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THE RECORDS OF MEN

BIOGRAPHY is an attempt to penetrate the mystery of human character. You tell the story of a man's or a woman's life, hoping to shape it into a unity which can, at last, be described in a few well chosen words. The task is subject to continuous hazard and often seems doomed to failure. The unity is lost in detail, but lifeless without it.

The detail gives reality but conceals or distracts from meaning. What is the relevance of the endless irrelevances of human experience? Do you, like the bland empiricist who makes no attempt at explanation, say simply that that's the way things are? And then go on to another series of anecdotes as though the collection of incidents and colorings were all there is to the matter?

The biographer who fails to confront this dilemma is either a naïve enthusiast or an irresponsible hack. If he does not start out, saying to himself, this thing is impossible but must be attempted, even with full conscientiousness he can be no more than a chronicler of dubious (because unrelated) facts, and in this case the more important the facts the more dubious they become. And if he accepts the task with some understanding he can hope to accomplish no more than an arrangement of near-misses. Isaiah Berlin set the problem well in the title for his study of the mind of Leo Tolstoy—*The Hedgehog and the Fox.* This book begins:

> There is a line among the fragments of the Greek poet Archilochus which says: "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." Scholars have differed about the correct interpretation of these dark words, which may mean no more than that the fox, for all his cunning is defeated by the hedgehog's one defense. But, taken figuratively, the words can be made to yield sense in which they mark one of the deepest differences which divide writers and thinkers, and, it may be, human beings in general.

Berlin proceeds to a comparison of various Russian writers to illustrate this difference—Pushkin, the arch-fox, with Dostoevsky, the ultimate hedgehog, for example, then says:

> But when we come to Count Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy, and ask this of him—ask whether he belongs to the first category or the second, whether he is a monist or a pluralist, whether his vision is of one or of many, whether he is of a single substance or compounded of heterogeneous elements, there is no clear or immediate answer. The question does not, somehow, seem wholly appropriate; it seems to breed more darkness than it dispels. Yet it is not lack of information that makes us pause: Tolstoy has told us more about himself and his views and attitudes than any other Russian, more, almost, than any other European writer, nor can his art be called obscure in any normal sense: his universe has no dark corners, his stories are luminous with the light of day; he has explained them and himself, and argued about them and the methods by which they are constructed, more articulately and with greater force and sanity and lucid,ity than any other writer. Is he a fox or a hedgehog? What are we to say?

Mr. Berlin's admirable book pursues an answer to this question. He says at the outset that he thinks Tolstoy is a fox who felt that he ought to become a hedgehog, and struggled throughout his life to be one and show that he was. His art was the fruit of this ordeal, his attempt to show how apparently irreconcilable diversity could be made to testify to an ultimate unity. He would ignore no facts and give up no dreams. At the end of his book, Berlin says that the great man—perhaps because of his greatness—could not succeed:

> Tolstoy was the least of superficial men: he could not swim with the tide without being drawn irresistibly beneath the surface to investigate the darker depths below; and he could not avoid seeing what he saw and doubting even that; he could close his eyes but not forget that he was doing so; his appalling, destructive, sense of what was false frustrated this final effort at self-deception as it did in

> all the earlier ones; and he died in agony, oppressed by the burden of his intellectual infallibility and his sense of perpetual moral error, the greatest of those who can neither reconcile, nor leave unreconciled, the conflict of what there is with what there ought to be. Tolstoy's sense of reality was until the end too devastating to be compatible with any moral ideal which he was able to construct out of the fragments into which his intellect shivered the world, and he dedicated all his vast strength of mind and will to the lifelong denial of this fact. At once insanely proud and filled with self-hatred, omniscient and doubting everything, cold and violently passionate, contemptuous and self-abasing, tormented and detached, surrounded by an adoring family, by devoted followers, by the admiration of the entire civilized world, and yet almost wholly isolated, he is the most tragic of the great writers, a desperate old man, beyond human aid, wandering self-blinded at Colonus.

Well, that is Berlin's final estimate. He has not, we must say, penetrated the mystery. Or at least, a Tolstoyan sort of longing in the reader brings this verdict, making Berlin's judgment a pressing invitation to go to Tolstoy and read him, one book after another. Yet we know that to look for the heart of human character, and then to find it among all the contradictions, delusions, and transient intoxications of existence, would be an achievement as extraordinary as Galahad's successful quest for the Holy Grail, and perhaps as mythical. But we read on in Tolstoy, read both his great stories and his exhorting and defiant tracts, wondering, meanwhile, what sort of world it would be without the heroic efforts of such men, and whether we could bear to live in such a world at all. The hedgehog spirit has a kind of immortality; it is continually reborn in fanatics as well as geniuses, which makes the matter endlessly puzzling.

But the question is not disposed of, and the "facts" are still there, too. We have our lives to live in the midst of this dilemma, and the partial resolutions reached from age to age by determined human beings are probably the only real foundation of what we call history.

Tolstoy was a noble European, born in the bosom of European civilization, with its great traditions along with the tyrannies and betrayals that so oppressed the Russian genius. Here on the Pacific Coast, during the years of Tolstoy's rise to fame, an American writer, by no means of the stature of Tolstoy, yet one who claims attention, wrestled in another way with the contradictions of life. His name was Ambrose Bierce. It is far from our intention to compare Bierce with Tolstoy, but Bierce, too, was a tragic figure, a man who took what little nourishment he could find in the raw and raffish frontier metropolis of San Francisco. He practiced journalism as a man of parts and letters, but was continually affronted by the crudities corruption, and vulgarities of his place and time. In a biography of Bierce published in 1929, Carey McWilliams described his writing for San Francisco newspapers and "little" magazines:

> Perception and reaction were spontaneous with him. This gave his wit its force and aptness. Meditation would have brought doubt, and doubt in turn might have resulted in meditation and study, which might have brought about abstract thought and philosophy. But not for a sensitive man. He had not learned, as had Anatole France, "to despise man tenderly." He hated ugliness; detested dishonesty; shunned hypocrisy as the evil one itself. . . . this sensitiveness . . . bordered on the pathologic in the course of time. In time, too, came a gruff exterior, a layer of cynicism that tended to become coarse. But beneath that exterior the man was almost feminine in his vibrant perception of values. . . . It was scarcely aesthetic, not philosophic, it was more a poetic intuition, a sharp ability to perceive realities beyond realities, a certain fine quality of perception.

With this feeling about the man, McWilliams, who was a sophomore in college when he resolved to understand Bierce, set out to gather all the evidence he could find. By the middle 1920s there were dozens of half-baked legends about the San Francisco journalist, and McWilliams wanted to put things straight. The careless inaccuracy of easy generalizations about Bierce had become deeply offensive to the young writer—who in later years would become editor of the *Nation.* Here

we give only a few illustrations of this effort to get at the character of Ambrose Bierce:

> Bierce had an uncanny ability to "sense" situations and he was capable of the most intense suffering. . . . In his walks through the woods near St. Helena, he would bring back pigeons, whose wings had been broken, and he would nurse and heal them in his study with the tenderness of a woman. He would take his daughter, Helen, for long walks through the mountains. She remembers that he would have her wait while he strode forward in the center of a glade or clearing. There he would stand perfectly still and erect the sunlight touching his hair into a blaze of gold, while he called wild animals. It was a soft call, half a whisper and half a cry, and birds would come and light upon his uplifted arms, perch on his shoulders, and jump about on his hands. Others report the same experience. He always possessed this power and he was never without a "pet" in his study, be it a squirrel or a lizard. The central fact of his personality seems to have been some quality which invariably suggests such hackneyed expressions as "electric" or "vital." It was this quality which charmed the people he knew, for energy is eternal delight. As with William Blake, "there was for him no evil, only weakness, a negation of energy, the ignominy of wings that droop and are contented in the dust."

What was Bierce's writing like? McWilliams gives some samples from the *Argonaut*, founded in 1877 to oppose the dangerous demagogy of Denis Kearney. Much of his work for the *Argonaut* was ephemeral, but McWillams says:

> . . . realizing that it was written just as journalism, there is an amazing clarity and force to such statements as this: "There was enough of Lincoln to kill and enough of Grant to kick; but Hayes is only a magic-lantern without even a surface to be displayed upon. You cannot see him, you cannot feel him; but you know that he extends in lessening opacity all the way from the dark side of John Sherman to the confines of space." Or such cogent reasoning as this: "No man of sane intelligence will plead for religion on the ground that it is better than nothing. It is not better than nothing if it is not true. Truth is better than anything or all things; the next best thing to truth is absence of error." He anticipated Nietzsche by saying: "No one but Jesus Christ ever loved mankind." Not only was he beating some of the sound tenets of skepticism into the gaseous souls of his fellow citizens, but he was pummeling them out of their magnificent rhetoric, their incurable fondness of bombast, which was really the same thing. He made this suggestion to Loring Pickering, editor of one of San Francisco's largest daily newspapers: "Mr. Pickering, I have told you a dozen times that to call rain a 'pluvial dispensation' is to be a magniloquent idiot, compared with whose style the song of the sturdy jackass in braying his love to a star is chaste and elegant diction."

In 1881 Bierce became editor of the *Wasp*. In its pages he recorded his weariness of the revivalists that kept coming to town on religious business:

> What a procession of holy idiots we have had in San Francisco--hot gospellers and devil-pelters of all degrees! Thick-necked Moody with Sankey of the nasal name, Hallenbeck, Earle, Knops and all their he-harlotry of horribles. And now this grease-eating and salt-crusted Harrison from the pork regions of the northeast, thinking holy hog-and-hominy and talking his teeth loose for the dissuasion of sinners from their natural diet of sin, without which they would be sick! Can we do nothing to rid us of the periodical incursions of these scale-bugs—these leaf-worms—these phyllorexa of the moral vineyard? May the devil smite them with a tempest of sulphunic acid from his Babcock extinguisher!

A paragraph by McWilliams on Bierce's literary background suggests the more serious side of his thinking. Jack London and Bierce were friends, but they quarreled a bit after Bierce was critical of London's *The Road*. With condescending benevolence, London wrote of Bierce to a friend, "Too bad he hasn't a better philosophic foundation." McWilliams rejoins:

> Perhaps London would have been surprised had he known that Bierce wrote intelligently of Nietzsche in 1904; praised Ezra Pound's poetry in manuscript before it was published in book form; was immediately enthusiastic about Baron Corvo's "In His Own Image" when it was first published, defended Tolstoi's "The Kreutzer Sonata" at a time when London was teething; praised Anatole France's "L'Ille des Pingouins" when London thought that Voltaire was the last satirist, and was early in his appreciation of such books as John Galsworthy's "In Motley" and Mary Austin's "The Land of Little Rain." . . .

Why hasn't Bierce left a more lasting mark on literature? McWilliams offers two reasons. One is the barrenness of San Francisco culture and the impassable gulf which separated life as he had experienced it from the ideals he cherished. The other is that his collected works (twelve volumes) are a hodgepodge of materials much of which should not have been published a second time. One or two volumes of his best, McWilliams proposed, would prove that there is "far more of the 'best' Bierce than even Bierce fans realize, and that this 'best' is timeless."

Bierce fought fiercely against the robber barons of the Pacific coast. He saw that the Southern Pacific Railroad had gained a stranglehold on the state of California by 1896. Hearst saw this too and invited Bierce to go to Washington to oppose passage of the Funding Bill, a brazen piece of legislation which would free the railroad for a century of any obligation to return to the federal government the enormous sum of money it had borrowed, on which neither interest nor any principal had been paid. Bierce had said, "If ever two men were born to be enemies he (Hearst) and I are they," yet he would work for Hearst, demanding complete editorial freedom (which he got), and in this case Hearst's self-interested journalism, as McWilliams says, ran parallel with Bierce's concerns. In the ensuing battle of words, which lasted for months, Bierce was completely victorious. The bill was withdrawn and killed, and Congress proceeded to collect the debt owed by the Southern Pacific.

In his opening article Bierce paid his respects to the boss of the railroad, Collis P. Huntington, who probably had the cleverest lawyers in the country. He began:

> Mr. Huntington is not altogether bad. Though severe, he is merciful. He tempers invective with falsehood. He says ugly things of the enemy, but he has the tenderness to be careful that they are mostly lies.

Bierce enjoyed a colorful but frustrating life, beset by misfortunes and harassed by attacks of asthma. As a young man he fought in the Civil War, and was cited for bravery on numerous occasions. He lost two sons, one by a duel, the other from pneumonia, and through a misunderstanding was separated from his wife, despite the fact that they loved each other dearly. He was haunted all his life by the feeling that he had been made for better things. McWilliams suggests that what George Santayana wrote of Hamlet could be justly applied to Ambrose Bierce:

> . . . "his sardonic humor and nonsensical verbiage at the most tragic junctures, may justify themselves ideally and seem to be deeply inspired. These wild starts suggest a mind inwardly rent asunder, a delicate genius disordered, a mind with infinite sensibility possessing no mastery over itself or things. . . . The clouded will which plays with all these artifices of thought would fain break its way to light and self-knowledge through the magic circle of sophistication. It is the tragedy of a soul buzzing in the glass prison of a world which it can neither escape or understand, in which it flutters about without direction, without clear hope, and yet with many a keen pang, many a dire imaginary doubt, and much exquisite music."

Edmund Wilson thought that Bierce suffered from "obsession with death." Taken at face value, the judgment might be supported. Bierce had fought at Shiloh, seeing at first hand "the pageantry of the heroic go down to unutterable defeat before the ruthless idiocy of chance." But Wilson says that he "seems to have been haunted by the idea of death even before he enlisted." McWilliams wonders if his lifelong struggle with asthma, with its gasping feelings of suffocation, played a part. The loss of his sons and of friends may have later contributed to his attitude, which McWilliams describes:

> By experience he had come to view death quizzically and with a sneer; contemplation of its significance had made even death negligible. But it served, this ever-present consciousness of death to beat life into place, to reduce it to such a lowly level that it was wholly contemptible and unworthy.

Late in 1913, Bierce disappeared into Mexico and was never heard from again. He was a tired old man, over seventy, and sick of it all. He did

not ask the questions Tolstoy asked, but he found the habits of those around him equally unpalatable. McWilliams says:

> Out in that easy, slothful, lackadaisical world morons and zanies applauded clowns who shouted and roared for their entertainment and the process was known as selection of a president. Other lovely mannered "genderless gents" wrote novels of "local color" or spent their time in idle, ridiculous, "muck-raking" and were pronounced "artists." "Nothing mattered," he said and who, pray tell, would argue with him?

Perhaps, as his biographer suggests, Bierce simply sought a clean and private end in Mexico. But to speak of obsession with death is to say that one is fascinated by thresholds and vestibules. Wilson's phrase is like so many of the generalizations to which writers are reduced, which are no more than admissions of ignorance. Bierce's work both revealed and hid the man. If, as McWilliams suggests, he is more memorable as a man than as a writer, and if his courage, his indomitable spirit, his wit and decency make him one of "the immortals," then "obsession with death" is a curtain which hides his true being. The project is rather to try to understand the struggle which went on inside him, to feel a little of the integrities of heart and recognize the symmetries of mind that tried to cope with a disreputable age. We need to go behind his sardonic thrusts to the disappointments that provoked them. Not what he said and did, but the contest which produced it, and what was behind the devices that he used to console his battered hopes and diminishing expectations. Summarizing phrases help but little, but the triangulations of the biographer, who works in the grain of a life, leave open the questions we ask by lighting them anew.

REVIEW
RETURN OF THE ESSAY

THE essay has long been out of fashion, with the result that for many years only writers who were very good at it could find a publisher. Joseph Wood Krutch is our best example of this, although there have been a few others. Of late a new sort of essay has been appearing—the reflective writing of specialists in the sciences who feel the need to do serious philosophizing. Hannah Arendt called this simply *thinking*—the Socratic sort of inquiry which helps the thinker to know good from evil, the ugly from the beautiful, and, sometimes, to prevent catastrophes.

So now the essay is returning, borne along on a current of wondering by people who are known for achievements in the sciences. There is of course a danger in this. The old rule for scientific achievers was "Don't think, find out," and it is often said that we found out far more than we could handle. But if, by reason of present technological excesses, writers reverse the rule and compose pseudo-essays filled with fuzzy enthusiasms which result from not bothering to find out, we shall certainly have more sloppy "thinking" than we can handle. Well, the bars to independent thinking are coming down, and intellectual sloppiness is everywhere in evidence. One could even argue that far-reaching change seems to require the freedom which allows it, obliging readers to distinguish for themselves the good thinking from the bad. There is no longer an "academy" that can be relied upon to supply critical judgments.

What are essays—good ones—by scientific thinkers like? *The Lives of a Cell* by Lewis Thomas is a worthy example, and his more recent book, *The Medusa and the Snail*, is almost as good. There are of course the books by Loren Eiseley, so provocative that they practically stand alone. What are such essays good for? They don't settle anything. They use facts, but not to nail any Q.E.D. conclusion down. The "facts of life" are only launching pads for the essayists, who are interested in exploring questions that have no final answers—questions which would be drained of meaning by final answers. They exhibit the inadequacy for human value of assemblages of facts.

The book we now have of essays by scientists is E*xplorers of Humankind*, edited by Thomas Hanna, and published by Harper & Row ($6.95). There are ten contributors, each one an innovator in one of the sciences which study and work with human beings. Since the writers are so diverse in background and area of research, it is difficult to generalize about the book, but one can say that they have in common a sense of opening up new ways of thinking about the human resources and possibilities. And they are nearly all critical of past ways of dealing with human beings. For example, Alexander Lowen, a psychoanalyst (with degrees in law and medicine) who studied with Wilhelm Reich, has this to say:

> Society shapes its members to fit into its system. In a highly industrialized society like ours people have to be schooled to fit the very narrow slots on the economic machine. Some are sales people, others mechanics; some are executives, and others professionals of various kinds. We become so highly specialized that we become very like the machines we serve. It is also true that the machines serve us, but the relationship is reciprocal. We are as much the slaves of our machines as we are their masters. But since the machines will do all the hard work for us, we do not use our bodies, nor do we need much energy. We push buttons which requires little energy.
>
> In fact, a person with energy and life may find it difficult to function satisfactorily in our present system. Could a fully alive person stand for hours punching a register at a checkout counter or collecting quarters in a tollbooth? Of course, such a person could function creatively, but though we talk of creativity, our machine system provides few opportunities for creative expression. Talented people in all creative fields often have trouble earning a living with their talent. We even discourage too much aliveness in our children. Most parents want their children to be quiet, calm and well-behaved, like dolls or puppets. This is especially true of parents who are depressed and cannot tolerate too much

> activity. In other words, one can survive more assuredly in our culture as a quiet, unaggressive, conforming person than as a vital individual with a mind of his own.

"The human dilemma," Dr. Lowen says, "is that man is a creature with a dual aspect, an animal body and a godlike mind." But for man to become a god is impossible, he believes. Well, if we correct our idea of a god or gods along with our idea of man, it may not be impossible at all. A god is a transcendent being, and the real business of human life is transcendence.

The theme of this book, according to the editor, is that the new knowledge of how our organisms work is freeing us from the old idea of the body as a static thing. The body, Mr. Hanna seems to suggest, is a kind of projection of the mind. Or body-psyche is a unity that ought not to be abstracted into two. In his words:

> What is uncanny is that the "body" of a human being is not a physical body so much as it is a system of constant functions. Without these functions there would be no 'body" at all. This theme of functional *order* is fundamental in the essays of both Feldenkrais and Pribram. In a broader fashion, the assumption of functional dominance is central to the thinking and therapy of Alexander Lowen, who sees the energetic functioning to be the vibrant core of bodily process. Most strikingly, this is also the view of Ida Rolf in her practice of "structural" integration, which modifies human structure so that there is a reduction of entropy in human functioning.

There is a sense in which this book is an attempt to reunite body and mind after the long separation established by Descartes, but the general conclusion of these writers is that responsible humans can take charge of their bodies and use them intelligently—an idea that "dematerializes" the body by making it a responsive tool.

In the past, when we felt sick, we looked for some external cause and an expert to fix what went wrong. Ida Rolf says:

> That which had happened just before the symptom appeared was all too often called its cause. In this period, the greater reliance was on the introduction into the living system of something from the outside to effect a curative change.
>
> Humans have been changing this assumption and now tend to believe that the responsibility for healing and curing lies within the individual himself. This may almost be regarded as the hallmark of the "new medicine." We now say it has been the individual's error which introduced the problem; it must be his responsibility to recognize the error, correct it and thus remedy the condition. In short, modern thinking places the responsibility for his well-being squarely within the suffering individual, and very often within his mental approach to life.

Our physical well-being, Ida Rolf believes and teaches, is a balance between two fields—the field of the world and the field of the human. She says:

> In school you were probably taught that all the chronic ills of a human came from his attempt to stand on two legs instead of on four for which they told you he was originally designed. But man is a species which is emerging, not static. He is emerging inexorably toward verticality, and when he reaches verticality the energy of the earth's field automatically supports him, adding to his personal energy, and he reports this in all his "behavior": how he feels, how he stands, how he walks, how he acts, how he digests, how he thinks, how he relates to the world and to his fears and his feelings.

The Rolfers have found out how, through manipulation and education, they can "bring any human to a more vertical stance."

> At this position of verticality gravitational forces reinforce him, because at the surface of the earth, gravity acts as a set of vertical lines. Gravity no longer tears him down or pulls him apart. Then he says, "I feel good. I feel wonderful. What have you done to me?" But it is not we who have created this well-being, it is gravity

Perhaps the most fascinating essay in this volume is the one by Karl Pribram, on the way in which the hologram—originating, according to Thomas Hanna, with Leibniz—helped him to understand how memories are stored by (or through) the brain. Dr. Pribram is a neurosurgeon and psychiatrist who has devoted many years to brain research. After a brief account of the Leibnizian doctrine of the monads, Mr. Hanna says:

> This interesting bit of metaphysics might seem to be only another dusty corner of history except for the fact that the theory of monads, which was based on Leibniz's own discovery of calculus, is also the theory of the hologram: namely, the theory of how that which we experience as spatial and temporal can be stored in distributed units of information that are not, themselves, specifically spatial or temporal; but when refocused, the same spatial and temporal dimensions will appear again. . . . In the hologram, objective space and time are created from information on a film that is not on a specific spot of the film surface but is distributed, like a blurred image, all over the surface.

Brain surgeons found that damaged parts of the brain did not eliminate the memory thought to be stored there. "The nature of memory in relation to the brain made no sense, inasmuch as it appeared that memories seemed to be stored everywhere in general but nowhere in particular." Hanna says:

> The model that could best account for this curious situation was that of the hologram: It appeared that the human brain functioned in the same way as a hologram, not storing information in one place, but distributing it out of focus throughout the organism—when one remembers an event or scene, the distributed information is refocused and the information clearly recalled.

This seems a scientific way of getting into metaphysics—backing into it, you might say. There is, Dr. Pribram says, "a very basic level of organization in brain and universe in which 'things,' as such, do not exist." The hologram is an analogue of this reality.

COMMENTARY
NOT ALL POETS

THE account given by Carey McWilliams (page 2) of the birds which came at the invitation of Ambrose Bierce, lighting on his arms and shoulders, recalls a similar incident described by Vincent Sheehan in *Indigo Bunting,* his memoir of Edna St. Vincent Millay. She, too, called and conversed with wild birds. In the summer of 1945 Sheehan visited her and her husband on Ragged Island, off the coast of Maine. As his dory approached the island, Sheehan saw Edna appear at the top of a path leading to a port formed of large flat stones. She ran down the path to greet her visitors, skipping from rock to rock, with three seagulls circling round and round her head, as though conducting her. When she reached the port the gulls squawked briefly and flew away.

Sheehan felt that he was witnessing the reanimation of some ancient legend:

> Rising at dawn—or before going to bed at dawn—with her red hair flying loose and her green eyes gleaming, this gentle pagan stalked her beloved messengers, talking to them, listening to them, sitting on the ground in motionless absorption as she watched them while the first light brought into being the brave flash of their many colors, and it is not for me to say that she did not have some comprehension of what they told her, or that they in their turn did not understand her.

Sheehan's wonderings may give a hint of the qualities hidden, deep down, in Ambrose Bierce, which found expression in moments when he was alone in the forest. Speaking of Edna Millay's absorption in nature, Sheehan wrote:

> She did not like to say that all life was one, . . . but in her daily acts as in her writing she betrayed the awareness. It appeared to me that in so doing she bore witness to an ancient kinship, not only with poets long dead, but also with island peasants and fishermen, rustic queens and oracles, lone men in the darkling wood, girls dancing in the moonlight—all those creatures of anonymous time before history began to be written, before the self-consciousness of man had concentrated the idea of divinity into anthropomorphic idols. If the learned can seek out for us, as they have done, evidences of men's belief in a spirit informing all life, with the bird as its messenger and spokesman, we can cap their learning with examples from the existence we share even in this late day: we find it abundantly around us, and those who feel it are not all poets.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
"I AM CAPABLE AND LOVABLE"

[For this week we have the talk, given by Len Solo as principal, to the 1979 graduating class of eighth-graders at the Cambridge (Mass.) Alternative Public School. This school was founded by some determined parents who got together in 1972, decided what they wanted in a school and then persuaded the local school authorities to establish the school and let them run it. They chose Len Solo, who had been with the Teacher Drop Out Center (later the Teacher Information Center), to be Principal of the School. After his address, which is brief, we have added some of Maslow's last musings, which seem vaguely relevant.]

FOR the last few weeks, I'd been trying to figure out what to say to you today, when suddenly, some questions came to me a few nights ago. I asked myself, What did I expect you to learn here at CAPS? Why attend this school rather than your neighborhood school? What do we expect you to take away from here?

Like any other school, we expected you to acquire skills—to read, to write, to do math, etc.; we expected you to acquire knowledge—of history, of cultures, of science, of art, of literature, of music, of languages, etc. These are important and we hope you leave here with skills and knowledge, with being capable people.

We've also tried to teach you some simple ideas. For some reason, though, the simple things are always the hardest to learn.

If you look around at each other and at the members in the audience, you will see that there are white, black and brown people here. This is deliberate. We choose to mix people together here at CAPS by race and cultural backgrounds because we would like to see people from various races and cultures learn from each other, learn how to get along with each other, learn to live together well. We live in a racist society, but we hope you've learned not to be racists.

You know that we live in a society that is structured by class, where those who usually succeed are the ones whose parents have succeeded and the poor are looked down upon as failures. We have deliberately mixed together children whose parents are poor with children whose parents are middle class. We do this to promote the idea that people can really be equal, regardless of their parents' backgrounds. So, another idea that I hope you've learned here is that people's abilities do not necessarily depend on their backgrounds, that poor people have abilities equal to richer people and that they are just as good. We've also tried to teach you how poor people have been exploited and oppressed and how some people have fought against that exploitation and oppression. I hope you go away from here with the expectation that you will treat others as your equal and that you will be treated as an equal. I hope you will insist on this condition.

The third idea we've tried to get across is that one sex is not better than another, that males and females are equal to each other in abilities and that we should not get locked into roles because of our sex. We live in a sexist society but we've tried to teach you not to be sexist.

We do not ordinarily have children who are good academically in one class and children who do not achieve well in another class. We mixed you together because we think that all children have something to learn from each other, something to teach, something to give to each other.

More than anything else, we have tried to set up a school where you learn to feel good about yourselves, feel confident and competent, and to have a school where people really care for each other, where people learn to live together.

This might be hard for you to believe right now because many of you are in what one writer has called the "fist of adolescence" when you don't allow each other to believe that adults can really care for you. Sure, we've set up rules, expected you to do certain things, we're on your backs at times. But that's part of it, part of learning what others expect of you, part of learning the limits. Learning is never hassle-free. What we tried to do with our rules is to set up a safe place for you, to establish what a writer has termed "an island of decency" in a not so decent

world. For example, each of you had an advisor whom you met with each week, a person who was there to look out for you, to care for you; we set up all those courses with just a few students in the classes because we cared for you, wanted you to learn a wide variety of things from different people.

So, my starting question was, What do I hope you've learned here at CAPS? What I hope you've really learned is to say, "I am capable and lovable": I know things, I have skills, I can do things; I like myself and I like other people.

June 13, 1979 LEN SOLO

[One often wonders how the seething energies of eighteen-year-olds or thereabouts react to such excellent common sense—whether it actually touches them so that they think about it for a while. Len Solo probably has some ideas on this question.

The quotable phrase, "the fist of adolescence," made the connection with the last article that A. H. Maslow wrote, shortly before his death in June of 1970. (It appeared in *New Directions in Teaching*, and has now been reprinted along with other material by him in the Summer 1979 *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*.) This article was the final chapter of a "controversy" growing out of a seminar given by Maslow at Brandeis, on the application of humanistic psychology to education. Graduate students and teachers who took part found what he did valuable, but the undergraduates (and a few graduates) seceded to run their own seminar. One of the graduate students wrote a paper describing and discussing what had happened, and Maslow responded, giving his own view and suggesting that participants in the seminar add their reactions. Four of them did, all quite critical of Maslow, and this last paper became his measured evaluation of the whole affair. Apart from a clarifying discussion of "extrinsic" and "intrinsic" learning, which requires separate consideration (see last week's lead article), he said:]

It is my retrospective conclusion that from the very first meeting of this seminar there was a pre-programmed, perhaps not fully conscious, challenging of the (very minimal) authority of the professor by some individuals of the class (in which, as in most groups, most people were silent). . . . I was reminded in this first meeting of the seminar of the old-fashioned western movies in which the "fastest gun in the West" is perpetually challenged to fight it out, whether he wants to or not. For instance, when I listed the two or three books to be read by everyone, one girl announced, quite gratuitously, "I'll read them if I want, and I won't read them if I don't want." Even the assigning of good books was by some regarded as a put-down, an affront of self-esteem. Also in this first meeting of the seminar, I announced that I had arranged for optional T-groups to be led by an experienced person whom I trusted and recommended since I felt it unwise for the instructor to run it himself. (The roles of judge, evaluator, rewarder and punisher are in general incompatible with the role of the T-group leader or psychotherapist.) The opportunity was refused by practically everyone in favor of the "leaderless" or self-led group which was formed a few weeks later.

In the last meeting of the semester, when I was asked to comment on the group meeting I had attended, among many comments I made, one was that of three factual statements about humanistic psychology I had heard, all three were incorrect. This was challenged by one student, saying, "Who are you to tell us what is correct and what is not?" and who then seemed puzzled by my burst of laughter.

My impression had been growing through the last four or five years of teaching that I was being used not so much as a teacher but as an object upon which some authority-rebellious students sharpened their teeth and claws, as the bear uses a scratching tree. . . . I recall another impression which had been slowly dawning on me through the years. This was: in contrast with my former students during the 30's, the 40's, and the 50's, more recently students have been more easily bored, less able to listen, made more restless by sitting for several hours, more demanding to be stimulated, excited, inspired, turned-on, even entertained, by *the teacher* rather than from within. One can less and less make the assumption that they elect a course because *they* are interested in it. More and more, I got the feeling that I was supposed to *arouse* their interest. Also, more and more they have wanted to be listened to, to "discuss."

FRONTIERS

"It All Goes Through the Wash"

HUNDREDS of years ago, the story goes, a conscience-stricken and guilt-laden foreign king, who had executed his daughter for flight and disobedience, gave the initial impulse which in time made the town of Gheel, in Belgium, a haven for the insane. Since the thirteenth century, it is said, the people of Gheel have taken the mentally ill into their homes, treated them with the same regard as members of their own family, and in many cases helped them to get well. The unfortunate daughter, an Irish princess named Dymphna, was eventually canonized as patron saint of the insane, and the old Gothic church of Gheel is dedicated to her. The mentally ill who are brought there for care and help live in and around Gheel in farms and houses within a circumference of thirty miles of the town. Today the colony is divided into four sections, each with medical and psychiatric supervision. "The Gheel system," one authority says, "is regarded as the most humane method of dealing with the insane."

Is the Gheel idea of healing minds practiced anywhere else today? We know of no other such town, but there are households which continue this wise and compassionate tradition. There has been one in Santa Barbara, California, called Sanctuary House, for the past three years, and if the needed financial support is forthcoming it will no doubt continue. While there is psychiatric oversight and consultation, the staff is made up of lay people who feel able and willing to do this kind of work.

Recently a writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, Ann Japenga, visited Sanctuary House and had supper there. Usually there are five or six "residents" at meals (they're not called "patients"), and with members of the staff supper is a large family gathering. The *Times* writer says:

> Residents drift into the candlelit dining room. Sitting on pillows before a low table, they pass around plates and talk about journal-keeping, high school, cooking and ceramics.
>
> Resident Laura Rogers (not her name) and staff member Marion Thomas, a potter, compare their approaches to art. "I go through several black crayons a week," says Rogers. "My work is always enclosed and symmetrical—like mandalas."
>
> Mid-meal, Andrew enters. A gaunt young man with the beginnings of a beard, he piles vegetables on his spoon, studies them, and begins taking great gulps. Rogers lays a hand on his arm and suggests he slow down, reminding him of what happened last time he ate too fast.
>
> Andrew doesn't appear to hear her. But as the others are pouring maple syrup on scraps of corn bread, he puts down his spoon.
>
> After dinner, some residents help with dishes, some return to their rooms or escape to the privacy of the third-floor loft, pulling the ladder up behind them. Others venture into the music room, attracted by art supplies, crates of album records and a painted window of Van Gogh intensity.
>
> This is a quiet group, observes staffer Scott Bass—"no real acting-outers, window-breakers, midnight creepers and stompers." When they have housed such types in the past, Bass says, it has been up to the judgment of the nonprofessional staff: Do we wait it out? Or do we call the crisis team? (L. A. *Times*, Aug. 10.)

A pamphlet put together by the psychiatrist founder of Sanctuary House gives the thinking which led to its establishment:

> This approach is designed to provide that which even small, well-staffed psychiatric units cannot provide; namely, the flexibility of response that can allow sufficient time and energy for the issues of a crisis to be acknowledged and worked through at the height of intense crisis, within a non-authoritarian, non-hierarchical organization. There are no "staff-only" meetings. With the guidance and support of the staff, house members are allowed and encouraged to explore the reasons for whatever "irrational" acts accompany a crisis, and to follow the course of the crisis to its evolved outcome. We view the schizophrenic break as a developmental crisis in living and a human process. During periods of intense regression, when the person is unable to participate fruitfully in the affairs of the house, beyond his/her immediate personal issues, Sanctuary

> House staff members take care of and support the person's needs completely. . . . Properly guided within a nourishing environment, a person can emerge from an acute crisis in living, such as psychosis, feeling more confident and better integrated to pursue a way of life which he/she views as successful and fulfilling. Further, not everyone needs to make a long regressive journey before growth may proceed. For many, the crisis intervention, accomplished in itself by moving to Sanctuary House, brings relief and recovery begins soon.

Staff members rotate, each working continuously for two-and-a-half days a week—on duty all the time, although some sleeping is accomplished. There are also volunteers from the community who help and sometimes join the staff.

Besides an atmosphere of getting well for troubled people, what else does Sanctuary House provide? It is a place where the cost per resident ($50 a day) is about one third the base charge for psychiatric hospitalization, so that, from any point of view, such friendly settings for working through mental illness have practical advantages. One former resident, now living at home and busy as a writer, visiting Sanctuary House, told the *Times* contributor:

> "When I arrived here I was taking Librium, Prolixin and Cogentin. At a local hospital, taking medication is urged if not required. Here, there is no imperative. The staff sees its responsibility as more personal than medical. I'm off drugs completely; I decided I didn't need them."

Sanctuary House allows but discourages use of psychotropic drugs, relying rather on the human relations to help the residents. The *Times* story gives the outlook of a staff member, Scott Bass, who has been with the House from the beginning:

> Friendships and relationships are the keys to health—and to sickness, Bass discovered. He feels Sanctuary House can accomplish more than hospital and board-and-care settings which tend to neglect "the power of friendship." He explains his manner of treating residents: "I try to be friendly, to talk to them, and to not lay any therapies on them. I try to offer them the woods and the mountains and the ocean. I don't expect any results because, often, I don't see any. Working here has changed my whole idea of what it means to be crazy. The people who come here have the same problems any of us have—loneliness, isolation, failure to understand our thought processes—but their problems are more out of control."

Staff members, diverse in background, all seem in basic agreement that: "We are all afflicted; we all have to deal with the historical and emotional baggage that keeps us from being what we might." One of them said: "All the stuff that arises in human relations gets dealt with here. It all goes through the wash."

Sanctuary House, a non-profit organization, may be reached by writing to the Director, P.O. Box 551, Santa Barbara, Calif. 93102.