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THE ESEMPLASTIC POWER

THE stories of our time—and among stories we include legends, myths, allegories—have lost their power, and Walter Benjamin believed the reason is that modern stories have no wisdom in them. Today's tellers of stories are not concerned with truth, but only with "impact" and the shock of external events. If we go to Yeats for help—and he seldom has nothing to offer—we find him saying: "We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry." It follows that those who have no quarrel with themselves cannot be storytellers. They are not inquirers into human meaning. Storytellers need not be spotless characters or successful in their quest, but they must try. Yeats put it well:

> I think, too, that no fine poet, no matter how disordered his life, has ever, even in his mere life, had pleasure for his end. Johnson and Dowson, friends of my youth, were dissipated men, the one a drunkard, the other a drunkard and mad about women, and yet they had the gravity of men who had found life out and were awakening from the dream; and both, one in life and one in art and less in life, had a continual preoccupation with religion. Nor has any poet I have read or heard of or met been a sentimentalist. The other self, the anti-self or the antithetical self, as one may choose to name it, comes but to those who are no longer deceived, whose passion is reality. The sentimentalists are practical men who believe in money, in position, in a marriage bell, and whose understanding of happiness is to be so busy whether at work or play, that all is forgotten but the momentary aim. . . .
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> When life puts away her conjuring tricks one by one, those that deceive us longest may well be the wine-cup and the sensual kiss, for our Chambers of Commerce and of Commons have not the divine architecture of the body, nor has their frenzy been ripened by the sun. The poet, because he may not stand within the sacred house but lives amid the whirlwinds that beset its threshold, may find his pardon.

Thus poetry is a half-way house, a threshold where the human struggles with conflicting elements in himself, yet with the rare distinction that by striving he creates a splendid architecture which others may visit, and gain invitation to a struggle of their own. The poet or storyteller has what Keats called *Negative Capability*—"that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."

The artists say the same thing—Flaubert, for example:

> Superficial, limited creatures, rash, feather-brained souls demand a conclusion from everything, they want to know the purpose of life and the dimensions of the infinite. Picking up a handful of sand in their poor, puny grasp, they say to the Ocean: "I shall now count the grains on your shores." But when the sand slips through their fingers and the sum proves long, they stamp and burst into tears. Do you know what we should do on that shore? Either kneel down or walk.
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> No great genius has ever come to final conclusions; no great book ever does so, because humanity itself is forever on the march and can arrive at no goal. Homer comes to no conclusions, nor does Shakespeare, nor Goethe, nor even the Bible. That is why I am so deeply revolted by that fashionable term, the *Social Problem.* The day on which the answer is found will be this planet's last.

Well, what is this "negative capability" Keats so admired, which, he said, "Shakespeare possessed so enormously"? Obviously, it is not the capacity to catalog or to describe precisely, but both something less and something more. Nor is it the skill of the calculator. The poetic or literary art, then, is the power to provoke the imagination. It moves on the currents of metaphor and analogue, reaching heights beyond calculation. It loses touch with earth, but retains its sense, or some sense of its sense. There is a life in this region—a trans-personal life of the mind—where we converse with others who live there or come on visits, and where we address ourselves to one another's dreams. The great stories are usually symbolic of this transcendent terrain, and philosophers try to make charts of its elevations.

Plato, for one, speaks of it at the end of the ninth book of the *Republic.*

We need an example, and one at hand is Olive Schreiner's "A Dream of Wild Bees" (taken from a small volume, *The Lost Joy and Other Dreams,* issued by Thomas Mosher in 1894). It is a tale of a mother, great with child, who lies by a window through which wild bees come. She falls asleep, dreaming that the bees, like a succession of fairy godmothers, offer gifts to her unborn child. The story is as old as imagination itself, yet filled with fresh wonder as Olive Schreiner tells it.

The first bee, which has turned into some sort of gangling creature, comes to her and says:

> "Let me lay my hand upon thy side where the child sleeps. If I shall touch him he shall be as I."
>
> She asked, "Who are you?"
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> And he said, "I am Health. Whom I touch will have always the red blood dancing in his veins; he will not know weariness nor pain; life will be a long laugh to him."

And so the bees came, each offering to touch the child with his genius. The next brought Wealth. With wealth the child "would live on the blood and sinews of his fellow-men, if he will," never knowing want. Another would give Fame, and the bearer of Love said that with his gift the child would never be lonely. One, promising Talent, told her that the boy would never have reason to weep for failure—whatever he attempted would succeed.

The story ends:

> About the mother's head the bees were flying, touching her with their long tapering limbs; and, in her brain-picture, out of the shadow of the room came one with sallow face, deep-lined, the cheeks drawn into hollows, and a mouth smiling quiveringly. He stretched out his hand. And the mother drew back, and cried, "Who are you?" He answered nothing; and she looked between his eyelids. And she said, "What can you give the child—health?" And he said, "The man I touch, there wakes up in his blood a burning fever, that shall lick his blood as fire. The fever that I will give him shall be cured when his life is cured."
>
> "You give wealth?"
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> He shook his head. "The man whom I touch, when he bends to pick up gold, sees suddenly a light over his head in the sky; while he looks up to see it, the gold slips from between his fingers, or sometimes another passing takes it from him."
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> Fame?"
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> He answered, "Likely not. For the man I touch there is a path traced out in the sand by a finger which no man sees. That he must follow. Sometimes it leads almost to the top and then turns down suddenly into the valley. He must follow it, though none else sees the tracing."
>
> "Love?"
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> He said, "He shall hunger for it—but he shall not find it. When he stretches out his arms to it, and would lay his heart against a thing he loves, then, far off along the horizon he shall see a light play. The thing he loves will not journey with him; he must travel alone. When he presses somewhat to his burning heart, crying 'Mine, mine, my own!' he shall hear a voice—'Renounce! renounce! this is not sine!' "
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> "He shall succeed?"
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> He said, "He shall fail. When he runs with others they shall reach the goal before him. For strange voices shall call to him and strange lights shall beckon him, and he must wait and listen. And this shall be the strangest: far off across the burning sands where, to other men, there is only the desert's waste, he shall see a blue sea! On that sea the sun shines always, and the water is blue as burning amethyst, and the foam is white on the shore. A great land rises from it, and he shall see upon the mountain-tops burning gold."
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> The mother said, "He shall reach it?"
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> And he smiled curiously.
>
> She said, "It is real?"
>
> And he said, "What is real?"
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> And she looked up between his half-closed eyelids, and said, "Touch."
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> And he leaned forward and laid his hand upon the sleeper, and whispered to it, smiling; and this only she heard—"*This shall be thy reward—that the ideal shall be real to thee."*
>
> And the child trembled; but the mother slept on heavily and her brain-picture vanished. But deep within her the antenatal thing that lay here had a dream. In those eyes that had never seen the day, in that half-shaped brain was a sensation of light! Light—that it had never seen. Light—that perhaps it never should see. Light—that existed somewhere!

And already it had its reward: The Ideal was real to it.

There is a stance here in which all great artists participate, however varying and imperfectly. Again, Flaubert:

I believe in the perpetual evolution of humanity and in its ever-changing forms, and consequently I abominate all those frames which men try to cram it into by main force, all the formulas by which they define it, and all the plans they devise for it. Democracy is no more man's last word than was slavery, or feudalism, or monarchy. No horizon perceived by human eyes is ever the shore, because beyond that horizon lies another, and so on forever. Therefore it seems idiotic to me to seek the best religion or the best government. For me, the one on its deathbed is the best, since it is then making way for another.

This was in a letter by Flaubert to one of his friends. The conclusion shows that this way of thinking did not mean that he lacked opinions about the management of the world:

I am rather cross with you for saying, in one of your earlier letters, that you are in favor of *compulsory* education. I loathe everything compulsory, all laws, governments and regulations. What is society, that it should *force* me to do anything at all? What God made it my master? See how it falls back into the old injustices of the past. It will no longer be a despot that oppresses the individual, but the masses, the public safety, the state that is always right, the universal catchword, Robespierre's maxim. I prefer the desert, and I shall return to the Bedouin who are free.

Both philosophers and artists live in this world created by the imagination. Philosophers make metaphysical structures and often add dark sayings, but the artists, having a lover's quarrel with the world, continually colonize the earthly regions with their visions, and so we have epics and utopian romances and, sometimes, heroes are born who strive to make them into the ways of everyday life.

All social arrangements are at best benign compromises which attempt to reproduce some of the ideals of the world of the imagination on earth. Wise law-makers plan for an order that will have the least failures—at that time—and would not dream of proposing a constitution for a "perfect" society. Laws are compulsion, so that real culture or civilization exists only in those works of the mind where people can live, insofar as they are able, and begin to be fabricators of their own utopias. The good society, for us, would be little more than a kindergarten for beginner Utopia-makers—all individuals, working on their own, yet having to learn that their own includes the rest.

What happens when the best of men—or men conceived to be best—stop using their imagination? We have three hundred years of history to instruct us in the answer to that question. Owen Barfield, plainly a man of imagination, has made a little allegory for his answer. Speaking of contrasting views of knowledge and meaning, he writes (in *Poetic Diction*):

I believe the difference between the two theories of knowledge may best be presented in a parable. Once upon a time there was a very large motor-car called the Universe. Although there was nobody who wasn't on board, nobody knew how it worked or how to work it, and in course of time two very different problems occupied the attention of two different groups of passengers. The first group became interested in invisibles like internal combustion; but the second group said the thing to do was to push and pull levers and find out by trial and error what happened. The words "internal combustion," they said, were obviously meaningless, because nobody ever pushed or pulled either of those things. For a time both groups agreed that knowledge of how it worked and knowledge of how to work it were closely connected with one another, but in the end the second group began to maintain that the first kind of knowledge was an illusion based on a misunderstanding of language. Pushing, pulling and seeing what happens, they said, are not a means to knowledge; they *are* knowledge. It was an odd sort of car, because, after the second group had with conspicuous and gratifying success tried pushing and pulling all the big levers, they began on some of the smaller ones, and the car was so constructed that nearly all of these, whatever other effect they had, acted as accelerators. Meanwhile the first group held their breath and began to think that their kind of knowledge might perhaps come in useful after the smash.

They didn't all just hold their breath. Some of them wrote books like *Decline of the West, The Abolition of Man, Brave New World, 1984, The*

Road Not Taken, and *The Promise of the Coming Dark Age.*

Mr. Barfield briefly interprets his allegory:

> The notion that knowledge consists of seeing what happens and getting used to it—as distinct from consciously participating in what is—was first worked out systematically by Hume. A mere sense-impression is something that happens to us, not something that we do, and Hume started from the assumption that thoughts themselves are faded sense-impressions.

Hume ignored the fact that putting sense-impressions together in order to obtain meaning is the work of the imagination, without which thinking is impossible. But the champions of the sense-impressions theory of knowledge paid no attention to this underlying reality. For them the imagination—called by Coleridge the esemplastic power (in *Biographia Literaria*)—had no standing at all, so far as knowledge is concerned.

What has been the effect of the sense-impressions theory on literature or story-telling? It eliminates the role of imaginative understanding. It makes stories such as Olive Schreiner's *Dreams* incomprehensible. It outlaws myth and allegory as playful, useless fantasy. Worst of all, it destroys the meaning of tragedy. Robert Heilman wrote thoughtfully about the loss of understanding of tragedy in the *Texas Quarterly* for the Summer of 1960. He said that tragedy should be used only when a divided human being—someone deep in a quarrel with himself—faces basic conflicts, apparently without solution. He must nonetheless choose: he "makes choices, for good or for evil; errs knowingly or involuntarily; accepts consequences; comes into a new, larger awareness; suffers or dies, yet with a larger wisdom."

But in our time every serious traffic accident is accounted a "tragedy." The term is applied to all unprogrammed death. Mr. Heilman says:

> This is a rather long way from the tragic pattern that we are able to discern in the practice of the Greeks and the Elizabethans and at least in the intuitions of some moderns. Even in the most skillful journalism we would hardly be able to get inside the victims and see them as divided between options or struggling in a cloudy dilemma of imperative and impulse; they do not choose but are chosen; something just happens to them; consequences are mechanical; and most of all they do not grow into that deeper understanding, of themselves and of their fate, which is the dramatic heart of the experience. . . . Tragedy comes to mean only accidents and sudden death or anachronistic death. As a result we tend to lose touch with certain ideas that are an indispensable means of contemplating human catastrophe: the idea that calamity may come from divisions within human naure and within the ordering of life.

What, indeed, is lost, and what happens to the culture or civilization that tries to go on without awareness of such meanings? Mr. Heilman is explicit. The losses are these:

> The idea that man may choose evil. The idea that potential evil within him may overcome him despite resolution or flight. The idea that brutal events may come out of the normal logic of character. The idea that man is never safe from himself. The idea that knowledge of such ideas is essential to the salvation of the individual and to the health of institutions. All these ideas are implicitly discarded if the word tragedy conveys to us only such a thing as a smashup on Highway 90. And what do we put in place of what is lost? The idea that the worst that can happen to us is an unexpected shortening of life. The idea that this cutting short is the work of causes outside ourselves. The idea that we are innocent victims.

If the Greeks knew the meaning of tragedy, and if the Elizabethans—the last of the believers in an organic universe of meaning—were through Shakespeare in some ways the equals of the Greeks, then why have we so easily given up such great keys to human understanding? Is it only because of the mechanistic instructions we have had from Galileo and Descartes? Or is it that we are, after all, still a young and shallow race, persuaded that our lives have no deeper meaning than fun and games? Well, the cultural historians may have some explanations, but the question is: How can we recover from the loss?

REVIEW

NO DETOUR BUT THE MAIN ROAD

IT is no easy task for a modern critic to take Gandhi seriously, but this is what Martin Green attempts, with considerable success, in *The Challenge of the Mahatmas* (Basic Books, 1978, $10.95). Tolstoy is a secondary figure who appears as in some sense a teacher of Gandhi, one who presents similar problems for the critic, since his unparalleled achievements as an artist compel attention. "Mahatma" seems to be used in this book as meaning simply "Great Soul," and the challenge lies in the demanding or revolutionary view held by great souls concerning the meaning and ends of human life. Both Tolstoy and Gandhi in effect condemn as unworthy the very standards of judgment of modern criticism. They declare for rigorous asceticism, rejection of all violence, and a religio-spiritual goal wholly divorced from the amenities and pleasures which Western idealism has taken for granted. It is a position at once upsetting and embarrassing to the Western humanist—upsetting because of the radical requirements which confront the individual, and embarrassing because it arouses neglected feelings of guilt which even a measured or controlled hedonism produces in people of some moral sensibility.

Why does a literary critic and teacher of the humanities feel obliged to take Gandhi and Tolstoy seriously? One obvious reason is that the modern world is in crisis. To serious thinkers of a conventional mold, a crisis so widespread and all-pervasive as that of the present has the effect of pressing the question: Have we been *wrong* in our confident assumptions about how the world should go forward to a better age? Is this really possible? Mr. Green has the distinction of asking these questions and then facing honestly *all* the implications of the Gandhian position to see how they apply and where they lead. (It is by such means, we should note, that, little by little, world opinion is made to change.) A second reason for taking Gandhi seriously is the gradual recognition of the enormous impact he has had on his times; and Tolstoy, too. It has been the habit of most writers to pick and choose in describing such men as leaders and thinkers. One selects what one can comfortably fit into one's own scheme of things, letting the rest go as irrelevant or mere oddities of a great man. Mr. Green does not allow himself to do this. He is willing to be made uncomfortable. He asks himself: What if Tolstoy and Gandhi are basically right on all essential counts? And he also asks: If they are sometimes wrong or wrong-headed, why is it that their thinking has proved remarkably prophetic, applying so clearly to the present? Their case is now being made by events.

Early in the book Mr. Green tries to help the reader to feel the sort of man Gandhi was:

> I won't refer to Gandhi's gentleness, his sweetness, his humor, his cleverness, though all these qualities were his. A more interesting profile is illuminated by G. D. Birla's remark, "A saint is not very difficult for the world to produce, and political leaders are put forth in plenty, but real men are not to be found in abundance on this earth. Gandhiji was a man among men—a rare specimen not produced by the world even once in a century." What Birla means is perhaps made more explicit by Zakir Husain, who described his first impressions of Gandhi as being—to his own surprise—of a level realism. And this was not merely a matter of Gandhi's making objective judgments. "His thought and speech expressed his whole personality, and his personality was not an accident of nature, or a product of inherited culture; it had been fashioned by himself, in accordance with a moral design."

Is this, the author seems to wonder, the way we all should strive to be? Are the best of men indeed *self-made,* as Pico declared long ago? There is no more revolutionary conception of the human being. Through Mr. Green's eyes, Tolstoy and Gandhi appear to us as human beings who were seriously at work in remodeling themselves according to a high and—for them—irresistible ideal. Is this the reason for their moral power? It can be no accident that their influence on others seems almost immeasurable:

> This firmness and fullness of self—which dozens of witnesses confirm—should reassure us

against our fears that we may be confronting the ineffably innocent or the totally sweet. Gandhi had made rough choices, had forced himself and he offered us everything he was with a consciousness—which we were expected to share—of those processes of choice, self-cruelty, and psychic self-mortgage. But he presented himself also with perfect self-confidence, perfectly unashamed, no self-concealment, to cramp his relation to us. And though it is less surprising that Tolstoy should have seemed "a man among men," still we should be struck by the testimony of men like Chekhov and Gorky, both of whom felt large reservations and resentments against Tolstoy, that they nevertheless also felt "as long as this man lives, I am not an orphan on the earth."

The Challenge of the Mahatmas is the work of a single essayist. Mr. Green comes to us from the fields of the humanities, whose materials are the stuff of human nature, human aspirations, strivings, and failures. It is natural for him, then, to think in terms of individual accomplishment, individual vision, and to see life in terms of individual drama and struggle. He finds that Gandhi, like Tolstoy before him, came to the realization that what the West prides itself on as "civilization" is really the result of habitual aggression and imperialism. Can it be that these two men, whatever their rough edges, are the heralds of a real civilization, the germs or seeds of a great flowering in the future? Using the vision he finds implicit in their work, Mr. Green sees Gandhi as a truly natural man:

> When one sees Gandhi in pictures with either his intellectual sponsors, like Rabindranath Tagore or Romain Rolland, what strikes one is how modern he looks. The other men look stiff, posing, inflated, over-dressed, beside him. He looks more natural, more self-defining, less affected by external criteria. He does not play to the camera, but the camera plays to him, because he does not freeze himself into the stately postures of protocol. He ignores the protocol of state occasions, and so the camera finds him out as the only natural person on the scene, time and time again. His style as a speaker and as a thinker, was anti-rhetorical, that is one way he is so unlike both his enemies and his friends and—incidentally—also his disciple, Martin Luther King. Gandhi was the reverse of the stately and rhetorical, even as a physical personality, and that, too, seems somehow especially modern.

The value of this book lies in its searching behind the façades of habitual or conventional opinion, obliging the reader to think in a new way, recognizing the power in a spiritual influence which can never be fashionable, yet touches that part of us which fashion can neither reach nor distract. During his visit to India, in preparation for this book, Mr. Green noticed a kind of disdain for Gandhi's ideas:

> Indeed, several people told me, when they heard I was working on Gandhi, that his name was never mentioned in India now. That, I need hardly argue, is a gross exaggeration. Even translated to mean that India has betrayed its Gandhian heritage, it is a foolish over-simplification. Indian politics, because of men like J. P. [Jayaprakash Narayan] and Vinoba, who are big political figures, is different from politics elsewhere. Of course it is true, and of course it is tragic, that the Indian state is not organized according to Gandhian principles, nor are major policy decisions taken according to those principles. But Gandhism is in the air, as a potentiality one can feel. What that remark meant, I decided, was a reluctance to emerge from the bitter-sweet pleasures of recrimination into the keener, sharper air that Gandhi represents. They would rather chew the communal cud of outrage against Indira than enter the presence—answer the challenge—of Gandhi.
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> The real tragedy of India from a Gandhian point of view is not the current restrictions on political freedom, but the blind energy with which the country is plunging in pursuit of Westernism, in contradiction of all Gandhi's teaching. That plunge is indeed Indira's responsibility, but the men who were so indignant against her were not really resistant to it, even at the level of intention. From a Gandhian point of view they were in complicity with her, for all their indignation.

What is Prof. Green getting at here? He is recalling the conception of the good society Gandhi set forth in *Hind Swaraj* in 1909, and repeated again and again in all the years of his life. It was the dream of a nation of self-reliant and self-governed villages, with little importance given to central government, a society essentially peaceful and intent on development of the

attitudes and faculties of soul. Politically, this meant, as Gandhi's secretary, Pyarelal, put it, that "Only when the factors which affect the elementary well-being of the common man are compressed within the ken of his mental horizon will he be able to govern himself and realize true democracy." In this we see the first working principle of today's new thinkers about ecological community—the principle Gandhi enunciated seventy years ago.

Gandhi, Prof. Green points out, wanted to create a communal structure throughout the country—a structure of human culture, not politics:

> He wanted the Congress party to dissolve itself as a political force at the moment of victory, and reconstitute itself as a force within the state, directed in some sense against statehood. . . . And it is something like that that Vinoba and J. P. have worked toward—with limited success—since his death. It is, to use John Middleton Murry's phrase of the 1930s, a network of alternative communities "in the interstices of the totalitarian order."

Tolstoy's forthright moralities and Gandhi's uncompromising counsels, Mr. Green remarks, may seem like "the byroads and detours of history," and so they have been until now:

> But by now it is surely clear that the main road we have followed has been a mistake. . . . They are probably the ones who were not lost. The success of Gandhi's movement showed that one of those dim figures inherently implausible on the great stage of history, could play a hero's part. He had given an extra dimension to the others, the lost men of Western history, so that now we have no excuse for our blindness to them; if we continue to be dazzled by the bright lights it is because we deliberately stare into them.

Mr. Green's book seems an omen predicting that, in the years to come, Gandhi's Truth will grow and grow.

COMMENTARY
ART OF THE TWIST

IN this week's "Children," at the end, Harold Goddard speaks of the "educational paradox," that, as he says, in teaching "what logically should be the fruit and outcome must, by a queer twist in the nature of things, be likewise the seed and starting-point."

John Holt's new book, *Never Too Late,* which we have for later review, is entirely devoted to the importance of this "queer twist." Holt is now teaching himself how to play the cello in the middle years of his life. He has had some good teachers—one in particular—but he early realized what he would have to keep alive: *the joy of playing*. Nothing that got in the way of this, whatever the importance claimed for it, would help him to play the cello. Yet playing a wrong note or losing track of the time became a kind of torture to him. Well, after some sweat and tears he found the solution—or rather, a partial solution, which is all that can be expected in the practice of the arts.

The heart of the matter in teaching music—teaching anything—is to stir eagerness, to keep the pleasure of learning alive and growing even while the drudgery and the constant mistakes are going on. Good teachers find a way of doing this. As Holt notes, Suzuki, the famous teacher of the violin to the young, with his helpers in Japan, "has taught thousands upon thousands of otherwise unselected four- and five-year-old children to play the violin with astonishing skill." Without knowing anything about Suzuki, Holt applied his principles. He began his first cello student—a boy about eight—with some themes from great composers. No commonplace exercises. Technique would come hard, as always, but it comes.

> . . . I had to pay close attention—and is not this true of all serious teaching?—not just to what my student was doing, but even more to how he was feeling. When he was feeling good I could drive him hard—no, that note's flat, that one's sharp, longer bow stroke, do it again, do it right. When he was feeling bad he would bleed at the touch of a feather. And these feelings would change, not just from one lesson to the next, but within a lesson. . . . More than once he went through the whole up-and-down cycle, all in the space of a forty-five minute lesson.

The boy didn't practice often, but when he did it was with "great energy and enthusiasm." Music wasn't spoiled for him. He soon outgrew Holt, who was himself an adult beginner, but his love of music went on. He had experienced the "queer twist" right at the beginning. At seventeen he was composing for his guitar, to which he had switched. The art of teaching is the art of the twist, which has no rules, just wonderful improvisations by the imagination.

Incidentally, the charges against the California midwife (see Frontiers) were thrown out of court by an intelligent judge who said that in his opinion the infant would have died in a hospital, too. Could there be better evidence of the importance of an independent judiciary?

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

THE PROBLEM DOESN'T CHANGE

THE more we work at putting together items for this Department, the more we become convinced that there is only one important thing to say about education. The real task of the teacher is to do what he can to awaken in his students the desire to know. The problems of education all have to do with the obstacles to this. Once the longing to know exists, education becomes no more than technique—skill in making available information deemed reliable, which should of course be accompanied by efforts to excite suspicion of it. There will always be better information. But providing information is only an incidental affair for the teacher. His real job is to make wanting to learn infectious. There are times, like the present, when this becomes extremely difficult.

In thirteen carefully written pages in the July-August (1978) issue of *Working Papers,* Christopher Jencks does what he can to explain why. His article is titled "What's Behind the Drop in Test Scores?" He begins:

> Five years ago the College Entrance Examination Board announced that college applicants' scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) were declining. Shortly thereafter American College Testing, which tests almost all college applicants who do not take the SAT, reported a similar decline. Since then, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has announced that 17-year-olds as a group knew less about the natural sciences, wrote worse essays, made less accurate inferences from what they read, and were less adept at using reference works in 1973-74 than in 1969-70.

He goes on, piling up evidence from various current reports. Then he says:

> Where older students run into trouble is in making inferences from what they read. They know what a passage says, but they do not understand what the author's point really is. When they write, they make no more spelling or punctuation mistakes than 17-year-olds made a few years ago, but they turn out less coherent paragraphs. The trouble, then, is not with "the basics" but with what for lack of a better term we might call "complex" skills. But skills are not the only problem. Today's high school graduates have not read as widely as their predecessors, or at least they do not seem to know as much about the kinds of things young people traditionally learned from reading. They do worse on tests that ask about literature, history, politics, and scientific subjects. And they do not seem to think as carefully about the problems testers set for them, even when the solution does not require external information.

What is happening? The thirteen pages endeavor to say, but here we skip to the end of Mr. Jencks' article where he draws what seem arguable conclusions. On the question of whether educators have set scholastic standards too low, he says:

> Whatever one's final judgment regarding standards, it should be clear that they would not address the underlying causes of recent test score declines. If minimum standards have any effect, it will be to make high schools devote more attention to basic skills. But these are precisely the skills that have not declined in recent years. Test score declines, as I argued earlier, have involved more complicated skills, as well as the kinds of information that flow from such skills. If we want to reverse this trend, we must find ways of motivating students to go beyond the basics. We must convince them that systematic, rigorous thought is really worth acquiring and that systematic, rigorous thought is superior to intuition. This is not a matter of establishing "minimum standards." It is a matter of creating respect for "maximum standards."
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> Getting adolescents to respect knowledge and intellectual rigor is difficult in the best of times. Teenagers lack both information and experience, so they have a hard time reconciling respect for these attributes with self-respect. They find it much easier to respect traits they feel they have in abundance, like athletic ability or "sincerity." Nonetheless, the whole purpose of sending teenagers to school instead of summer camp is to force them to think rather than just to feel, and to replace mythology with information.

Well, one could work up quite a quarrel here. Rousseau was convinced that the young are exposed far too soon to academic subjects which are meant to "force them to think." Paul Goodman agreed, pointing out that the ancient Greeks deferred that sort of education to at least the twenties. If the Greeks were right, and they probably were, then our whole approach to teaching "thinking" is wrong. Moreover, some "intuitions" may need preservation

in spite of "rigorous thinking," and some mythology may be more important than "information." The building of mythic structures of thought is not really understood, since it has to do mostly with the formation of character, on which, except for Lawrence Kohlberg, we have no theory at all. But these comments, while they may be pertinent and even all-important, don't help us to explain the "decline" which is Mr. Jencks' concern. In favor of rigorous thinking, he advances these observations:

> They [the teachers] must reject the mindless relativism that assumes one idea is as good as another if the advocates on both sides are equally committed to their positions. They must also value knowledge and experience, and must convey to the students that a large vocabulary is better than a small one, that *War and Peace* tells us more about life than *Love Story,* that astronomy is a monument to human imagination while astrology is a fraud.
>
> Today's cultural climate is not especially hospitable to this kind of "elitism." Respect for those in authority has declined precipitously over the past decade, and for good reason. Teachers have an even harder time commanding their students' respect than they did a generation ago.

But what if an astronomy which pays no attention to the philosophical and possibly cosmic roots of astrology is itself a frustration to the imagination, and what if the unqualified condemnation of astrology by apparently learned men is a major cause of the fraud and trivialization which seem characteristic of its present practice? What if a science which shuts out the idea of man as a spiritual as well as a biological being is the basic cause of the present-day loss of respect for "authority"?

Admittedly, these possibilities are too large and far-reaching to be of immediate help to educators, even though they ought to be kept in mind. Yet they might explain the decline in *interest* as much as any other cause. And lack of interest among students seems the heart of the matter.

Interest is a problem which can be considered apart from all the others. Where there is interest, there will be learning. What can teachers do about that?

This is a problem which hardly changes at all. One of America's great teachers, Harold Goddard (see his *The Meaning of Shakespeare*), discussed generating interest in students in *Century Magazine* for May, 1914, saying nearly all that can be said. Writing on "What Is Wrong with the College?" (all of them), he began by deploring the presence of students who come "for social reasons, or because, as the phrase runs, it is 'the thing to do,' or vaguer still, for no reason at all." The trouble with having these "students" to cope with is that they are "the intellectual non-conductors that break the circuit, that insulate the real students from one another, and so prevent the emergence of a mental current."

Getting rid of the non-conductors is his first solution. The next is "unrelenting war on the spirit of narrow specialization." Subjects which cannot be related to human life, the life of the student, should not be taught. How, Goddard asks, does a boy learn to play baseball?

> We would never dream of initiating him into the mysteries of that sport by delivering in his presence an elaborate disquisition on the kinds of wood of which baseball bats are made. When he has once grasped the game as a whole, however, he will then listen eagerly to the most recondite discussion of anything related to it. . . . He will subject himself to any hardship, physical or mental, to obtain the practical or theoretical knowledge that makes up a real comprehension of the game.

This is Goddard's sermon to the teacher. To the objection that he is demanding, at the beginning, the consummation that really comes at the end, he says:

> Precisely. That is the paradox that confronts every teacher—the educational paradox, it might be called: the curious fact that only through an interest in the whole can one arouse an interest in the parts, that what logically should be the fruit and outcome must, by a queer twist in the nature of things, be likewise the seed and starting-point.

The teacher, then, needs to become expert at "queer twists." This may prove easy only on rare occasions. How, for example, would you help a child to remain eager to play the violin, when he will probably make only awful sounds on the instrument for months and even years?

FRONTIERS

Champions of the Home

CHANGING attitudes eventually bring changed institutions. Marriage, for one thing, is no longer regarded by practically all young women as a necessity for a happy, productive life, but an option that may be rejected. According to an old clipping (Feb. 18, 1976) from the *Christian Science Monitor,* more and more young Americans are choosing to remain single, and meanwhile the divorce rate among those who marry continues to go up. A report by the Census Bureau revealed that the number of persons between twenty-five and thirty-four who have not married increased about 50 per cent between 1970 and 1975—from 2.9 million to 4.2 million persons. In the same period, the number of families headed by women jumped from 1.6 million to 7.2 million.

Meanwhile, as a way of keeping the women's movement in balance, an organization called the Marthas has sprung up, to restore among women (and men) respect for the arts of homemaking, which are distinguished from the chores of housekeeping. According to the founder, Jinx Melia, who lives in Arlington, Virginia, and runs a consulting business of her own, the concern of the Marthas is with the militant expectation that "free" women will leave the home. "Not all of us can be lawyers or physicians or have superneat jobs," she said. Apparently many other women agree, since the group became national within a month. (The address is 1011 Arlington Blvd., Arlington, Va. 22091.) A California member has stressed that the point of the Marthas is the need to feel that there is a real choice—"going into a profession or remaining a home-maker"—and feeling that "either choice is of equal value."

The common sense of the movement seems well embodied in an article by Carolyn Lewis (*New York Times,* Dec. 5,1977):

> In our eagerness to exact equal treatment, we women seem to be forgetting who we are. We are not men. Men cannot bear children. And for a woman, the birth of a child is a transforming experience. . . .
>
> I'm glad it is now socially acceptable to work outside the home. When I made that choice years ago, it was considered downright immoral. I'm glad today's woman can pursue a career free of stigma, if that's what she wants to do.
>
> But the world outside the home is not the only real world. The only rewards worth having are not necessarily the rewards of salary and status. There are psychic returns in giving and receiving love, in molding a child's mind and spirit.
>
> It is true that we women have much to do to achieve equal treatment in the job market. That fight has to go on. But at the same time I sense a strident militancy, a radicalism, that makes it harder for those women who prefer to stay home. Parallel with the freedom to work outside the home must go the freedom to work inside it without being made to feel like a pariah.

There is dignity, conservation, and authority in homemaking—a kind of knowledge that deserves respect. Jinx Melia told a *Los Angeles Times* writer (June 8, 1976):

> Whenever there's a conference on, say, nutrition or crime, we always gather all the experts together. No one ever calls the homemaker. She is never recognized as having any kind of input. We credential people on the basis of what they have learned in the classroom, rather than by experience. When colic is discussed in the media, experts and professionals are usually quoted. Rarely are the home-makers credited with their success or asked for their advice.

Scott Burns' *Home, Inc.* would be a good book to read for thorough-going confirmation of what Mrs. Melia says about the achievements of the homemaker. At least some scholars will agree. In the Spring 1977 *Daedalus,* Alice Rossi concludes a paper on the American family by suggesting that a balanced life for Americans will come only by planning and building "from the most fundamental root of society in human parenting, and not from the shaky superstructure created by men in that fraction of time in which industrial societies have existed." This writer, a

biologist, defends having babies in the home, saying:

> From the point of view of the health and well-being of the newborn, American babies are cheated of a good start in life: the Apgar scores [based on the skin color, breathing/crying, activity, and pulse of the infant at birth] of infants born in home settings with midwife attendants in poor sections of Appalachia show healthier babies than those born in private obstetric practice in wealthy suburbs. In the Netherlands where birth is managed in as natural a way as possible, babies show markedly better Apgar scores of physical well-being at birth than American babies do.

"Children" for last Nov. I quoted from a writer who observed that home deliveries are standard practice in Holland, a country that is third in the world in low maternal mortality rates. This is a fact that ought to be more widely known. The recent prosecution of a California midwife for "murder" of a child that was barely alive when born, and died five days later, has precipitated a fresh debate about home delivery and midwifery. According to a report in the *Los Angeles Times* for Sept. 13, 1978, the state of California began to discourage midwife practitioners in 1949 by no longer issuing new midwifery licenses. But with the decline in the number of midwives, "unlicensed counterparts began taking their places, especially as home births steadily increased over the last 10 years." The writer, John Hurst, presents these figures:

> "Out-of-hospital" births in California have risen from 1,596 in 1966, when they represented .5% of the total births to 4,688 in 1976 when they represented 1.4% of the births in the state.
>
> The out-of-hospital category also includes accidental rather than planned home births, but the increase is believed to be caused by the growing popularity of planned home births rather than an inexplicable increase in the accident rate.

In Marin County the percentage of home births reached more than ten per cent of the total in 1976. Since having a baby at the hospital is said to cost at least $1,500, an economic factor is at work, but home birth parents, the *Times* writer says, "are not usually the traditional poor."

A Sonoma County doctor, Donald A. Solomon, who has a home birth practice, remarked: "The physicians who say we have to protect this unborn baby go back to their office and perform 10 abortions." Commenting on changing opinion in the state, the *Times* writer said that some women seek out unlicensed midwives because there are so few doctors or certified nurse midwives who will attend home deliveries, while others "believe that conventional medical training is inappropriate for a natural childbirth."