

THE GARMENTS OF MYSTERY

FOR text at head of one of his chapters in
Horse of Pride (Yale University Press, 1978),

Jakez H lias uses a sentence from

"As the background for a novel, one single day in
the life of a peasant can be as effective as a

of intangible meaning run through books about the
lives of the peasants of the world. A third of a

Beston warned that the
Peasant Civilization of Europe, which had

"fifteen patchwork centuries of invasions,
massacres,

sovereignty," ever renewing life through the
fertility of the land, was at last succumbing to the

origins are entirely urban." He continued (in
Human Events

To this new order ancient customs are so much
ignorant nonsense, and a brutal and "efficient"

planners to all farm problems. The protagonists of
this mechanized and industrialized agriculture

almost anything and carry on, while gasoline
agriculture must live or die with the machine age.

prevision of the few writers who understand the
texture of life on the soil as well as the currency of

Beston, in *Outermost House* *Northern
Farm*—

Berry, in all his books. What burden of meaning
are such writers seeking to convey? Musing in a
Lafcadio Hearn did his best to

Just beyond the cemetery, in a tiny patch of
hedged-in land, a farmer and his ox are plowing the

the wife helps the work with a hoe more ancient than
even the Empire of Japan. All the three are toiling

mercy by the knowledge that labor is the price of life.

That man I have often seen before in the colored

Kakemono of much more ancient date. I have seen
him on painted screens of still greater antiquity.

have passed: the peasant's straw hat, straw coat, and
sandals of straw remain. He is himself older,

has indeed swallowed him up a thousand times a
thousand times; but each time it has given back to

perpetual renewal he is content: he asks no more. . . .
Out of the sum of his toil are wrought the ships of

the hands that pay for the universities and the new
learning, for the telegraphs and the electric lights and

the machinery of commerce and the machinery of
war. He is the giver of all; he is given in return the

centuries under, to plant new lives of men. And he
will thus toil on till the work of the world shall have

What is Hearn trying to say? It can hardly be

unforgivably trite, definition, æ blasphemy.
Yet we feel an overwhelming need to recreate this

in its most primary form—a simple enough idea,
yet endlessly complex in its expression. It is an

therefore can never really be set down. But when
such ideas are forgotten—when men stop

an end. It may go on for a time, but its
nourishment is gone.

new Enlightenment. The old Enlightenment, after

was brought down to a practical level, became a
matter of making precise definitions that work—

scientific definitions which could be tested. If you can't test a proposition, it was said, don't bother

the unbroken weave of human life was ignored. We all became problem-solvers, and triumphant
finish.

The New Enlightenment is emerging as the
it? Well, there are dozens of truisms which attempt to say. Much better are ways to the meaning of the New Enlightenment. In *Hidden Wound* (1970) Wendell Berry writes

grandfather's farm. To get at what the urban sort of thinking—the genius of the Old

Berry tells about the black man, Nick, who worked for him.

working years to the last, he was never safely beyond the threat of financial ruin. He was always, he *had* to be, deeply concerned with the economic and legal

worked and planned the slant of the market was usually against him. Like many other farmers of his

abuse his land in order to hold on to it. Nick's economic situation, although much lower in fact and

In wages I don't believe he ever received more than a dollar a day, but by the usual terms of employment he

house, wood for fuel, the use of a milk cow, and a garden plot. Except that he did not own the land, he

employers living as much as possible off the land. His circumstances did not vary much: from year to

pretty much what he expected. If he was poor, he was not harassed by economic uncertainties or the threat

to the field his mind was burdened; when Nick went to his field his mind was free. The difference can be

one of them trying to determine how that landscape can be made to produce the money necessary for the

whereabouts of the dens of foxes, planning a hunt. And the knowledge I received from those two men is

could say, of a whole relationship to the earth. From my grandfather's struggle to hold on to the land, I got

lives invested in the earth, and also the sense of the land as the preserver of such continuity and of the

estrangement from the very place to which he had joined himself with such passion. From Nick I got a

of pleasure in *being*

But a fellow like Nick, people say, will never get anywhere. He was just stuck on that farm.

Berry's point is that Nick was in some ways a lot better off than his grandfather. Those are the

because they were at first taken for granted, then upon examination, declared subjective and

as the "mysteries" behind the New Enlightenment.

We are in a transition period of history during

these mysteries. There is a kind of ridicule in Wright Morris's insistent question to Thoreau, a

beaver inhabits a stream. What "business" were you about at

Walden to do? he asked. Thoreau doesn't say, and Morris is vexed. And Ellery Channing, mused:

meant by his life. Why was he so disappointed with everybody else? Why was he so interested in the river

judge."

"Something peculiar" which we would give

The Horse of Pride, the book referred to earlier,

Wylie speaks of the final submission of the

scholarly French curiosity concerning the fatal decline of their region. Great "studies" were made

Breton communes. One elaborate research program, pursued in élias Plozevet,

lasted five years. It was "carried on intensively by

interdisciplinary teams of hundreds of social scientists: anthropologists, medical researchers, psychologists, sociologists, demographers, ethnologists, geographers, historians." An old man of the town said: "We've been eaten by the mice. . . . They didn't get away with everything!" Commenting, Wylie says:

In this book Hélias gives us "what they didn't get away with," what some would call the "soul" of the society. the essence of the *pays bigouden* that escapes teams of social scientists. . . . The social science studies contain much information that enables us to compare the structure of Plozevet with that of communities elsewhere. This does not interest Hélias. His account contains fascinating, intimate detail and analysis of values missed by the others. . . .

This book is a monument, a monument to a dead culture for Hélias painfully but inescapably recognizes that Breton peasant culture is dead. . . . The essential character of traditional Brittany depended on conditions that have disappeared or evolved: the isolation of the peninsula, the pervasive power of the Church in everyday life; the predominant use of the Breton language; the material, technical, and moral bases of the peasant condition. The centralizing force characterizing French history has done its work. Universal military service, public education, and mass culture have helped homogenize France.

What were the "values" (devalizing word!) of this culture for which Hélias' book is a wonderful memorial service—or better, a literary recreation? Henry Beston does not exactly say, but in his concluding paragraphs on the peasant civilization of Europe, he suggests what they have meant to the past:

The world cannot afford to lose what it would seem to have lost. We live in an increasingly urbanized civilization, and such a civilization, based on the city, is concerned with sensations rather than with realities. The city has no true sense of time or historical continuity, and its artificialities permit little awareness of Nature. Such an awareness is the root of the sense of reality, just as the earth is the ultimate source of feeling. The result of unbalanced urbanization is Cloud-Cuckoo-Land, destitute of both the reason and the warmth of human understanding. Believers in Cloud-Cuckoo-Land stop at nothing.

It is the historical function of a country population and a country way of life not only to grow food but also to supply a nation with a certain grim common sense. Though the Peasant Civilization is gone, a remnant of the peasantry is still with us. And if we wish to keep even what we have, we will do well to realize that it is not the Science of the Atomic Bomb which lies between us and a new Dark Age, but simply "the poor crooked scythe and spade."

Why did the peasants last so long? Why weren't they infected sooner by the diet of "sensations" Beston speaks of? Well, for one thing, they were poor. Hélias' grandfather, farmer and part-time maker of *sabots*, used to say, "Since I am too poor to buy another horse, at least the Horse of Pride will always have a stall in my stable." Hélias' book moves in the grain of the lives of such men and women—fathers who go hungry to feed their children, mothers who scratch and save pennies to be able to send a bright son—like Hélias—to a far-off school. He writes of what a boy of ten or twelve looked forward to sixty years ago in Brittany—about the thrill of the first time he was given a flail, and of the joyous eating which came after the threshing. In his last chapter he tells something of what has happened to the life of the peasants:

Now from the very start, peasants have been predisposed toward independence, especially in Brittany, where thousands of their ancestors have been strung up on trees for their very love of it. The humblest of them would have liked to have his fief, even if it consisted of no more than a thatched roof and a field of gorse, some pasture for a cow and a piece of land for growing potatoes to keep the pot boiling. If he had a pine wood and two pigs to boot, our man would have felt like a lord. Today's old generation of peasants is determined to preserve that independence, as well as the art of living that follows from it, at the price of sacrifices which seem burdensome to others, but which they accept with equanimity. One of those peasants, who is getting on in years and who, I know, lives in very reduced circumstances on a farm which less than thirty years ago was well known for its prosperity, told me the following: "What did you expect? A man can't have everything. In my case, Friday is not the only day I don't eat meat; far from it. But at least I'm in my own home. . . . My son has a car and a television set, near

Paris. I went to see him this year. But there are over a hundred people living in the same building, which would easily fit into my farmyard. I can't say what I'd do if I were younger. But at my age I prefer to stay here and look at my empty farmyard, with the sky above it and the fields around it. I know perfectly well that I'm rich, with all this land just for me alone. That's why I have to live like a poor man."

A poor man and a lonely one, even if the commune did make him a fine tarred road leading directly to his farm. For there's no longer any "group" or any society. In the past a big farmer at least had the company of his poor workers. They were companions; they led the same life. Indeed, there was hardly any difference between them. The poor man didn't spend money because he had none; the rich man didn't spend it either, because money was meant to be saved to buy land. The poor man didn't have the impression of being badly off; that is to say, he wasn't. And the rich man led the life of a poor man, having put his wealth into deeds executed by the notary public. Today a minority of rich countrymen have all the comforts of modern life at their disposal. When one of them goes for a drive in his car there's no room on the seats for the poor peasant. The inequality of circumstances has become blatant. It isn't always the rich people's fault; it is the tragedy of the new age. The lowest of the agricultural workers have clearly lost their social position, as have the farmers and their families. They know it, are annoyed by it, feel humiliated, withdrawn into their bitterness, and on Sundays go from bistro to bistro drinking red wine, since people no longer visit each other as they did in the past. Every man for himself; and let the rest drop dead.

That diet of sensation which now monopolizes the life of modern man has altered the way we think, shutting out the ideas and feelings natural to an unchanging culture—as the peasant culture used to be. This makes the excellences of the past—the qualities the New Enlightenment is now pursuing—even more mysterious. Years ago G. K. Chesterton spoke of this change, blaming journalism:

Newspapers not only deal with news, but they deal with everything as if it were entirely new. Tut-ankh-amen, for instance, was entirely new. It is exactly in the same fashion that we read that Admiral Bangs has been shot, which is the first intimation we have that he was ever born. There is something

singularly significant in the use which journalism makes of its stores of biography. It never thinks of publishing the life until it is publishing the death. As it deals with individuals it deals with institutions and ideas. After the Great War our public began to be told of all sorts of nations being emancipated. It had never been told a word about their being enslaved. We were called upon to judge of the justice of the settlements, when we had never been allowed to hear of the very existence of the quarrels. . . . It is very exciting; like the last act of a play to people who have only come into the theatre just before the curtain falls. But it does not conduce exactly to knowing what it is all about. To those content with a pistol shot or a passionate embrace, such a leisurely manner of patronising the drama may be recommended. To those tormented by a merely intellectual curiosity about who is kissing or killing whom, and why, it is unsatisfactory.

Peasants are hardly immune to these tendencies, but they have some built-in resistance to ways of feeling, thinking and acting which violate every habit of their day-to-day lives. So it is natural that peasants have become symbols of what is missing in our lives, just as they did, a century ago, for Tolstoy. This is a part, a major inspiration, of the New Enlightenment. Interestingly, Helias would collaborate with even the shallow aspects of the revivalist trend:

Let us take advantage of the fact that Brittany is now a fashionable brand name; in that way we can make ourselves known, and I have no objection to that. Let us become as Celtic as possible, to the sound of Scottish bagpipes and even by planting fake menhirs in front of our neo-Breton houses; it might give me cause to smile a bit, but I wouldn't disapprove. Let our poets and our singers gather together huge and fervent crowds, to the accompaniment of harps, guitars, oboes, organs, spoons, and gadgets, and with thundering amplifiers; it would delight me, and all the more so in that a few of them are poets in the true sense of the word. . . . my Breton-speaking contemporaries will perhaps be the very last people to have spoken Breton on their mothers' laps. They must thus assume a responsibility, and one which is not the same as that of their predecessors or that of their successors. The latter were not much concerned with the fate of their idiom, even if they did consider it inferior to the many other voices that go to make up the concert of the world. The former will always have an excuse for

their future helplessness: our having been inadequate at firmly establishing their heritage. It is therefore up to us to know and to proclaim the present state of affairs.

This is what I am attempting to do here, with no vain illusions and no pretension. But it would seem that the upheavals in society, the mindless destruction of nature, the waste of raw materials, the fear of atomic weapons, and a thousand other apprehensions are forcing our contemporaries to look into various other resources so that human progress will be ensured new possibilities. And why wouldn't the Breton-speaking civilization have a chance in the transformation that is taking place? That's the reason why any and every means possible should be used to maintain it, prolong it, and even upgrade it, by being fully aware of its significance.

We long to deal with the essences of things—what it was, in this case, that made the life of the Bretons so precious, so worth continuing and revitalizing. Was it that a Breton child, determined to save the family cow, took chances which resulted in death from a passing train? An eleven-year-old, Hélias says, would be quite ready to risk his life for the welfare of his family. But no, it is the ten thousand things, added up, which made the quality of peasant life, of the human beings who lived it, worth while. And now we have this consciousness of it—of something the modern world has very largely lost—and with which we have been out of touch for so long that it is indeed a mystery. If we become able to get even a precarious hold on what is at stake in penetrating the mystery, our poets may be able to begin to compose epics, once again.

REVIEW
IN PURSUIT OF "REALITY"

to review a big book which took the author
The Seven Mysteries of
(Houghton Mifflin, 1978, \$17.95) by Guy

areas of human experience, in terms of seven
categories: Abstraction, Interrelation, Omnipresence,
Polarity, Transcendence, Germination, Divinity
These are "abstract" ideas, but the book is filled

It seems written on a kind of plateau—a stance
various sciences, using current discoveries and
reasoned speculation.

opening words:

definable limit to life? Does it have measurable
to consciousness? In simplest terms, what holds body
its own? As for death: is it an end—or a phase of

These are the kinds of basic questions I seek
warm maternal Earth and brood upon her
forms and rhythms I see pouring out, not only
microscopically through every organism dwelling
also coursing temporally through the whole length of
generation—in its entirety probably the most
consciousness.

going and what sort of mysteries will turn up, let me
realize that there is something intangible behind the
and that this immateriality (energy, if you will) is
things into events. I find it convenient to classify all

noumenon under the general

The value of this book is in the numerous

ask questions, but Mr.
carefully chosen frameworks, then proposes
substance to the questions and his answers are
about where the questions may lead.

mind will illustrate:

that, in turn, lead us to such age-old fundamental
consciousness, of memory? Is there any sort of
nerve cells individually think or remember? Or is
in a tune, of minor significance in its individual self
compose a chord or, when extended through time, a

These are tough questions that for millennia
West. Anyone may of course compare a thought to a
more than a poetic analogy to make a useful measure
far from simple.

findings of science, being released rather than
fixed conclusion; he makes suggestions:

cell experience a mental event? No one has proved it
opinion holding to the concept of the nonexistence of
incidentally, seems to have as many definitions as life
consciousness and life are synonymous.

consciousness of crystals and molecules, whose
individual pulses of less than a thousandth of a

arise through the integration of the pulses of trillions of molecules into a patterned weave of memory, a synthesis of innumerable threads into a mother rug of ultradimensional apperception. Even the atom may know a beginning of primeval consciousness with its electrons or its undiscovered quarks choosing their own paths under the law of indeterminism.

For some, the most interesting—even exciting—part of the book may be the pages devoted to discussion of abstractions. What is an abstraction? The dictionaries are not much help. An outline of an object is an abstraction of it. When you want to explain something, you show a photograph to convey a sense of reality, but for explanation of how it works you use a diagram, an abstraction. The diagram extracts from the object the relevant elements for the explanation. When the purpose is to explain the movements of the heavenly bodies, astronomers use geometrical figures on a plane surface to indicate the passage of the planets around the sun. Mathematics, a completely abstract science, is at the foundation of the science of physics.

All general ideas are in some sense abstractions. When you say "house," you mean not any particular house, but some form of shelter. The more you consider the part played by abstractions in both thought and speech, the more evident it becomes that we could not think at all without abstract ideas. A *concept* is an abstract idea. We live in the world and have an idea of the world. The idea represents our understanding of the world, and the more accurate the idea, the more efficient our function in the world. But, we say, an *idea* is not the world! This may be true, but if someone asks, What else is it? we reply with another idea or set of ideas. We don't *know* what else it is, since our knowing is always in terms of ideas. What, then, is "real," so far as we are concerned?

A good case can be made for saying that the idea itself is the reality, since we act upon the idea, whatever it is. Mr. Murchie examines this question:

When it comes to the nature of the physical body . . . it appears the very opposite of abstract at first. . . . What then, I ask, is the body made of? At any given moment it is made of the world, for there is no fixed borderline between you and your surround—yet, reflecting on it at length and in the full context of time, the body progressively becomes as abstract as a melody—a melody one may with reason call the melody of life. Does such an answer surprise you? A surprise it certainly was to me when the idea first entered my head. For, although I had intuitively assumed life itself abstract, the physical body had always seemed simply material and I did not see how it could be otherwise. Then I tried to define the physical boundaries of the body and began to realize they are virtually indefinable, for the air around any air-breathing creature from a weed to a whale is obviously a vital part of it even while it is also part of other creatures.

Another point:

. . . I will mention that Dr. Paul C. Aebersold of the Oak Ridge Atomic Research Center has reported that his radio-isotopic tracings of numerous chemicals continuously entering and leaving the body have convinced him that about 98 per cent of all the 10^{28} atoms in the average human are replaced annually. "Bones are quite dynamic," he declared, their crystals continually dissolving and reforming. The stomach's lining replaces itself every five days, skin wear and tear is retreaded in about a month, and you get a new liver every six weeks. As for how long it takes to replace every last neuron, the toughest sinew of collagen and the most stubborn atom of iron in hemoglobin, all of which are notoriously reluctant to yield their places to substitutes, it may well take years. But there ought to be some limit to this stalling of the final few holdouts and my late friend, Donald Hatch Andrews, professor of chemistry at John Hopkins University, who seems to have given the matter long consideration, put it at about five years, after which one can presumably consider one's physical body completely new down to the very last atom.

Very interesting, a reader may say, but that's not what I mean when I say, "My body." Of course not. We think of the aggregate we call our body not in terms of its transient ingredients, or its rather wonderful functions we have hardly begun to understand, but in terms of a particular kind of relevance. Which is to say: by body we mean a

kind of tool or instrument we use for staying alive and doing things.

The meaning of body is the offspring of human purpose. It gets its reality, its well- or ill-being, from its relation to that purpose. And what could be more abstract, more remote from Dr. Johnson's cobblestone, than a human purpose? One could even argue, following a suggestion by Peter Abelard, that the real world is the world of concepts. This is the world that psychologists have named the "assumptive world," the world as we assume it to be. The assumptive world changes, of course. The world in the time of Julius Caesar was in some ways very different from the world as Galileo defined it. And very different from the world as Darwin defined it. The world as a child thinks of it is different from the world through the eyes of a human in the last few days of life. Philosophers try to develop abstractions that will include all we know about the world, and in consequence what they say grows very empty to the everyday mind. The emptiness or fullness of ideas depends very largely on how we decide to think—on for what we decide to generate "reality."

Inquiries of this sort soon grow dull unless there is a great deal of colorful raw material for thought. That is exactly what Mr. Murchie supplies. He brings up these philosophical questions in one rich framework after another. The book is a splendid exercise of thought, and also an engaging encyclopedia of modern knowledge, threaded into unity by a single thinking and articulate man.

COMMENTARY
DON'T BE AFRAID!

IN 1862 Tolstoy wrote in his periodical, *Yasnaya Polyana*, comparing Education and Culture. Drawing on the experience of teaching peasant children in his school, he argued that culture is what is learned from life, while education is what some people think must be imposed on the young. His discussion drew strong criticism from the "educationists" of the time, mainly because he maintained that no one has the "right" to educate anyone else. What did he mean? He meant that all real learning is voluntary. But people can't help "educating" others! Tolstoy agrees, but insists that learning remains voluntary:

It is said that science has in itself an educational element; that is true and not true, and in this very statement lies the fundamental error of the existing paradoxical view on education. . . . The educational element lies in the teaching of the sciences, in the teacher's love for his science, and in the love with which it is imparted,—in the teacher's relation to his students. *If you wish to educate the student by science, love your science and know it, and the students will love both you and the science, and you will educate; but if you yourself do not love it, the science will have no educational influence, no matter how much you compel them to learn it.* Here again there is the one measure, the one salvation, the same freedom for students to listen and not to listen to the teacher, to imbibe or not to imbibe his educational influence that is, for them to decide whether he knows and loves his science.

Tolstoy proposed another rule: That the school must not interfere with education! Again, what does he mean?

The school will, perhaps, not be a school as we understand it, with benches, blackboards, a teacher's or professor's platform,—it may be a panorama, a theatre, a library, a museum, a conversation; the code of the sciences, the programme, will probably be very different. (I know only my experiment: the school at Yasnaya Polyana, with its subdivision of subjects, which I have described, in the course of half a year completely changed, partly at the request of the pupils and their parents, partly on account of the insufficient information held by the teachers, and assumed other forms.)

Rhetorically, he asks: What, no schools!
"What will become of humanity?"

Don't be afraid! There will be Latin and rhetoric, and they will exist another hundred years, simply because the medicine is bought, so we must drink it (as a patient said). I doubt whether the thought which I have expressed, perhaps indistinctly, awkwardly, inconclusively, will become the common possession in another hundred years; it is not likely that within a hundred years will die those ready-made institutions, schools, gymnasia, universities, and that within that time will grow up freely formed institutions, having for their basis the freedom of the learning generation.

He is right, of course. Nothing to worry about. But Tolstoy's thinking about education is gathering new strength.

The quotations are taken from *Tolstoy on Education* (Chicago University Press, 1967) edited by Reginald D. Archambault.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves CHANGING ISSUES

A READER comments on "Children" for last Dec. 6:

In framing the issue [of compulsion in education], you seem to believe the choice is between a compulsory system and no public schools at all. ("What sort of disaster would overtake nine-tenths of the families in the United States if tomorrow all the public schools closed their doors?")

A more useful question, and more relevant to what could happen, is what would happen if the public schools remained open but parents were not compelled to send their children. The question would be even more interesting if the removal of compulsion were accompanied by a voucher system for alternative parent-run schools which would receive tax support.

There is often a missing factor in discussions of alternatives to compulsory public education: one, of great importance, is the resourcefulness of the parents involved. The point here is that abolishing compulsory education would give resourceful parents a chance to do better than the schools. John Holt thinks that parents have the right to decide whether they are doing better, and that the arbitrary standards imposed by bureaucratic school boards fearful of losing their authority tend to destroy that right.

Another sort of problem would almost certainly result from reducing the power and the educational authority of the state: far too many people are now completely adjusted to the idea that the state, and not themselves, is responsible for the education of their children. What, then, is the best and most considerate way of weaning these parents of their faith and reliance on public authority? Meanwhile, for some children, public school may be the best thing that could happen to them! The goal might be described as an arrangement which gives freedom to parents who want to act for themselves, but does not suddenly withdraw support from those who don't, or don't know how.

Our correspondent continues:

This brings up another point—that nearly all children are going to be compelled by their parents to be *somewhere*, in any case, school or no school. And that is natural and proper. The real issue is not whether children are to be compelled, but whether parents will be.

On the matter of minorities who cannot speak English: If this is an important reason to have public schools, there are obviously far cheaper ways to accomplish the same goal. If compulsion is needed, let it be limited to those who are presumably to benefit from learning English.

But I would prefer not to discuss schools at all. They are inevitably a poor substitute for a kind of life in which children would have a full-time place. Let us choose only vocations where our kids can be with us, at least three-fourths of the time. Let tasks be so organized and divided so children can do some of them by age three or four, and increase that role as they get older. Let it be considered irresponsible to marry or have children until both parents are ready to provide that kind of life.

The world is such a perilous and complex place now to grow up in, that we dare not assume the old lackadaisical approach to bearing children, nor dare we follow up with an institutional approach to their education. Only the most thorough and humane upbringing can now enable kids to achieve maturity and normalcy.

Parents who are resourceful and feel the sort of responsibility this writer advocates are certainly able to move in the direction he suggests. John Holt's paper, *Growing Without Schooling*, is a kind of forum for such parents. It contains many letters from parents now teaching their own children, telling about their experiences, and now and then such items as the following:

Grand Rapids, Minn. (AP)—An Itasca County jury has found a Deer River couple innocent of violating the state's mandatory school attendance law in refusing to send their two children to public schools. The jury agreed with Joseph Palmer's argument that his wife, Ann, was capable of teaching the children, aged 8 and 10, at home.

In their two-day trial, the couple maintained that public schools were a corrupting influence on children and said the education provided by Mrs.

Palmer, who had one year of college, was adequate. Palmer is a custodian in the Deer River school system. [!]

Another informative item:

Friends of ours live in a rich suburb with a "good" public school system. Last winter one of their boys broke his leg and had to wear a huge cast, which made it impractical to send him to school. The family (not unschoolers) told the school they wanted to be sure the boy kept up with his class. The school said, no problem, we'll send around a tutor, which they did, every week—for *an hour and a half*. It was enough.

Apparently, policy concerning compulsory school attendance varies from state to state. A Vermont parent wrote to *Growing Without Schooling*:

I am sorry to hear that so many people are having such a hard time taking their kids out of school. I thought you might like to balance the scales a little with a positive story.

I never sent my kids to school. They are 9 and 7, and I have always taught them at home. I have been approved by the state every year, the local authorities have been very friendly, supportive, and even enthusiastic. The local school board has bought all our books and materials, to be returned when we are finished with them.

I noticed you said that the burden to prove that a program is not equivalent to public school, should rest with the state. In Vermont it does. (State Supreme Court decision.)

I also know three other families in Vermont who have taken their kids out of school without harassment.

A report like this one inevitably recalls Dorothy Canfield Fisher's book, *Vermont Tradition* (Little, Brown), which came out in 1953. We looked up the MANAS review and found a quotation about schools, illustrating the common sense of a past time, and the quality of the people then living in Vermont. Telling about a town meeting (in her own town), Mrs. Fisher quoted the son of an Irish immigrant, then partner in a local grocery store:

"We are being told that our town cannot afford to keep its bridges safe and also to provide for its children a preparation for life that will give them a fair chance alongside other American children. That's what we are being *told*. Not one of us here really believes it. We just can't think what to say back. But suppose it were true—Then I say, if we have to choose, 'Let the bridges fall down!' What kind of a town would we rather have, fifty years from now—a place where nitwit folks go back and forth over good bridges? Or a town with brainy, well-educated people capable of holding their own in the modern way of life? You know which of those two is really wanted by every one of us here. I say, 'Let the bridges fall down!' "

He took his seat in silence, the American citizen, the Celt, whose grandparents had lived in enforced ignorance.

It was a turning point in the life of our town. We knew it was. . . . The school was built.

The same sort of Vermonters, you could say, are now teaching their children at home.

For a conclusion, there is this quotation from Albert Einstein given in *Growth Without Schooling*, on education and compulsion:

It is, in fact, nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity; for this delicate little plant, aside from stimulation, stands mainly in need of freedom, without this it goes to wrack and ruin without fail. It is a very grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty. To the contrary, I believe it would be possible to rob even a healthy beast of prey of its voraciousness, if it were possible, with the aid of a whip, to force the beast to devour continuously, even when not hungry, especially if the food, handed out under coercion, were to be selected accordingly.

FRONTIERS Wants and Needs

A READER in North Carolina writes to object to the claim by Jerry Mander (quoted in *MANAS* for Feb. 21) that advertising creates "needs." He will stipulate that advertising may generate *wants*—"I might," he says, "want a new Cadillac after seeing pictures or demonstrations," but "I do not *need* one. . . . No advertising can create a need that I be transported in one particular vehicle, or even in a vehicle per se."

This correspondent does not say that ads are a public service, but only that some advertising is useful and that manufacturers and merchants should be free to offer their wares:

Grocery stores are major advertisers, but all they promote is that consumers can get a good product, a good price, or a desired value per dollar from their stores, they may save the shopper some time in deciding where to go, and through competitive pricing may also save the consumer some money. Man's needs are determined by the nature of man! Man is free to choose how (as well as "if") those needs are to be met. Only a strict behaviorist would deny Man's freedom (and dignity). So it is apparent that advertising does, as intended, influence individual decisions, but there is no validity to the proposition that advertising creates needs where none existed before.

Well, if we ignore the loss-leader techniques of chain food stores and the moot question of whether a want can be transformed into a need—what we *think* is a need—then this argument seems acceptable. In principle, then it may be admitted that an advertisement sometimes gives the potential buyer pertinent information. There can be nothing wrong with that. Our correspondent goes on to say that in his opinion "most attacks on advertising tend to come from left-wing socialists, or from collectivists in general, who would abolish or forbid advertising along with other aspects of the 'terrible' system of Capitalism."

It would indeed be a disaster to prohibit all advertising. For purchasing guidance we should

then be restricted to announcements and persuasions by the only remaining authority—namely the prohibitor, or the now Omniscient State. This, all will agree, would be a fate far worse than the modernized poverty to which most advertising is paving the way.

In general, our correspondent seems to think that social or cultural criticism like Jerry Mander's is a shrill call for remedial or preventive legislation. He has some justification. A great many people, once they have made up their minds, see little wrong with trying to turn their thinking into the law of the land. There is, in their view, no "right to be wrong." And if, besides being the people who are right, they are aware of certain "weaknesses" in their countrymen—such as the belief that it is all right to have differences of opinion in even important matters, and the idea that legislated morality may turn into the greatest immorality of all—they might put expert conditioners in charge instead of storm troopers, to make people see the light. From a PR point of view, professional motivators are preferable to cops.

But in the case of Jerry Mander, there is no such subversive bias. He, we learned recently, heads a San Francisco advertising agency and doubtless believes that white space and media time can be put to legitimate use. At any rate, he designs campaigns for ecological and environmental groups. In his book, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, he seems intent on increasing the intelligence of his readers in relation to advertising appeals. This might give them greater freedom, not less.

But all through this question is confused by the ambiguity of "needs." How do you measure the responsibility of people who only *hint* that you can't have a good life without their products? What do you say about the people they fool? That it serves them right? What's wrong with critical examination of how people use their freedom and monopolizing access to the mass media?

In recent years various studies have been made of the effect of television and other advertising on children. Some programs seem to have the effect of addicting children to unhealthy sweets, etc. A law or two might help a little, but when some of the largest companies in the world seem intent upon outwitting any sort of regulation, who can believe that passing laws will do much good? Adults, moreover, are not much more controlled than children in their susceptibilities, although we have to assume they are, or the idea of self-government makes no sense at all.

Jerry Mander's criticism of television is obviously directed at the typical advertiser's dream of a securely indoctrinated acquisitive society: "The goal of all advertising is discontent, or to put it another way, an internal scarcity of contentment."

What would a society in which this aim is fully achieved be like? Years ago (in *MANAS* for Nov. 9, 1955) a contributor quoted at length from a psychiatrist's account of a mountain community in Jamaica (West Indies) called Rocky Roads, where only wealth and economic security are desired. The writer, Yehudi Cohen, said (in *Psychiatry* for August, 1955):

The constant and preponderant aim of life in Rocky Roads is the maintenance of economic "independence"—that is, wealth or self-sufficiency. . . . Almost all anxieties, fantasies, conflicts, inhibitions, and feeling of guilt among the folks of Rocky Roads center about food and money. Thematically, food and money constitute the basic motivating factors in religious ideas and practices, interpersonal and punitive aggression, marriage, the formation of nonsexual friendships, and political behavior. Significantly, most dreams are interpreted by the Rocky Roaders as omens of economic success or failure.

The people of Rocky Roads live in a perpetual state of anxiety over their economic welfare. . . . Actually, eighty per cent of the people in the community live above the subsistence level, and no more than three per cent of the adults can be classed as dependent upon others for their physical survival.

Thus these economic anxieties are completely out of proportion to objective reality.

The Rocky Roader usually achieves his "independence," but continually fears its loss. The person not able to maintain himself suitably, who is an economic failure, is—

relegated to the lowest stratum of the community; and if he finally loses the struggle and becomes completely dependent upon an outside agent for his physical survival, he perceives himself as impotent before the demands of his organism and worthless before the world. He lives in a state of perpetual anxiety which renders him completely immobilized. He sinks into abject apathy, despondency, and utter helplessness. The incessant complaint of the dependent adult is that "No one knows me any more."

There seems very little difference, actually, between the highest good according to the Rocky Roaders and according to most advertisers. Both are true believers in the acquisitive society.