* has not really been communicated to us by the public means so often pointed to as representing our great technical achievement. For example, in *Peace News* for last Dec. 22 Godfrey Featherstone summarizes in bare outline the toll of the Vietnam war in South Vietnam, North Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. He draws mainly on conventional sources—well-known newspapers, reputable correspondents, and responsibly written books—that

is to say, his sources are familiar and available to all, but the impact of his compilation is much greater than any of the "news" that reaches the general public. From the twenty-four columns of small print he provides in *Peace News* we quote a small extract:

> From 1965 to mid-1971, the war in South Vietnam has resulted in:
>
> (1) More than six million refugees, one third of the population. (The 1970 Senate Refugees committee made the same estimate, so it clearly underestimates the total);
>
> (2) At least half a million military deed. (Over 50,000 U.S. troops—a third more than in Korea—have died since the war began. American figures published in May 1969 claimed 500,509 Communist dead and this does not include figures for dead Thais, Nationalist Chinese, S. Koreans, Australians, Philippine troops, etc.);
>
> (3) 325,000 civilian war dead, at least 30% of whom were children under 13. (William S. Pepper in *The Children of Vietnam,* on the basis of extremely hypothetical calculations, claimed that a quarter of a million children died from 1961 to 1966 and another three-quarters of a million were wounded. The same book alleges that 415,000 civilians were killed in that time, but no basis for the calculation is given, though an ex-ICC official is quoted. Edward Herman in *Atrocities* in *Vietnam: Myths and Realities,* estimates that from the war's beginning to 1970, one million dead and two million wounded South Vietnamese civilians resulted. Chomsky, quoting Herman, comments that estimates are "carefully calculated," but again no firm bases of calculation are given. Raskin and Fall estimated that there were 250,000 Vietnamese deaths [including military] from 1963-mid-1965.);
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> (4) 284,000 war orphans, 131,000 war widows; 156 000 persons physically disabled. (Many of the orphans die in orphanages.) Much of the money intended to aid widows and orphans and taxed from soldiers' pay has been embezzled by an ex-Saigon Defense Minister (*The Observer,* July 16, 1972). Many refugees also die of neglect and disease which spreads easily in grossly overcrowded conditions;
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> (5) A seventh of Vietnam's forest land has been defoliated and some chemicals employed have caused birth defects. Over 6% of South Vietnamese crop land has been devastated, causing severe food shortages.

This is the outline report for South Vietnam. Here is a little on Laos, with no "cease fire" announced (as yet):

> The U.S. Senate's own estimates state that by 1971 at least a third of the people of Laos have been killed, wounded or made refugees, nearly all of whom have been driven from their homes by air attack, according to USAID witnesses. On the Plain of Jars, life scarcely exists. The villages of the 90,000 refugees have been completely destroyed. . . .
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> The origins of U.S. involvement in Laos can be traced back to 1954 and the Eisenhower government's attempts to turn the country into "an anti-Communist bastion" (Stanley Karnow of the *Washington Post*). It has interfered constantly in Laotian government since then, financing the toppling of regimes it did not like—its aid is many times Laos's gross national product. Bombing has been indiscriminate and automated. By 1970, according to Karnow, it had become the most heavily bombed country in history (*Washington Post,* October 17, 1970). . . .

What can be said about horrors of this scale when they proceed, day by day, as the settled policy of a nation-state? Apparently, there is no society which, so organized, will not go to such excesses. The evolving mechanisms of power determine the exercise of power, while the institutions of civilization—cultural and educational—become instruments of rationalization.

A social order in which such measures seem neither desirable nor necessary is surely the only alternative. After all, peoples' lives tend to be so much dependent upon and involved in the mechanisms required for the working and support of social complexity that, once "bigness" is the admired and achieved goal, moral ideas are enfeebled and become almost powerless as a restraint. Meanwhile, we can be practically certain of two things: Peace is the health of the community. War is the health of the State.

# *REVIEW*
## THE PARADOX OF CONSCIOUSNESS

FOUR years ago—in the *New Yorker* for Feb. 8, 1969—George Steiner reviewed the memoirs of the Russian revolutionary, Alexander Herzen (1812-1870), making this comment:

> Herzen's memoirs have a twofold relevance. They document, with complete psychological fidelity, the condition of tragic liberalism. I mean by that that Herzen strove with all his might for revolution but came to know that such revolution would spell min for the civilization that he himself embodied. The impulses that made him a rebel, that drove him into exile and unbroken resistance to autocracy, were generous and deep-seated, but they reflected the idiom and intellectual values of a privileged, high-bourgeois culture. . . . What lay ahead was most likely a grey plateau, a mass society devoted to the crafts of survival. Herzen knew this; he sensed the philistinism, the vengeful monotonies that waited beyond the storm. Unlike so many new left pundits and would-be bomb-throwers of today, Herzen never minimized the cost of social revolution in terms of culture. Stuffed into the dustbin of history would be not only injustice, exploitation, class snobberies, religious cant of every kind but a good measure of the fine arts, speculative insights, and inherited learning that were the peculiar glory of Western man. Herzen knew that the task of a radical intellectual elite was in a very precise sense suicidal. In preparing a society for revolution it was inevitably digging its own grave.

While Herzen regarded this prospect with some regret, some modern radicals look toward the destruction of what they call bourgeois culture with almost lustful ardor. Discussing the contemporary attack on literature in the *American Scholar* for the Winter of 1972-73, René Wellek quotes a former president of the Modern Language Association as declaring that the very concept of culture "is rooted in social elitism." Even education may be a threat, since "high culture tends to reinforce the given alignments of power within the society." Mr. Wellek provides examples of generalized contempt for the symbols of high culture, then says:

> Even the briefest reflection will recall the eminently subversive, or at least liberalizing, role of literature in many historical situations the French revolution was prepared by the *philosophes;* the Russian Revolution drew sustenance from a long line of writers critical of the Tsarist regime; the idea of a unified Italy was kept alive for centuries by her poets. The rebirth, in the nineteenth century, of the Greeks and Hungarians, the Czechs and the Poles, was triggered by poets and men of letters, and today few would refuse admiration for his heroic resistance against new oppression to Alexander Solzhenitsyn or deny the prominent role of writers in the "Prague Spring" of 1968.

Mr. Wellek might have added a reference to William Irwin Thompson's *The Imagination of an Insurrection,* the study of the struggle of the Irish for liberation from British rule in terms of acts which had a poetic inspiration. High culture, in the best sense of the term, always provides the seminal inspiration for movements which seek freedom and justice, and to suppose that dadaist contempt for the vulgarities of an acquisitive society will lead to anything more than another brand of vulgarity seems a mistake similar to that of the sophisticated Germans who saw in the barbarism of the Nazis a refreshing relief from the dull, money-grubbing hypocrisy of Berlin in the 1920's. Yet the error is not new. As Wellek points out:

> As long ago as 1816 William Hazlitt complained, on the occasion of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus,* that "imagination is an aristocratic faculty," that "it is right royal, putting the one above the infinite many, might before right," that "the language of poetry naturally falls in with the language of power" and that "the principle of poetry is a very anti-leveling principle."

But Wellek adds:

> Still, even in his time, Blake and Shelley showed that this is not necessarily true and that, as common sense tells us, literature and poetry as such cannot be guilty; men and writers say what they want to say—conservative or revolutionary thoughts, good or evil thoughts. The political attack on literature is a foolish generalization.

The contentions for the radicals whose opinions Mr. Wellek has sampled seem to be based upon an iron determinism: if the economic

and political system of the civilization which produced the art and literature was exploitive, unjust, and bad, then its art cannot be worth transmitting to future generations. This seems a way of insisting that there will be no true art or literature until after the Revolution—when, with utopian conditions finally established, works of mind and hand will be produced under conditions of social justice and reflect their excellence.

There are two practical objections to this view. First, the literature of the countries where Marxist revolutions have taken place is seldom anywhere near as good as the prerevolutionary literature, and what is good seems to have circulation only underground. (Samizdat is the name given by the Soviet writers and artists to the poetry and essays they quietly pass to one another, in typed or photostatic copies, since it cannot pass the political censorship of the Soviet publishing enterprises.) The other objection is that waiting for the Perfect Environment as the basis for ideal literature seems a direct denial of the human capacity to transcend the limitations of existing circumstances. The literature of the past comes close to being the best evidence we have that transcendence *is* possible, since every great change in human relations and arrangements is first conceived in idea, and almost always written about before it is carried out in history.

This is not to suggest that there are no grounds for criticism of what men often regard as "high culture." Tolstoy could be taken as an example of an extreme critic of both art and literature, yet Tolstoy was neither a hater nor a bomb-thrower, but rather a man whose conceptions of art were so pure—if stubbornly narrow on occasion—that he demanded much more, not less, discipline of the artist or writer.

Another difference between present-day revolutionary nihilism, which sees culture or civilization almost entirely in economic terms, and a more discriminating criticism is suggested by William Irwin Thompson:

> Perhaps the reason that art and politics are often at odds with one another even when they are embedded in a single ideology, is because great art most often realizes itself in a tragic or comic perception of the nature of human existence. To live out his role the politician must believe or pretend to believe that the next revolution or piece of legislation will make a difference and that the difference is worth living and dying for. The artist, with an older sort of wisdom knows better. Like the anarchist Bakunin, he sees that the revolution that is to bring about the dictatorship of the proletariat will only bring about the dictatorship of the ex-proletariat. But this avuncular wisdom does not appeal to a younger generation yearning for commitment. . . .
>
> The rebels of 1916 (in the Irish Easter uprising) were something like the rebels of the student New Left today (1967). Impatient with the philosophical, the ambiguous the tragic, and the complex, they demand that issues be approached "at gut level." The career of such a rebel seems to fall into two phases: in the first phase the adolescent rebel attempts to defeat authority at its own game; failing in that the rebel kicks over the table and attempts to destroy the game itself. The student who at twenty-nine is so violent a member of SNNC was at eighteen trying to write poetry in the manner of T. S. Eliot.

Having disposed of the political rejection of literature as little more than juvenile emotionalism, Mr. Wellek turns to what he regards as a more serious attack—the increasing distrust, today, of language itself. Here, again, he collects numerous expressions from modern writers voicing this suspicion. The linguists have shown how deeply thought is affected by language, and there is now a large school of writers who declare the almost total inadequacy of language:

> J. Hillis Miller tells us that "all literature is necessarily a sham. It captures in its subtle pages not the reality of darkness but its verbal image. . . . Words, the medium of fiction are a fabrication of man's intellect. They are part of the human lie." (*Poets of Reality*) In France, Roland Barthes complains that "literature is a system of deceptive signification": it is emphatically signifying, but never finally signified" (*Essais critiques*). The Saussurian terminology hides a simple thought: a word can never become a thing. Michel Foucault in *Les Mots et les Choses* has construed a whole history of the human mind in three stages of its attitude toward language.

> Before the advent of rationalism men assumed that words are things; they believed in the magic of words. In the Enlightenment people wanted to discover the order of things by words or, in Foucault's technical jargon, they wanted to find "a nomenclature which would be also a taxonomy." Our own period has concluded, as Foucault puts it, that "the thing being represented falls outside of the representation itself," and that man is thus unhappily trapped in a language game of which he knows nothing. There is no relation between language and reality. Language and literature have no cognitive value.

So we now have a "cult of silence," yet its members seem to be mainly writers who have by no means stopped publishing. As Mr. Wellek says, "The artist's dissatisfaction with language can only be expressed by language." Yet the despair exists, and the sense of failure in communication is widespread. Mr.Wellek continues:

> "The human voice conspires to desecrate everything on earth," says J. D. Salinger. Still, if we reflect upon this indictment of literature and language, we should recognize that it is man's actions, man's tools and inventions, his whole society that are condemned here. Admittedly, civilization would be impossible or even completely different if man had not developed speech and writing, which have speeded communication and prolonged human memory. But to deplore this, as our apocalyptic prophets of doom and silence do so eloquently, means deploring that man is man and not a dumb animal—a mood, a gesture of despair but hardly a possible way of life and behavior. Men will continue speaking, and even writing.

What Mr. Wellek says is a truism that bears repeating. It is that all tools are double-edged, and this applies to the mind and to language. It seems well to remember here that suspicion of the written word is as old as writing, and was artfully expressed by Plato in several places. Only the individual who knows how easily words deceive has any hope of writing well, and even he will not always be successful. Simply to say something is to shut other things out. In life, everything is connected with everything else, but we hardly know how, and lucid "explanation" of one thing distracts from the larger ignorance.

This may be no more than a single facet of the paradox of consciousness. To know one thing is to ignore others; to see the figure is to be blind to the field. Then, when someone discovers the wealth of hidden realities in the field, there is great lamentation, even despair, and we declare ourselves betrayed by the world. But the world has not changed; instead, we have only begun to discover something of the magnificent complexity of both the world and ourselves.

We may note that the mind has made this discovery, and that it is something we can tell about with language.

# CHILDREN
## . . . and Ourselves
### FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION

IN the September-October issue of *K-Eight,* a magazine apparently edited for school administrators, Leslie A. Hart, educational consultant, tells how the present-day system of classroom instruction came into being. He says:

> Almost single-handedly, Horace Mann imported the class-and-grade system in the 1840's, from Prussia. It was, we may allow, an improvement over the miserable schools that it replaced. But it caught on because it fitted the needs of the times in growing towns and cities.
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> The factory system was being introduced at this period, and was much admired, by those who did not have to work in it. By no coincidence, schools were set up on the same model. The students were the raw material to be batch processed—to be *"run through the mill."* The teachers were the operators—to be paid as little as possible, and given specific orders and duties as were loom-tenders and mechanics. The whole was tightly supervised at every level, and those who did not *"fit"* were simply cast aside. Since, unlike factories, schools could not be run for a profit, the aim was to prevent costs from rising, and to this end the class was a delightful invention. Once set up, more and more students could be put in the room until the walls bulged, at no additional costs. Much less was known then about human differences, and the evidence is that not too many cared. These early class-and-grade schools, we should remember, were primarily for the poor—paid for out of "poor rates." The guiding rule was that beggars could not be choosers.

Later, the schools were more broadly based in service to practically the entire population, but as we know, educational "success," for various reasons, has remained closely related to the families of the children attending. The schools became a selector system, called by Arthur Jensen in his notorious *Harvard Educational Review* paper "one of society's most powerful mechanisms for sorting out children to assume different positions in the occupational hierarchy." Meanwhile, innovations go on all about, but the classroom remains the pattern of educational practice, despite the fact that the objections to it have become well known. Mr. Hart quotes a school superintendent, Donald Thomas, who says:

> The classroom concept itself is a violation of the basic value system-it is supposed to produce. The classroom establishes the teacher as an encyclopedia, and necessitates educational strategies aimed at groups rather than individuals. It isolates learning from the rest of the school-community. It requires regimentation and a retreat to norms of achievement. Most important of all, it makes it impossible for even the best teacher to implement the ethic we expound.

Mr. Hart adds:

> When I ask, "Why do you have classrooms?", I draw not arguments so much as blank looks. Though alternatives have been demonstrated and publicized for years, most educators still seem to think of the classroom device as coming from Mount Sinai rather than Horace Mann, and as timeless rather than as an emergency measure that coped with the flood of immigration over perhaps seventy-five years. Even some of the most outspoken critics of the present schooling miss the point—one could name at least a score who accurately detail its horrors and failures, yet end up still talking as though the classroom needs to be improved, not abandoned.

By this time, we hope, a little resistance has been developed in our readers. After all, some classrooms can be remembered as great places, and a good teacher can overcome the limitations of almost any physical arrangement. Moreover, there are certain practical advantages, for some sorts of communication, in having a room that will hold a number of people.

Why, then, this vigorous attack on classrooms? Good reasons are not wanting. Some physical circumstances tend to facilitate poor relations between human beings. Systems can take on the bad qualities of dehumanizing or regimenting activities for the simple reason that form *does* follow function. Yet it is a mistake to condemn the form as though it were indeed the function. A classroom form may suit some functions well and the mistake has been to assume that it is the best form for *all* functions. It may be good for only a few of them. A form is nothing but a tool.

A child we know had the good fortune to go to a school that had abandoned classrooms entirely

except for foreign language study and math. Why did it work better for these subjects? We hesitate to say, but the fact is that it did. Maybe the language teacher felt that she needed it, and she happened to be a very good language teacher, so that the pupils never thought about how they had been "arranged" for that purpose. They were too intent on learning. She was a teacher who made arrangements seem very unimportant.

A teacher who has a large class may need to be elevated above the heads of those who are sitting in the room so that he can be seen. In this case a platform or a rostrum is a good thing. It serves a purpose. He can always get down from the platform, walk around, break the pattern, and do something entirely different if the school is able to switch to smaller groups.

A person might be glad to sit on a hard bench without a back in a chilly room if he could hear Ralph Waldo Emerson talk about Self-Reliance or listen to Thoreau get stirred up about John Brown. The trouble wasn't so much with the "classroms" introduced by Horace Mann as with the idea of processing a lot of people to get them ready for clerkships or the factory system in the name of education. The *intentions of the society* created all the forms which are now seen to have had such bad effects on the children, but changing the forms will not correct the intentions, since if the intentions remain the same the new forms will soon be adapted to the underlying purposes of what is being done.

The right sort of meeting-place between teacher and pupil won't really accomplish much if, say, we still teach geometry and mathematics as no more than the foundation for utilitarian manipulation of matter (in engineering) instead of recognizing that the child (the adult, too, of course) needs to see in the forms assumed by all material things the wonder of harmony and proportion in the universe around us, as the ancient Greeks maintained in the teaching of geometry. If we think of the world as nothing but a means to our ends, we shall think of people in the same way. People are a part of the world.

Right now a great many persons feel nihilistic toward cities. Cities seem to them totally bad places. They are certainly places where the worst in human beings gets objectivised and put on display. Nature doesn't have much of a chance to ameliorate the urban scene. The snow doesn't cover the city with a blanket of purity, but with great mounds of polluted and grimy slush.

But what ought a city to be? A city ought to be a place where people come to experience what they cannot find elsewhere—great and wonderful things done by human beings for other human beings to see and hear and learn from. A city ought to be the vast extrapolation of an ideal university, in life, in the round. Instead, the city is the place where men in home offices and banks and stock exchanges hatch out ideas like an ever-expanding economy, map the markets for multiplying profits, and invent ways to intensify human desires so that people will spend beyond their means. So of course the cities are ugly. They are places where these ideas function and create the forms that will inevitably follow. Cities are fiercely ugly in their most "necessary" parts, and brassily over-designed in their superfluous parts. The normal parts and values of large cities are increasingly difficult to find. They are being crowded out of existence.

But we have to eat, don't we? Economics is basic and real. It is indeed, but the truth of what we need to eat is carefully hidden from us by industry, and this ought to teach us something about the endless demand for "practicality." Meanwhile, the realities of economics are *not* being revealed to us by economists, but by nature-lovers and like-minded dreamers who are concerned with excellences more imaginative than the bottom line of a sales contract.

These are some of the reasons why, as a rule, we don't talk much, here, about the abuses and blindnesses and cultural lag of the public schools. All most people can do about them is agree that they are just *terrible!* Still, there are psychological realities behind such sad conditions, and when these are a little better understood we may see more clearly what we all might be able to do.

# *FRONTIERS*

## Towns and Cities

A FEW weeks ago (MANAS, Jan. 3) we quoted from *Environment* the fact that between 1940 and 1970 the farm population of the United States dropped from 31.9 million to 9.4 million (from 23.2 per cent to 4.8 per cent of the total population), and that in the same period the .size of the average farm increased from 167 acres to about 400 acres. These figures pointed to the extensive mechanization of agriculture and the increased need for pesticides and artificial fertilizers, but they also reflect the accelerating migration of people from rural areas to the cities.

This is a movement of population which has been going on for a long time. In 1912 Arthur Morgan noticed the barren character of most of America's small towns, especially the agricultural town. Writing of the rural town years later, he said:

> Its main reason for being was, not as a place to live a full and interesting life, but as a service place for agriculture. Aside from three or four churches and the public school, the community activities largely revolved around exploiting labor and land to serve the urban need for food.
>
> There was another reason for the low repute of small towns. The money made in the community was taken to the big city. The agricultural wealth of Iowa and Illinois went to Chicago. The small town had only the leavings.

In *Community Comments* for December, 1972, Judson Brown repeats this statement by Dr. Morgan and says:

> Today this economic starvation of rural areas, characteristic of many civilizations, has proceeded more rapidly and more completely than in previous eras. What once took centuries to accomplish is now taking place in decades. Larger and larger areas of rural America have been depopulated. The metropolitan order was built on the principle of one man dominating the other. The institutions ordered for the accumulation of wealth by those who are already rich, the economic exploitation and starvation of the countryside, and the concentration of people around the metropolis is the old order from which our forefathers sought an escape. Now that most people have left the small towns for the larger cities, the harmful biological densities are becoming apparent where they are no longer obscured by the vitality of new immigrants from the countryside. Historical processes that once took centuries are foreshortened and we can more quickly observe and evaluate what is taking place. We can predict that increasingly with the breakdown of community in the metropolis, the people of the metropolis will fail to reproduce themselves, and so the old order will pass away. As this old order passes, what shall take its place?

The spate of books and articles dealing with the disorders and problems of the cities—housing, drug abuse, overcrowded and inadequate schools—tells the story of this breakdown in detail. It seems clear enough that these problems will remain unsolvable until their true origins are faced, in terms of the sort of sociological studies that are briefly published in *Community Comments.* We know from books like Charles Abrams' *The City Is the Frontier* that the legislative approach to urban housing is almost a complete failure, even the intent of the legislators being frustrated by the way in which the housing laws are administered. Also in the December issue of *Community Comments,* Peter Kaplan points out that "Urban Renewal" is usually a euphemism for destruction of community in the inner city. Too often, the people who are displaced cannot afford to live in the new housing units, and must move to other sub-standard areas, which may mean only "keeping one step ahead of the bulldozer." Mr. Kaplan says:

> A June 1966 survey of 1,155 projects showed that 67% had been predominantly residential before redevelopment, while only 43% were predominantly residential after development that was completed or planned. This shift in the use of tens of thousands of acres of land has resulted in the demolition of far more housing units than have subsequently been constructed on these sites. . . . The influx of dislocated project area dwellers into other parts of the city causes sound neighborhoods to deteriorate into slums and remaining slums to become worse. Problems of overcrowding become more severe; because there are fewer places to live, families are forced to double up.

Meanwhile, the interest is in the new construction, not in what happens to the displaced people. Mr. Kaplan says that "the quality of relocation assistance for families forced from their homes by urban renewal has been poor." He continues:

> Perhaps the most eloquent testimony to this fact is the absence of surveys comparing the pre- and post-relocation housing of former residents of urban renewal sites. Of the thirty-three studies cited by Hartman, only eight contained enough information for the reader to get a realistic picture of how families fared in relocation.

Kaplan also points out that local urban renewal officials often seem to neglect the worst parts of a city in selecting a site for renewal, since other areas give more promise of becoming a "good" development. So the worst housing is left standing in such cases. Finally, the public housing that is constructed may not work very well:

> Public housing is considered a major repository for dislocated families, but the projects that have been built thus far are totally unsuitable for the former residents of low rent districts such as Boston's West End. Their physical design and institutional quality are not conducive to the predictable acquaintance patterns and social control of high density tenement neighborhoods, and thus their equally high densities become oppressive. For this reason, many working class families avoid public housing even if they are eligible.

In the opening article in *Community Comments*, taking an over-view of all such problems, Griscom Morgan points to the need for "the building and development of a new order of fine small cities throughout the country." In one place he quotes from Van Loon's *Story of Mankind* a passage on the importance of community life to the ancient Greek citizen. Van Loon wrote:

> The Greek . . . never lost touch with his immediate surroundings. He never ceased to be a part of a little town where everybody knew everyone else. He felt that his intelligent neighbors were watching him. Whatever he did, whether he wrote plays or made statues out of marble or composed songs, he remembered that his efforts were going to be judged by all the free-born citizens of his home-town who knew about such things. This knowledge forced him to strive after perfection, and perfection, as he had been taught from childhood, was not possible without moderation.
>
> In this hard school, the Greeks learned to excel in many things. They created new forms of government and new forms of literature and new ideals in art which we have never been able to surpass. They performed these miracles in little villages that covered less ground than four or five modern city blocks.
>
> And look, what finally happened!
>
> In the fourth century before our era, Alexander of Macedonia conquered the world. As soon as he had done with fighting, Alexander decided that he must bestow the benefits of the true Greek genius upon all mankind. He took it away from the little cities and the little villages and tried to make it blossom and bear fruit amidst the vast royal residences of his newly acquired Empire. But the Greeks, removed from the familiar sight of their own temples, removed from the well-known sounds and smells of their own crooked streets, at once lost the cheerful joy and the marvelous sense of moderation which had inspired the work of their hands and brains while they labored for the glory of their old city-states. They became cheap artisans and did second-rate work.

Well, more, doubtless, than this was involved in the decline of Greek genius, but Mr. Morgan's point is nonetheless well made.

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