

## IN THE IDEAL STATE

IT sometimes seems that the clearest statements made about social problems and issues come as "asides" from people who have other things to do with their time, but have been interrupted by massive intrusions on their lives and work. A man who spends his whole life thinking about politics is likely to get confused about what human life is for. The meaning of life is no doubt obscure, but it can hardly be found out through the sagacious management of other people. And how can a society do anything but decline if its chief cultural pursuit lies in argument and controversy about social and political *systems*?

The best discussions of politics that we have encountered are those which are undertaken mainly in order to clear away misconceptions and to establish certain priorities, making it possible to change the subject. That, it seems evident, was the motive behind Thoreau's *Essay on Civil Disobedience*. You might say the same thing about much of Gandhi's career. He said in 1920:

If I seem to take part in politics, it is only because politics encircle us today like the coil of a snake from which one cannot get out, no matter how much one tries. I wish therefore to wrestle with the snake.

To me political power is not an end but one of the means of enabling people to better their condition in every department of life. Political power means capacity to regulate national life through national representatives. If national life becomes so perfect as to become self-regulated, no representation becomes necessary. There is then a state of enlightened anarchy. In such a state every man is his own ruler. He rules himself in such a manner that he is never a hindrance to his neighbor. In the ideal state therefore, there is no political power because there is no State. But the ideal is never fully realized in life. Hence the classical statement of Thoreau that that government is best which governs least.

Why, then, all the endless writing about politics and political systems, when the secret of

good politics is its progressive self-elimination as a human concern? A reduction of the occasions when it intrudes itself upon human affairs? Questions like this cannot help but arise when books keep coming out, one after another, concerned with past politics and political theory. These are works on the management of men for their common good. But the problem is rather the development of the capacity for self-management, so that political matters will become matters of convenience and minor efficiency, instead of desperate issues of power. There is no politics of the good life; there is only the good life and a politics in complete subordination to it.

But this, it will be said, is a counsel of perfection. Perhaps so, but there may be a way to apply a counsel of perfection to even the worst of situations. Consider that when people neglect to cultivate good lives, looking instead for political remedies for their ills, the ills multiply rapidly. And since a demand for remedies invariably creates a supply, we have a very active politics of remedial programs. We have had this politics now for some two hundred years. The "important" literature of the day seems largely made up of discussion of socio-political remedies. The wars of the time are fought to settle angry differences of opinion concerning what is the best social system and political remedy. While there are various cults which devote themselves to what they call the good life, there is no mainstream thinking on the subject. The good life is something we are supposed to have already, given to us by the Constitution and by technology. Who can know more than the members of an affluent society about the good life? The problem is rather to control or eliminate the people who would like to destroy or dilute it. It follows that military might is the ally and defender of the good life, and

the greater the might the more securely will the good life be preserved.

These are dogmas of our corporate existence, yet the effect of their application is that the lives of more and more of us are being interfered with and disturbed. For reasons too numerous to name, the system is working very poorly and sometimes not at all. And because of the two hundred years we have spent in devising and arguing about political solutions, it occurs to almost no one that the true remedy is concerned with realities which have to be dealt with above the level of political action.

Here we should like to quote a Kentucky farmer and poet, another man who finds the tenor of his life interrupted and interfered with by the political and economic confusions of the times. In *A Continuous Harmony* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch) Wendell Berry says:

It has suddenly become clear to us that the practices and ambitions that we have been taught from the cradle to respect have made us the heirs apparent of a variety of dooms; some of the promised solutions, on which we have been taught to depend, are not working, are probably not going to work. As a result the country is burdened with political or cultural perfectionists of several sorts, demanding that the government or the people create *right now* one or another version of the ideal state. The air is full of dire prophecies, warnings, and threats of what will happen if the Kingdom of Heaven is not precipitately landed at the nearest airport. . . .

The public *demand* for perfection, as opposed to private striving for it, is almost always productive of violence, and is itself a form of violence. It is totalitarian in impulse, and often in results.

There are perfections of various sorts within the reach of human beings, but there is *no* perfection in politics, and cannot be, since its excellences are always the imperfect reflection of some prior good. It follows that the demand for political perfection turns the public forums into arenas for contenders in the politics of frenzy. The situation is much as Mr. Berry describes it:

It appears to me that the governing middle, or the government, which supposedly represents the

middle, has allowed the extremes of left and right to force it into an extremism of its own. These three extremes of left, right, and middle, egged on by and helplessly subservient to each other's rhetoric, have now become so self-righteous and self-defensive as to have no social use. So large a ground of sanity and good sense and decency has been abandoned by these extremes that it becomes possible now to think of a New Middle made up of people conscious and knowledgeable enough to despise the blandishments and oversimplifications of the extremes—and roomy and diverse enough to permit a renewal of intelligent cultural dialogue. That is what I hope for: a chance to live and speak as a person, not as a function of some political bunch.

What is disturbing, then, about these three "sides" of our present political life is not their differences but their similarities. They have all abandoned discourse as a means of clarifying and explaining and defending and implementing their ideas. They have taken almost exclusively to the use of the rhetoric of ad-writers: catch-phrases, slogans, clichés, euphemisms, flatteries, falsehoods, and various forms of cheap wit. This has led them—as such rhetoric must—to the use of power and the use of violence against each other. But however their ideological differences might be graphed, they are, in effect all on the same side. They are on the side of their quarrel, and are against all other, including all better, possibilities. There is a political and social despair in this that is the greatest peril a country can come to, short of the inevitable results of such despair should it continue very long. . . .

The political condition in this country now is one in which the means or the disciplines necessary to the achievement of professed ends have been devalued or corrupted or abandoned altogether. We are offered peace without forbearance or tolerance or love, security without effort and without standards, freedom without risk or adventure, comfort without responsibility, abundance without thrift.

Who could have supposed that the parties which claim men like Jefferson and Lincoln as their ancestors would now be spreading these superstitions? For such offerings, when held out as rewards for proper political decision, could only beguile a population already victimized by superstitious belief and hungry for the performance of miracles. Peace, abundance, security, freedom, comfort—these are the natural

fruits of a style of life, the synergistic usufruct spontaneously earned by a community of people who have a realizing sense of the meaning of their lives, from day to day, and who are active in their chosen work. They know their work, and they do it well as an end in itself. They are farmers, builders, artisans, healers, teachers, writers, and sometimes philosophers. They have some mastery of the skills of their callings, and their sense of purpose generates the atmosphere of civilization. Their fulfillment is felt by others, warming their sympathies and sensibilities.

Peace is the quality of the lives of people who can think of no reason that could ever justify harming others, and know many reasons for understanding and being friendly with them. A covenant to embody these attitudes may be of some utility, but it does not "make" the peace. Abundance is the natural sufficiency which suits those who find no symbolic reassurance in having more than they need, who recognize any unnecessary acquisition as an impediment. Security comes from the inner sense of having done one's part, which is all one is able to do. Freedom is life in the spacious realm projected and given its wide dimensions by people who make imaginative decisions and who honor the unpredictability of the human power to become. Comfort is a minor effect of knowing the major laws of health and enjoying the built-in hospitalities of the natural environment. All those qualities that are promised as a result of instituting the correct political system are really achievable only as effects of the way human beings think and live.

Explaining his entry into politics, Gandhi said that he sought relief for his country from an oppressive political system, imposed by an invader, which stood in the way of the natural development of people's lives. His ideal, even though he thought it could never be perfectly realized, was a community where there was no political power. And Gandhi's conception of the

appropriate compromise had been well put by Thoreau.

What then would be the role of government in relation to conditions where an oppressive rule had made people virtually unable to help themselves? In that case, it seems clear, government must function something like a school or a teacher, and a teacher's only legitimate purpose, as Tolstoy said, is to make the pupil equal to himself—to help him, that is, to become free of the need of instruction or help. But governments, unfortunately, are more schooled in gaining power and control than in relinquishing it.

However, it must be recognized that the weaknesses and ineffectuality of people have other causes. Not only invaders bring a decline. Wendell Berry speaks of the loss of the old disciplines which were once the source of individual excellence in human life. The substitution of the goal of wealth or acquisition for the ideal of a productive and useful life seems primarily responsible:

The standard of efficiency displaces and destroys standards of quality because, by definition, it cannot even consider them. Instead of asking a man what he can do well, it asks him what he can do fast and cheap. Instead of asking a farmer to practice the best husbandry, to be a good steward and trustee of his land and his art, it puts irresistible pressures on him to produce more and more food and fiber more and more cheaply thereby destroying the health of the land, the best traditions of husbandry, and the farm population itself. And so when we examine the principle of efficiency as we now practice it, we see that it is not really efficient at all. As we use the word efficiency means no such thing, or it means short-term or temporary efficiency; which is a contradiction in terms. It means cheapness at any price. It means hurrying to nowhere. It means the profligate waste of humanity and of nature. It means the greatest profit to the greatest liar. What we have called efficiency has produced among us, and to our incalculable cost, such unprecedented monuments of destructiveness and waste as the strip-mining industry, the Pentagon, the federal bureaucracy, and the family car.

It is in relation to matters of this sort that the counsel of perfection must be made to apply, since there can never be any remedy for the ills of our society so long as these attitudes persist. Mr. Berry's account of what has happened to the way men regard their work and their objectives is by itself enough to show the futility of measures which ignore basic characterological weaknesses.

A large part of the present problem, however, grows out of the fact that millions of people are now entirely dependent for their livelihood on an economic system devoted to this kind of quantitative thinking. Enormous financial interests are also involved, to say nothing of the subservience of government to the managers of these vast industrial and commercial undertakings. And how could politics possibly contribute any real solution to a situation of this sort, so long as it costs considerably more than a million dollars for anyone to run for President, and even would-be senators have to spend close to a quarter of a million just to be nominated? The "image" politics of the times in no way lends itself to serious discussion of the changes that need to take place.

In any event, the real changes are prepolitical. Again, it is as Wendell Berry says:

The peculiarity of our condition would appear to be that the implementation of *any* truth would ruin the economy. If the Golden Rule were generally observed among us, the economy would not last a week. We have made our false economy god, and it has made a blasphemy of the truth. So I have met the economy on the road, and am expected to yield it right of way. But I will not get over. My reason is that I am a man, and have a better right to the ground than the economy. The economy is no god to me, for I have had too close a look at its wheels. I have seen it at work in the strip mines and coal camps of Kentucky, and I know that it has no moral limits. It has emptied the country of the independent and the proud, and has crowded the cities with the dependent and abject. It has sacrificed the small to the large, the personal to the impersonal, the good to the cheap. It has ridden its questionable triumphs over the bodies of small farmers and tradesmen and craftsmen. I see it still, driving my neighbors off their farms into the factories. I see it teaching my students to give

themselves a price before they can give themselves a value. Its principle is to waste and destroy the living substance of the world and the birthright of posterity for a monetary profit that is the most flimsy of human artifacts.

This passage has a majesty of utterance that penetrates to the core of our ills. Mr. Berry, as he says, speaks for no "political bunch." He fortifies no ideology. He speaks out of his right and necessity as a man, addressing those sensibilities in other men which are awakened in himself. We all have them. We are all men. We all have the same human essence, may respond to the same high calling, have the innate capacity to know the same elemental truths about the earth, the land, and what is worthy of our strength and fidelity.

Doing what we ought to do will take time. We are out of the habit of doing what we ought to do. And there are all those superstructures and processes which have been erected for the wrong reasons and set going in the wrong direction. It takes time to set such things right.

We are not just stockholders in the wealthiest corporations in the world. We have some errand on this planet that goes beyond fouling it with the debris of our quarrels and our wastes. Are we really resolved to make false prophets of all our great men, who dreamed such wonderful dreams for America?

Mr. Berry has his plans, and works at carrying them out. Other people are working on theirs. Still others, with fewer options, are at least altering their tastes, making their inner allegiances felt, little by little. It will indeed take time, but who really knows enough to make haste, save in terms of the private simplicities one may be trying to embrace?

New ideas are spreading around, and some very old ones, too—ideas with leverage in them. Meanwhile—

"You are tilting at windmills," I will be told. "It is a hard world, hostile to the values you stand for. You will never enlist enough people to bring about such a change." People who talk that way are eager

to despair, knowing how easy despair is. They want to give up all proper disciplines and all effort, and stand like cattle in a slaughterhouse, waiting their turn. The change I am talking about appeals to me precisely because it need not wait upon "other people." Anybody who wants to can begin it in himself and in his household as soon as he is ready—by becoming answerable to at least some of his own needs, by acquiring skill and tools, by learning what his real needs are, by refusing the merely glamorous and frivolous. When a person learns to *act* on his best hopes he enfranchises and validates them as no government or public policy ever will. And by his action the possibility that other people will do the same is made a likelihood.

But I must concede I *am* tilting at windmills. While we have been preoccupied with various ideological menaces, we have been invaded and nearly overrun by windmills. They are drawing the nourishment from our soil and lifeblood out of our veins. I say let us tilt at windmills. Though we have not conquered them, if we do not keep going at them they will surely conquer us.

It is true enough that there are some honest and intelligent men in Congress. But it is also true that some of them barely get elected, and that they are helpless without strong constituencies. Congress hasn't amounted to much in a long time, and it won't—it can't—without better constituencies. To be effective, good government—simpler government—needs effective citizens who think as human beings, not as "consumers" and "demanders." In order to think like a human being, it is necessary to live like one. This seems the only political truth worth remembering.

## *REVIEW*

### PAINTER AND POET

WE have, from a reader and friend, a much thumbed copy of Herbert Read's small book, *A Coat of Many Colours* (George Routledge, 1945), comprised of seventy-one brief essays on a great variety of subjects. It is a book to dip into—a bedside companion. The reader may find here many things that trouble him intelligently and provocatively dealt with, and also learn about forgotten men who ought to be better known. There is for example an informing essay on the life and work of Eric Gill. Enthusiasts of community should find out all they can about Eric Gill, since he apparently understood the laws in which the meaning of community is rooted.

Then there are reflections on Picasso's "Guernica." If you are one of those who resist the breathless admiration sometimes expressed for this painting, Read's essay is worth considering. For example:

Monumental art is inspired by creative actions. It may be that sometimes the artist is deceived, but he shares his illusion with his age. He lives in a state of faith, of creative and optimistic faith. But in our age even an illusion is not tenable. . . .

The only logical monument would be some sort of negative monument. A monument to disillusion, to despair, to destruction. It was inevitable that the greatest artist of our time should be driven to this conclusion. Frustrated in his creative affirmations, limited in scope and scale by the timidities and customs of the age, he can at best make a monument to the vast forces of evil which seek to control our lives: a monument of protestation. When those forces invade his native land, and destroy with calculated brutality a shrine peculiarly invested with the sense of glory, then the impulse to protest takes on a monumental grandeur. Picasso's great fresco is a monument to destruction, a cry of outrage and horror amplified by the spirit of genius.

It has been said that this painting is obscure—that it cannot appeal to the soldier of the republic, to the man in the street, to the communist in his cell; but actually its elements are clear and openly symbolical. The light of day and night reveals a scene of horror

and destruction, the eviscerated horse the writhing bodies of men and women, betray the passage of the infuriated bull, who turns triumphantly in the background, tense with lust and stupid power; whilst from a window Truth, whose features are the tragic mask in all its classical purity extends her lamp over the carnage. The great canvas is flooded with pity and terror, but over it all is imposed that nameless grace which arises from their cathartic equilibrium. . . .

Goya, too, was a great artist, and a great humanist; but his reactions were individualistic—his instruments irony, satire ridicule. Picasso is more universal; his symbols are banal, like the symbols of Homer, Dante, Cervantes. For it is only when the widest commonplace is infused with the intensest passion that a great work of art, transcending all schools and categories, is born; and being born, lives immortally.

Read exhibits the qualities of a true essayist, qualities which assure that, whether or not he is "right," you can learn from him. He shows the considerations which ought to enter into judgment.

Lovers of lyric poetry will particularly appreciate the essay on Shelley, in which Read illustrates Shelley's power to use words, not for communication, but for incantation. He quotes Shelley's six fragmentary lines on the waning moon—

And like a dying lady, lean and pale,  
Who totters forth, wrapped in a gauzy veil,  
Out of her chamber, led by the insane  
And feeble wanderings of her fading brain,  
The moon arose up in the murky East,  
A white and shapeless mass—

and comments:

The image is vivid, but it is very nearly ludicrous; and under no circumstances does the moon appear as "a white and shapeless mass." But it does not matter: the words are magical, and once read, always remembered.

Read finds other lines in which Shelley tells what the poet does:

Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses,  
But feeds on the aerial kisses  
Of shapes that haunt thought's wildernesses.  
He will watch from dawn to gloom

The lake-reflected sun illumine  
 The yellow bees in the ivy-bloom  
 Nor heed, nor see, what things they be;  
 But from these, create he can  
 Forms more real than living man,  
 Nurslings of immortality.

Read remarks that in these lines we have "a precise and very adequate account of the nature of the poetic imagination."

It happens that from the same reader we have another book, *Patterns of Consciousness* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1969) by Richard Haven, which amounts to a study of "the poetic imagination" since it is devoted to Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Coleridge was much concerned with understanding the power of the imagination. In Mr. Haven's view, he "was a born psychologist trying to write as a metaphysician." The scholar is interested in this side of the poet's achievement, remarking in his Introduction:

He [Coleridge] was an acute and indefatigable observer of his own mind, his own experience. He was at his best when drawing on that observation. He longed, he once said, to find "some principle that was derived from experience, but of which all other knowledge should be but so many repetitions under various limitations, even as squares, triangles, etc., etc., are but so many positions of space." His "philosophical opinions" were "blended with or deduced from, . . . (his) feelings." As he wrote of Plato, he "thought deeply within himself of the goings-on of his own mind . . . and then looked abroad to ask if this were a dream or whether it were indeed a revelation from within, and a waking reality." There have been many studies of what happened when Coleridge "looked abroad." There have not been many which tried to consider what he found when he "thought deeply within himself of the goings-on of his own mind," and the extent to which this determined what he thought and wrote.

Mr. Haven looked for evidence of this sort of searching by Coleridge, and found it mostly in marginal notes in books in the poet's library. An example:

And in a marginal note on the works of Jacob Boehme, he wrote that "in all knowledge" we must distinguish between "the mode of acquiring, and the mode of communicating it." The first of these, he

continued, is "Intuition, or immediate Beholding." The second is "the *art* of reasoning, by acts of abstraction, which separate from the first are mere shadows, but, like shadows, of incalculable service in determining the rememberable outlines of the Substance."

This seems a profound observation. How deftly Coleridge compares the splendor of what we *know* with the faltering attempt to put it into words, in order to give our knowledge, whatever it may be, to someone else!

And here we have before us the project of the poet—to use words to overcome the limitations of words—to make the things for which the words stand, or which they suggest, so real, so vitally before us, that the words, as abstractions, no longer stand between the reader and what is portrayed. The light from the image hides its parts, overwhelms the material construction which generated it.

Coleridge was an exacting observer of psychological processes, as his comment on Hume's famous disposition of the "self" makes plain:

How opposite to nature and the fact to talk of the one *moment* of Hume; of our whole being as an aggregate of successive single sensations. Whoever *felt a single* sensation? Is not every one at the same moment conscious that there coexist a thousand others in a darker shade, or less light, even as when I fix my attention on a white House on a grey bare Hill or rather long ridge that runs out of sight each way . . . the pretended single sensation is it anything more than the *Light-point* in every picture either of nature or of a good painter?

Getting to the point as Coleridge saw it, and as Read illustrated it with lines on the moon by Shelley, Mr. Haven sets the problem of the poetic imagination:

The problem arises when we wish to communicate our experience not of discursive but of unitive consciousness. I am forced by the structure of language to speak of the tree which moves me to tears of joy in the same words in which I speak of a tree which stands in the way. I am forced to separate into *me, tree, and emotion*, into separate concepts, the undifferentiated moment of me-tree-joy. However

precise our language, however subtle and complex the structure of meaning we present, we are still dealing with concepts, with what Coleridge called the fixed and definite counters of the fancy. We are manipulating the products of perception, and we cannot compose from concepts that flash of intuition in which experience is grasped as a vivid and living whole and which it is the function of the poetic imagination somehow to express.

So, as Haven says—

. . . it is for Coleridge one of the characteristics of imaginative poetry that it does not make us think about a thing but makes the thing seem immediately present in experience. The poet must "make everything present by a series of images," since it is only by sensuous images that we can elicit truth in a flash." He needs "the power of so carrying on the eye of the reader as to make him *see* everything—and this without exciting any painful or laborious attention, without any anatomy of description."

It seems quite natural, then, to learn that Coleridge was a believing Platonist, soaked in Plotinus, Boehme, Henry More, Bruno, Ficino, and other philosophers of the Platonic tradition. For how could the poet perform such miracles, save by rising to the realm of Ideas, and feeling its more encompassing realities?

## COMMENTARY PUZZLES IN ART

AFTER absorbing what Herbert Read has to say about Picasso's "Guernica" (see Review), the reader may find that his intellectual grasp of the painting has been increased, but that his feelings still resist, and wonder why. By coincidence, we have on hand for review a new collection of essays by Octavio Paz, *Alternating Current* (Viking), in which there is helpful comment on Picasso. Paz speaks of "the mutilations, the deformations, the furious stylizations that Picasso delights in," amounting to a violation of nature. He also says that an apt title for the history of Western art might be: "From the imitation of nature to its destruction."

It is as though modern artists, following Sade, have regarded violation as significant as creation, since both occur in nature.

This, in its way, seems an æsthetic repetition of the scientist's moral neutrality. The justification would be that the artist, like the writer, holds up a mirror to his times, and it is certainly true that one more easily finds an audience for destructive expressions than for creative ones.

Speaking of the two great tendencies in the work of the artist—naturalism and subjectivism—Paz says:

A heroic painting, but also a theatrical painting: part daring feat, part dramatic gesture. Temporal art, for its part, is a vision of the instant that envelops presence in its flame and consumes it: an art of presence even though it hacks it to pieces, as in Picasso's work. . . .

The search for meaning or its destruction (it makes no difference which: there is no way of escaping meaning) is central to both tendencies. The only meaningless art in our time is realism: and not only because its products are so mediocre, but also because it persists in reproducing a natural and social reality that has lost all meaning. Temporal art resolutely confronts this loss of meaning, and therefore it is an art of imagination par excellence. In this respect, the Dadaist movement was an example (and an inimitable one, despite its recent imitations in

New York). Dada not only took the absence of meaning and absurdity as its province, but made lack of meaning its most effective instrument of intellectual demolition.

Modern art oscillates between presence and its destruction, between meaning and the meaningless. But we thirst for a *complete art*. Are there any examples?

It is sometimes difficult to see in all this much more than a burlesque of funeral rites. Isn't it time for a new beginning in art, too? Fine artisans practice an unpremeditated art that does not defy the understanding.

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### THE STUFF OF HISTORY

COURTS are institutions which are brought into existence by people who believe that offenders against the law are entitled to justice and that guilt and innocence should be determined by fair trial. But the people who work with those who are caught in the toils of the law, who are most often victims of forces and weaknesses that seem beyond their control, soon lose track of questions like guilt or innocence and the hope of justice. They see so much *pain*, so much defeat, so much despair, that all their energies are absorbed in simple salvage. They try to pick up the pieces of broken lives for at least a small number of the unfortunates they encounter. "Justice" they leave to those blindly optimistic enough to suppose that it can be defined and administered by institutional devices.

Much the same thing may be said about war. If you see enough of war, of how it affects people, you can't be drawn into an argument about "just" wars. Misery does not consult the heads of states before it overtakes the victims of war. War deals death, deprivation, and dehumanization, and none of these effects have any justice in them. Walt Whitman was perhaps the first distinguished American to see this, and to speak his mind. During the Civil War, he cared for the sick, the wounded and the dying in the hospitals. For him, this was the only thing to do.

So it was natural for the man who wrote *Nagasaki: The Forgotten Bomb*, when the Vietnam War came, to think more about what was happening to the people than about which side was "justified" or "right." Most of all he thought of the children—the hundreds of thousands of orphans he read about; and then, one day, he told his wife that he was going to Vietnam and adopt a Vietnamese child. "I have to do it," he said. "It'll be a girl, of course," she said. They already had three boys.

Fortunately, this man, Frank W. Chinnock, is a writer, and in *Kim: A Gift from Vietnam* (World Publishing Company, 1969) he tells the story of finding this little girl, of how he beat down the

various bureaucratic obstacles and brought her home and what all this meant to him and his family. A portfolio of photographs adds substantially to the enjoyment of his account.

It is a non-statistical story of what a man is likely to find out if he goes to Vietnam with some decent personal purpose in mind. He might learn good things like this:

When we came to a large clearing with a concrete building in the center of it, Masters pulled up. It was a one-story affair built like an H with two parallel structures connected by a passageway. Masters pointed to a sign: "An Tuc Settlement for Children." Underneath, in smaller letters, were the words: "This orphanage was paid for and built by the enlisted men of the 8th Eng. Btn., First Air Cavalry Division."

"Some people back home accuse the American soldier of not caring about the civilians," he said. "Well, this is the kind of thing your average 'uncaring' American soldier is doing all the time out here—things like building orphanages for kids."

The place wasn't quite finished so that there were only about a dozen children, and older than Chinnock was looking for, but one little girl was introduced to him as "Kathleen." Sergeant Muldoon of the Air Cavalry had found her in a village, the only living person after a Viet Cong bombardment, and he carried her in his arms to an orphanage not far away. She was now parentless, so he asked that when she was baptized (the orphanage was Catholic) she be given his mother's name. He came to see Kathleen on Sundays and whenever he could, teaching her English. Then one day Muldoon was killed on a mission, and his commanding officer found among his things a will leaving Kathleen his GI insurance and his savings. There was a letter for Kathleen:

Dear Kathleen:

If you are reading this letter, you will know that I have come to Vietnam to stay here forever. But somehow it doesn't seem fair that Vietnam gains one while America loses one. So maybe we can even the score a little bit. You remember how we talked of going to America one day? Well, I won't be going now. But you can go for both of us. You can be my eyes to see my country again, and my ears to hear its sounds. I have left you some money. With this I hope the orphanage will be able to find an American family that wants you, and that you can grow up with a mother and a father and brothers and

sisters. I never had that, but now you can have it for me. And remember I will always be there to hold your hand.

*With my only love,  
Sgt. Horace Muldoon*

The orphanage did find an American family that wanted Kathleen—a GI and his wife, who planned to take her to New Mexico.

Mr. Chinnock looked and looked. While he was looking, he learned other things about the effects of the war in Vietnam. There were of course the burned and maimed children. And a lovely child who would not be permitted to leave the country because her parents had been executed as "traitors." And a child who sat rigidly, staring, not having uttered a word for a year. So many had serious diseases. Then there was the question of what would happen to these children later on.

In all but the bad orphanages, the youngsters would invariably cluster around me when I first walked in, chattering and laughing. Mrs. Hutchinson explained why. "To them you're literally a giant. You're almost six and a half feet tall, the average here is five feet. They've never seen anyone so tall. And with your white skin and your round eyes, you absolutely fascinate them." It seemed true. A group would run off to play. But always, as I watched, their heads would swivel back toward me, and they would point and giggle delightedly, clapping their hand over their mouths.

I was amazed at the disproportionately high percentage of male children. There appeared to be at least five times as many boys as girls, and I asked Mrs. Hutchinson about it. "Very few girls are abandoned," she explained. "You see, a girl can start earning good money at a much earlier age than a boy."

"How?"

She regarded me gravely. "Prostitution starts over here when a girl is about eleven or twelve."

"Good Lord!" From then on I regarded the little girls with a different outlook. Some of them weren't that far from eleven or twelve. I wondered whether any of the ones I had seen would end up that way. And I remembered the pretty young women in their ao-dais riding in the carriage of the cyclos.

Had they perhaps been on their way to "work"?

Well, Frank Chinnock found his new daughter and brought her home to Katonah, New York. After she had been in the family for a while she started in at nursery school. One day this came in the mail:

Report on Kim Chinnock—Nursery, December 1968: Kim has the most delightful, happy, cheerful disposition of all the children in the group. She has adjusted very satisfactorily to the group and to school life. She is sweet, full of bubbly spirit, polite, responsive and affectionate. She loves school and shows her acceptance and joy. Her face lights up as she comes in each day. . . .

We haven't told any of the story, really. It is a pleasure to read.

Thinking about war and revolution brings to mind another recent book—*Life and Death in Milpa Alta* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), which is a translation by Fernando Horcasitas of an Indian woman's recollections of the Mexican revolution against the rule of Porfirio Diaz. The struggle lasted from 1910 to 1919. The Nahuatl Indian woman, Dona Luz Jiminez, lived in Milpa Alta, a village in the southernmost part of the Federal District of Mexico, where, by reason of geography, the southern followers of Zapata and the troops of various controlling regimes met and fought. While she spoke Spanish well, she told her story in Nahuatl, and it was first published in both languages in Mexico in 1968. There are many passages like this one in her book:

If you only knew, professor, all the things that happened to us when Zapata abandoned us! The people of the village will never forgive him for leaving us in the hands of the enemy. Strangers began to arrive, men wearing earrings. One wore a large golden ring in his nose. They spoke Spanish, I think, but we could hardly understand a word they said. They spoke with thick, brutish accents. They were the men of Carranza!

When the Carrancistas invaded our lands, the shooting began again, this time between the men of Carranza and Zapata. Zapata's men were forced to flee into the woods, all the way up the path towards Santa Ana and San Lorenzo. Their flight was like a forest fire, but there were no dead on either side.

The only dead were the people of the village, those who had gotten up early to work in the fields. Those were the ones who died. A man who had gone to the woods to gather herbs, a wood-cutter—those were the ones whom death caught on the road!

This book is the Mexican Revolution through the eyes of a woman of the villages. Her story is not what gets into the history books, but what ought to be the very stuff of history, until people learn that not history, but the end of history, is made by war.

## *FRONTIERS*

### **Nobody Else Could Do It**

A SAMPLING of the letters in the *Saturday Review of Education* for March illustrates the difficulty, if not the futility, of particularized criticism of the inadequacies of a society whose functions, plans, remedies, and repairs are in the hands of specialists. In the February issue a writer who had been badly overweight while of school age described the indifference and neglect he experienced from physical education instructors who seemed interested only in candidates for highly skilled competitive athletics. The March issue brought replies from three persons, one of whom accused the fat youth of spreading "half-truths, innuendos, and outright misinformation." He had ignored, this critic said, the "thousands of professional physical educators who have spent their lives concerned with the problems of the clumsy, overweight, unmotivated, and physically unfit who make up the majority of our students in physical education classes today." Another correspondent admitted the charges but said that they ought to be leveled "against education in general," since the math teacher "will treat an inept math student much as the coach treats a fat boy." Then he added that physical educationists are trying to correct their deficiencies. A third critic declared that a coach who "loved kids more than he loved winning" wouldn't have been able to do them much good because he "would not have been around long enough to help anyone."

Nobody said anything about the possibility of it being a great mistake to *expect* the schools to overcome what is physically wrong with so many of the students. Nobody said anything about abolishing competitive sports in education or putting an end to the pressure on coaches to "produce" winning teams. On the other hand, in a civilization like ours, the only way to get attention for something good is to make a sort of "cult" out of it—another specialty—presided over by, say, Karate experts, or T'ai Chi teachers, or macrobiotic sages, or Weight-Watchers. A good

thing to do has to be "programmed" or hardly anyone will believe it's real! The family doesn't have any wise, internalized disciplines to pass along, any more, so you have to take a course, go somewhere and hear a lecture, attend a class, or form a club and hold meetings. But at least some good things are spread around in this way, until they are commercialized and get spoiled by promotional gimmicks.

All these mild little counter-cultural activities may be a way of restoring to individuals some control over their own lives, since they do introduce the idea of self-help and self-control, but they probably won't really get very far until they have lost their glamor and fancy identities and are assimilated into a general store of informed common sense. Taking responsibility for one's own life and health needs to be taoistic and uncelebrated to avoid distortion.

Meanwhile, there are so many ailments to correct! There is still no specific for the common cold, and probably won't be, although now and then you meet some healthy person who never has a cold, or almost never. Then there is another difficulty almost as common as the cold for which a remedy is just as hard to find—the "bad back." You seldom meet anyone, these days, who has reached the age of fifty or sixty without having something wrong with his back.

We have just finished reading a little book about how to take care of your own bad back, written by a man whose profession—acting—depended upon preserving his agility; and whose enjoyment of life depended on playing tennis. Back in 1951 he lost the leading role in the Broadway production of *Finian's Rainbow* when he collapsed on the stage and literally couldn't move, having to be carried to a taxi and sent home after the curtain was rung down. Jerry Wayne tells what happened afterward in *The Bad Back Book* (Delacorte, 1972), making it into an adventure story.

Briefly, first he went to bed. There wasn't anything else he could do. Any movement like

standing up sent shooting pains down his leg to his ankle. He went from doctor to doctor. X-rays showed him apparently sound, but just resting didn't do much good since the pain came back if he moved around much. He had traction, acupuncture, chiropractic, and finally learned from a specialist's diagnosis that he probably slipped a disc. A severe case of sciatica was what the specialist said. Back to bed. Finally, a surgeon recommended an operation, and when they opened up his back they decided to take out the disc instead of fusing the vertebrae. And it was back to bed again until the tissues healed. Then, slowly, he began to walk a little, and then a little more. This brought back the pain, but the surgeon told him that this was to be expected for a while. More bed, then a little walking again, and when the pain returned he decided to "adjust" to it, so he stocked up on pain-killers and went back to work. He had to, since his money was almost gone.

His first job took him to London with a company of *Guys and Dolls*. There he heard about two German ladies who had helped people with bad backs. He went to them, and they taught him some exercises and gave him massage. He began to get better. He also found a physiotherapist who taught him some more exercises, and explained that he had to learn to strengthen his own back; nobody else could do this for him. He got still better, and was even able to play a little tennis. Then the little tennis became more tennis and he had a terrible relapse, which meant eight weeks of bed rest, with only some gentle exercises.

All this is preparatory to the climax of Jerry Wayne's personal melodrama. While in London he met a theatrical electrician who had had back trouble and was completely recovered, proving it by lugging heavy equipment all over the stage. The electrician, called "Tiny," had been working on location on a film in Libya when a back spasm laid him flat. He couldn't work at all. Then he found a local folk doctor who had been treating

the backs of the parachute jumpers from the nearby Wheelus air base. This folk doctor, named Raschad, taught him some exercises and after doing them for several months Tiny was totally cured.

Not unnaturally, when Wayne was offered a chance to tour the Middle East with a company entertaining Her Majesty's troops, he took it as a "sign." While playing in Libya he looked up Raschad, a little man who examined his back and said:

You apparently had a slipped disc, which had you not been operated on, I would have been able to treat by strengthening the muscles of the back so tremendously that they would have pushed the disc back into proper alignment and thus relieved the pressures on the sciatic nerve. However, since you have had surgery, we have additional problems to solve. One, the disc itself has been removed. . . . Therefore, our task is to rebuild your back muscles so that they will not only support your spinal column, weakened from the disc removal, but take over the function of the missing disc. We must teach you good posture at all times, even when sleeping, so that you break the vicious circle of pain, compensatory positioning of the body to relieve pain, causing more pain. Finally, and probably most important of all, we must try to impart to you a calm, carefree attitude toward life's values which eliminates tensions. This, in your highly industrialized world, will undoubtedly be difficult to sustain, but we shall try.

Well, they tried, and succeeded. In a matter of months Jerry Wayne was playing strenuous tennis, and has kept it up since. But he *never* skips his back exercises. There are eighteen of them, illustrated by drawings and carefully described.