

IN QUEST OF MATURITY

EXCEPT for rare individual achievement, maturity—cultural comprehension and competence without presumption—is a momentary affair. When a single person obtains or reaches maturity, he seems to have it for the rest of his life. Indeed, that is how we recognize it. Montaigne surely had maturity, and so did da Vinci. In our own time Ortega gave evidence of it, and among those still living one who will be recognized as truly mature is Lewis Mumford. We read these men not to collect facts but in order to absorb some of their sagacity. We know that maturity is good without being able to define it very well. Every account you give will either be contested or added to, and a stately, timeless, abstract definition would lose touch with life, where alone maturity counts.

Cultural maturity presents a more accessible profile, but it doesn't last. Periclean Athens nourished the seeds of its own destruction; Elizabethan England found a balance that could not be retained; the flowering of the American Transcendentalists is praised, even sometimes revered, but not repeated. There does not seem to be much collectivist transmission or inheritance of excellence and understanding. The makers of history give little attention to preservation of the ingredients of cultural maturity; indeed, there is hardly any evidence that they know or care about its elements. Some makers of history try, of course; Jefferson was one of these; but there seems a sense in which an epoch of cultural maturity can come into being only when history is undone. As, we think, Hegel put it, the owl of Minerva does not rise until the sun of Empire sets. Only as the overweening ambitions and egoistic preoccupations of the history-makers dissolve in failure and disillusion can the insight of maturity begin to shape the reflections of men. History—*our* history—is

always in a hurry. It moves from conquest of circumstances to self-induced crisis, from honoring leaders to the search for scapegoats, and then, only after this discouraging release from the compulsions of goal-seeking action, maturity is able to raise its head and look around.

The present, it seems almost certain, is such a time. What are the present signs of an emerging cultural maturity? You look for persons who know what they are about. They are individuals who have asked basic questions and found working answers. The questions take various forms, but the simplest expression of them may be: "Why am I doing what I am doing?"—which leads to,

"What am I?"

Such questions have no answers in the dialectical vacuum of pure self-examination. Replies must be sought in the implications of answers to other questions, such as:

What have I been?

What may I become?

We now have something substantial to inquire about. Determining what we have been involves the study of history. Predicting what we may be requires the practice of science. Before getting into these areas, however, we might take off a reading about the nature of man—a partial answer to the "What am I?" question:

Humans are beings able and obliged to look in two directions: Past and Future. Our search for knowledge, self-knowledge as well as knowledge of the world, takes place in the context of time.

Time, then, reveals—and may be the source of—our shackles, but time is also the haven of our hopes. There is a great paradox here, one which mystics remove by telling us that self-knowledge

is to be obtained *outside* of time. This, if we think about it, is found to be logical, yet all the memorable realizations we have experienced seem to have taken place *in* time. So, until the world is populated by successful mystics, we shall continue to look within time for our answers, although acknowledging on various occasions that there may be truth in what the mystics say.

We begin by studying history, the only place to find out about what we have been.

History is the identification and recording of past facts. Good history is accurate identification and recording. But the world is filled with countless facts and we cannot hope to list them all. We choose, then, the *important* facts. Who says they are important? This depends upon the one in charge of looking. The important facts for the history-makers are those relating to achievement of power. (See Machiavelli.) For biologists the story of "survival" is all that matters. (See Darwin.) But some investigations come closer to home—What are the means to escape from suffering and pain? (See the Buddha.) And, How do you find the Truth? (See the *Bhagavad-Gita* and Pythagoras and Plato.)

Past human history is the web-like record of such multiple enterprises, sometimes in harmony with each other, sometimes in conflict. Religious truth, teaching, or revelation is supposed to comprehend them all, and to relate and explain them. So, at any rate, men of the past have believed. Since we have to start somewhere, a good place to begin might be a time of decline in religious authority.

The Renaissance was the rediscovery of a previous investigation of ultimate questions. A Revival of any sort implicitly declares: Those people of the past knew what we don't know, so let us find out what they said. There are stages in this inquiry. First you say, Get the documents. Collect the manuscripts. Then you say, Verify the documents, be sure the record is good. And finally you say, *Interpret* the documents. They don't tell right out what we need to know.

At this point we are still in the past, entirely relying on it, but an important change has taken place. Interpretation adds the comparative realities of the present to the past. We begin to see that we understand the past only as put in the terms of the present. We recognize that we began looking at the past *for the sake of* the present. And for interpretation of the past we consult ourselves. We use our best judgment. This is *our* knowledge, not something from the past. We may claim that our interpretation is a pure reading of past knowledge or truth—the Fundamentalist preacher does this all the time; and so does the anthropologist who reconstructs early man's anatomy by putting together some fossil bones—but the fact is that some present-day guess or theory concerning who and what we are is imposing its requirements on the record of the past. The mystics, in short, although obliquely or negatively, have won a point. You can't say anything worth saying about history without escaping from time all those relativities—and proposing what is presumed to be some changeless truth that other findings or subsequent discoveries will not contradict.

But if you do this, you have moved out of the area of history and into the practice of science. Science is prediction. Successful science—that is, true science—is prediction. Saying what will happen, given certain conditions, is for truth the abolition of conditions. They don't confine, but confirm, your thinking. If the conditions change, so do your predictions. Science, therefore, overcomes change by encompassing it, neutralizing it. Accordingly, in the nineteenth century, philosophers of science felt able to say: Some day we'll know *everything*. We just have to put it all together. It will take time, of course, but we know how. Just look at all we've done.

But then, in the twentieth century, a modern Sampson shook down this scientific Tower of Babel. A mathematician, Godel, showed by a logic other mathematicians accepted that every closed system (and for nineteenth-century thinkers

science *was* a closed system, to be some day completed in a glorious mosaic of *all* the facts) has an element or factor that has no logical support from the other factors and will eventually break down. And a historian, Thomas Kuhn, illustrated this inevitability with an account of what happened to classical physics. Einstein demonstrated that physics must be put together *differently*. There is no changeless scientific truth. It, too, is a creature of time.

Back to square A.

But we can't stay at Square A, for the reason that only pure mystical inquiry is possible there. The mystic asks himself all the questions, and he listens only to the answers given by himself—by the Self which has the nonlimiting coefficient of potential divinity.

So we return to the cycle: Study history (the facts), which becomes interpretation, which becomes science, which becomes prediction, which breaks down, starting another cycle. But all through this apparently unending process, as students of culture are now beginning to see, decisive contributions by our own independent intelligence—usually smuggled in as either history or science—change the course of its development. Cycles do and do not repeat the past.

What has happened when we notice this? Well, we are no longer locked in history, focused on the past, and no longer locked in science, which predicts the future. We have become psychologists. We are telling ourselves how we think—how we think in history, in science, and in everything else.

But isn't psychology a branch of science? Partly, but not entirely. The field for psychological study is made up of the relationships between the subjective and objective worlds. Part of psychology is public, part private. It is the study of man as a being who, as Plato said, is halfway between ignorance and knowledge. Man is a meaning-reader in a changing scene, and psychology studies how he

reads. This involves review of cyclic changes, some of which we have described.

Getting back to Square A is both disappointment and release. We didn't get where we wanted to go, we say, but we're wiser now. People who say this with understanding have cultural maturity.

Lately we have been reading in the Summer and Fall issues of *Dædalus*, both dealing with Discoveries and Interpretations in Contemporary Scholarship. Two essays in particular suggested the presence among us of some cultural maturity. One, by Stephen Toulmin, has this to say about the recent thinking of scholars and inquirers (Summer issue):

To put the changes in academic life during the sixties into a broader context, I am suggesting that they represent one aspect of a wider shift in attitudes and preoccupations: a change that has extended not only across the whole world of learning and the arts, but into the practical realm of politics and social life also. Between 1910 and 1960, the cutting edge of originality in the arts and sciences was kept sharp by an emphasis on the technical, and specifically on formal methods and ideals—by taking mathematical logic as a foundation for philosophical analysis, by basing theoretical physics on the formal algorithms of the tensor calculus and quantum mechanics, by developing the Cartesian, geometrical style in architecture, nonrepresentational modes in painting, and twelve-tone techniques in musical composition—in general, by turning away from the rich, concrete particularity of history and nature into an alternative, timeless, and theoretical world of abstractions, set over against the confusions of historical actuality.

And now—

After forty years of concentration on a timeless abstract world of Being, the resulting revival of interest in concrete temporal processes of Becoming has certainly favored a shift from narrowly "discipline-oriented" research to wider and more "problem-oriented" issues; has resulted in a general lowering of the intellectual barriers separating different academic disciplines; and has made possible, even desirable, a greater involvement of the lay public in the affairs of the learned professions.

In this last respect, the changes in the academic world are in phase with, and in tune with, current

changes of emphasis in the broader social or political world. In his interesting studies of the politics of science, Don K. Price has ranged problems along what he calls "the spectrum from Truth to Power," and his way of viewing the interrelations between "truthseeking" academics and "powerwielding" politicians or administrators has thrown a lot of light on the political vicissitudes of American science. But there is a corresponding range of different problems to be recognized. During "discipline-oriented" phases, the accepted foci of academic study are defined in relation to an abstract, specialized view of Truth, which has no direct relationship to, or concern with, the power to do Good; whereas, during "problem-oriented" phases, these foci are reorganized and redefined in relation to a more concrete, generalized point of view, according to which the capacity for Good is a necessary element in the Truth itself. . . .

Mr. Toulmin asks:

Yet what is the longer term significance of these changes, and what is the prognosis for their continuation? Are we to see them as authentic novelties—as permanent, possibly even irreversible, changes in our interests and preoccupations? I suspect not. If we view the sixties against the whole historical background of Western life and culture, the changes we have been living through in the academy seem to me to have been simply one more swing of the familiar pendulum, by which thought and art have moved, every sixty or hundred and twenty years, between formal and functional, classic and romantic, timeless and temporal, Platonist and Aristotelian extremes.

What is the Aristotelian extreme? It demands that we start with the facts—the facts of sense experience. These facts, through our selective interpretation, become the data of science, and then prediction moves on the assumptions, seldom acknowledged, growing out of our beliefs about who and what we are. But only the facts are prominently displayed as compelling: you can't argue with facts, you have to accept them. The theory, constructed from the assumptions of science, is endowed with certainty by the facts. Thus our freedom is gone because science allows no contradiction.

This is the point of Jean Starobinski's analysis of "Criticism and Authority" (in the Fall

Dædalos). Rehearsing briefly our transition from looking to the past to reliance on scientific predictions of the future, he says:

To sum up in a few words, the belief in a heavenly Jerusalem implied a belief in the story of Genesis, of the Fall, in the genealogy of David, and more generally, in the supernatural provenance of the Book in which these events of the past were recorded. As consummated facts or texts, both sacred history and the Scriptures were liable to critical verification: if the alleged chronology was no longer admissible, or if it appeared that the "revealed" text was not of a single piece, the authority of dogma was shaken. And as soon as the past was no longer certain, the future was no longer assured.

If the account of the beginning of time was no longer believable, it becomes useless for man to subordinate his existence to an end of time defined by a strict correlation with the discredited account. The old dogmatism was therefore vulnerable to criticism because of the image of the beginning it had tried to impose. (This is how Voltaire fought Christianity, by attacking the Old Testament.) The new dogmatisms, whether they appeal to individuals or collective faiths, seem to have tried to escape this kind of strict verification. The authority that they seek to impose is entirely gathered in the future: it is situated beyond history and sees itself as the "end of history." As a result, it is invulnerable to any historical philological, or scholarly refutation of an event located at the beginning of history or even in contemporary history. . . . the new dogmatisms generally require that we believe their promises with no proofs other than the dissatisfactions (which they try to aggravate) that we feel with the present state of the world. They invite us to draw a blank check—an uncovered check—on the future. For, according to their system of interpretation, itself supported by the image of a glorious and unverifiable accomplishment, even their failures and their errors are indicative of the overall infallibility of the doctrine. . . . Utopia can defend itself far better than Revelation: it simply takes shelter in some new future and claims to be still at the preliminary stages of its realization.

Mr. Starobinski describes the historical movement back and forth between devotion to fact and reliance on theory—the theory which claims to emancipate us from bondage to past factual illusions. Theory is freedom and fact is its ground. Some say it is better to cling to fact than

get lost in false or inapplicable theory. Yet it may be still better to seek freedom in reasoned knowledge, even if we should succeed but little, than to lie helpless, like Gulliver, lashed to a primitive existence by adherence to facts alone.

He concludes:

Shall I add that I reject neither the work that goes into the scrupulous establishment of "facts" nor theoretical speculation? I merely wish to point out the relative sterility of pursuing these two goals separately. But everything can change if "fact" meets with an interpretive reading, and theory returns more closely to fact and consents to adapt and modify itself according to the demands of its object, so as to increase its textual understanding and comprehensiveness. The central locus of authority—such as I, along with many others, am inclined to recognize it—rests at the meeting point of "facts" (dependent on our subjective choice, confirmed and verified by a series of objective procedures) and of our "theoretical" inquiry. The interpretive act achieves complete validity only when an energetic question, with universal implications, bears directly on an object that is dearly grasped in its singular profile. From such a meeting, which is a task with no a priori guarantee of success, some meaning may be gained.

Here, it seems, we are back at Square A without deserting the scene of experience. We are back there because, parenthetically, the crucial contribution of the subject, *ourselves*, as ourselves, is added to the equation. We choose our facts and entertain our theories. If we are mature, we do it in freedom—and we are likely to be mature if we have begun to understand the human situation, as seems a fairly evident achievement in the work of these scholars. The field of experience is the known and unknown past, the known and unknown future, plus the observer and thinker, the chooser who defines the field, describes its lines of force, and takes a direction that will make (or risk) his destiny. The more we know about past and future, the less we are constrained, and the more securely we remain on Square A, wherever we go. This is probably the only way we shall ever extricate ourselves from time. Only a here-and-now transcendence seems possible to understand. Another sort of

transcendence may come within reach when we know more about past and future, including the limits of their control over knowledge and action.

A word about Plato, who was neglected in the comment after quotation from Mr. Toulmin. The Platonic approach (whatever may be a Platonic "extreme") includes the merit of Aristotle's claim for the authority of "facts." But far more important than this is the testimony of the subject himself—the "I" of every individual—who chooses the facts on which he will construct his theories, or will use for confirmation. This individual decision is voluntary. It is the inner, uncompelled assent on which Plato insists. What you *must* do is always something belonging to the regime of the past. All it can do is bring you up to date.

When trying to answer questions such as "Who am I?" and "What have I been?" and "What may I become?", the point of the inquiry is lost unless we look for and find a place in thought which leaves us free to choose. All constrained replies, for human beings, will be in some sense wrong—exiling us either to the past or to a future which remains unknown.

REVIEW

RANDOM NOTES ON FARMING

NOT every would-be farmer needs to know the history of farming in America, but those who want to inform themselves of the reasons why the basic and necessary activity of agriculture has become, as Americans (most of them) now pursue it, a threat to the future food supply of the world will do well to read *Whereby We Thrive: A History of American Farming, 1607-1972* (Iowa State University Press, 1975, \$12.95). The author is John T. Schlebecker, of the Smithsonian Institution. Mr. Schlebecker has packed an incredible amount of information into the comparatively small space of 320 pages. The whole story is there—the unique opportunity for plenty of fertile land in a great new continent, and the freedom of the settlers to apply for their own benefit the methods which the rich and titled European landowners had reserved for themselves in the old countries. The value of technology to the farmer is evident from a brief account of the improvements of a later time:

In the North, however, the newer cast-iron plows markedly reduced the man and animal power needed. If the plowman used oxen, the number of animals needed fell from two yokes to one yoke. In the case of horses, need fell from three horses to two. A reduction in the number of draft animals required meant considerable savings for the ordinary northern farmer. The iron plows could be used by one man instead of two or three. The amount of work which a farmer could do in a day increased by 50 per cent to 100 per cent, or from an acre a day to an acre and a half, or perhaps two acres a day.

Now the bottleneck in production became harvesting, not plowing. In time, gang plows were added, and vastly increased production was then made possible by the invention of reaper-harvesters. In the twentieth century, farming was transformed into an industry, no longer the craft of husbandry. The first tractor appeared in 1892, and by 1900 "some 5,000 steam tractors were made a year." These machines, which look a bit like old-fashioned locomotives, are illustrated in

Mr. Schlebecker's book. What one learns by reading this volume is the whole story of how American farming became what it is today, with all the factors given what seems a proper weighting. The book is mostly taken up with concise recitation of facts, but there are musings here and there. There are currents from thinkers like Collingwood, Galbraith, Toynbee, and Walter Webb running beneath the surface. The author wants us to *think* about the meaning of this extraordinary development. At the end he gives a page to Tolstoy's theory of historical determinism, and asks if the direction taken by American agriculture was "inevitable." *Whereby We Thrive* is not a "reformer's" book, but it is certainly a book filled with things that reformers ought to know. Mr. Schlebecker ends by saying:

The history of U.S. agriculture showed first an increase of farmers as they settled a vast and nearly empty land. The trend was reversed by the early 20th century. The number of farmers declined as farms increased in size and farm people moved to the cities. Although their numbers fell, the economic and political power of the farmers increased. At some point in the future, farmers may become such a powerful minority that the Federal Government may declare them public servants operating what amounts to a public utility and subject them to the same regulations. By 1972, U.S. agriculture was cartelized, and American farmers were practically part of a public utility already.

A book we haven't yet read, except for summaries and extracts, is *Food First* by Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins, which gives the other side of the picture what happens to the rest of the world when agriculture follows the course it has taken in the United States. These two books should doubtless be read together for a grip on the facts and their consequences. The point of *Food First* is that enough food for all the world would be easily available if agriculture in the dominant nations had focused on raising food first instead of making money. People are hungry for political and economic reasons, not agricultural reasons. People don't have access to the land to raise the food they need to survive. It becomes obvious from the Lappé and Collins book that

making farming a public utility is not the answer. Nations are not good managers of the welfare and food supply of the world.

There are other approaches to this problem. One is illustrated by an article by Mark Kramer, also a historian of agriculture (at the University of Massachusetts), in the *Atlantic* for November. This writer tells about one man, Leland Totman, a successful dairyman in Massachusetts where conditions (not enough flat land) are increasingly against large-scale dairy operations. Dairying in New England, as a result, continues in "an atmosphere of siege." This article, all about one man, shows what it takes to survive as a dairyman in Massachusetts. Leland Totman's achievement is awe-inspiring and ought to be read about by anyone contemplating life on the land. While this man's success may not illustrate an ideal "back-to-the-land" career, he has certain qualities that will always be required. Some months ago we reported the reasons given by Donella Meadows for the reduction of the number of dairy farmers in New England. (*Frontiers*, Jan. 26, 1977.) Increasing bigness growing out of technological advance, plus a non-growing market, plus the inability of the smaller farmers to get bank loans in order to expand (or die) were the chief cause. It now takes a quarter of a million dollars to start out in the dairy business in Vermont. Mr. Kramer tells how the cards are stacked against New England farmers:

In these modern times almost everything once grown here can be grown more cheaply somewhere else. Less than a sixth of the farm families in business on the eve of World war II are still farming in Massachusetts; fewer than 5000 farms remain in the entire state. Tractors available now are so huge that while they are practical on large fields farther west, they don't pay on small, hilly, widely separated New England fields. The coming of milk parlors, of automatic feeding, and of high-production breeding have made efficient herd sizes far greater than can usually be justified by the low density of farmable land of New England hill country. A supply system geared to national supermarket chains favors larger and larger units of output. High energy costs, high shipping costs, and competition from the world

market-place all make it less economically feasible than it once was to grow grain in Iowa and feed it to cows in Massachusetts. As the number of farms dwindles, farm suppliers and food processors also go out of business.

Why is forty-three-year-old Lee Totman still in business?

Among other things, Lee Totman knows how to farm. For years, like his father before him, he has grown better corn, made better hay, bred more judiciously, planned more carefully, and spent money more efficiently on buildings and equipment than have most other farmers in the region. He is Massachusetts' Outstanding Dairyman of the Year. When the agricultural extension agents came to him to tell him of the award, he told them their program didn't make much sense to him. His cows give more milk than those of other farmers in Franklin County. He would be at home in a small crowd of master farmers anywhere in the country. He has always been in the forefront in accepting new machinery and practices. . . . What is especially amazing about this generation of the Totman family is that the farm thrives and improves while New England agriculture as a whole is in sharp decline. Like horses so good they can win races carrying extra weight, a few New England farmers seem to improve under the strain of adversity.

Lee Totman probably has nothing to say to the problems posed by *Food First*. He might just ask, "What do you expect me to do, stop competing and go broke?" Yet he has something to say to everybody who works the land—something unrelated to social issues or politics. As Mark Kramer says:

He does something useful; he turns grass into milk, and he does it wonderfully well. He drinks the milk now as if to emphasize the point. He is the last of unalienated labor. In a national context his attitude is vestigial, an antique even in the universe of farmers. But the fact is clear: even now the system still works for Lee. There is no point in talking to him about my own politics. They don't make sense here; his do.

This seems the right place to stop quoting Mr. Kramer on Lee Totman, even though one wants very much to use a lot more of this material. Generalizing thins the meaning of what

should be read entire, letting it clabber into real nourishment.

The futility of conventional approaches to problems like that of modern agriculture is well illustrated by René Dubos' brief disposal of the French way of dealing with pollution: France now has, at the highest level of government, "a fullfledged *Ministère de la Qualité de la Vie*—as if the quality of life could be achieved by governmental edict." Meanwhile, he adds (in his essay in the Autumn *American Scholar*), the American medical profession has organized symposia on "Medicine and the Quality of Life," as though physicians are qualified, "not only for the maintenance of health and the management of disease, but for advising on the circumstances conducive to happiness." In what will these professional deliberations result? "They are also attempting to express, in dollars and cents, the effects of the various medical interventions on the quality of life, so as to incorporate this value into formal cost-effectiveness of medical practice." Dr. Dubos dryly concludes: "The assumption by physicians that they can put a price on the quality of life and advise on its achievement hardly seems justified in view of the fact that the rates of suicide, alcoholism, drug addiction, and other social difficulties are higher among them than among comparable professional groups."

Well, if we can't hope for anything from government, and if organized professionals are equally useless, to whom can we turn?

There are some good books by farmers who understand the causes of pollution *and* the meaning of "quality of life." For one, we are thinking of John and Sally Seymour's *Farming for Self-Sufficiency*, now available as a paperback (Schocken, \$4.95). We've reviewed the hardback edition, but the book is inexhaustible as a source of good ideas. The writers say in one place:

Economics is a great science, but it falls down flat on its face when it tries to equate all good with *money*. It is inefficient, any agricultural economist will tell you, for me to hand-milk a cow. But what if

I like hand-milking a cow? What is the economist going to say about that? Has any economist ever tried to measure the "efficiency" of playing golf? And what if a couple of gallons of milk derive from my activity of hand-milking a cow? Does that make it in any way less "efficient" than if I spent the time playing golf?

Seymour (who probably did most of the writing) is important to read because of how he thinks. His book is on small-scale farming, filled with everyday know-how and common sense. Mildred Loomis, who has been a small-scale farmer all her long life, testifies to this in her introduction, and she should know. People can learn to farm; America was once a nation of farmers, and perhaps will be once again, but not unless, along with farming techniques, they also learn how to feel and think in a new-old way. The Seymours' book will help in this. As will, also, Wendell Berry's new book, just out—*The Unsettling of America*, issued by the Sierra Club. Only in the work of such people is there found a natural approach to the numerous problems modern agriculture presents.

COMMENTARY
A SUFFICIENT GUIDE

THE breakdown of authority brings total disaster from the viewpoint of organized society, but it may be the beginning of individual wisdom for the members of that society. So long as public authority defines righteousness and human goals, people have no need to think seriously about what they ought and need to do. But when, as Hegel put it, the sun of empire sets, people are thrown back on themselves. The state can no longer direct their energies and satisfy their longings.

The social malfunctions and disintegrations of the present are indeed provocations in the search for truth. The common disasters which have overtaken American civilization during recent generations are all too familiar. There have been the terrible wars of the twentieth century, demonstrating the moral bankruptcy of the Western world. Political corruption and lying by high officials have undermined the confidence of the people. The careless destructiveness of self-interest as the dynamic of "progress" is gradually becoming evident to all, as the resources of the planet diminish while the needs of a growing population multiply.

Such developments make independent thinking necessary. The familiar forms of authority have all been shaken. Religious dogma no longer has any leverage in shaping human decision. The authority of science has diminished to merely technical questions, and technology, as a scientific discipline, is increasingly on the defensive. For all these reasons, there is a transfer of authority, as Mr. Starobinski says, to the "inner voice." Historically, this was the origin of modernism in literature, which grew out of an angry break with past authority. But the tragedy of modernism was the inadequacy of the inner voice of modern man. The climax of its failure may be seen in bleak Existentialist despair.

Today, the faith of those who try to think independently has a broader base. It has linkages

with the being and voice of the earth. The independent thought of the time weaves its way into the fabric of natural harmonies. Something like a "religion of nature" seems in the making. Such a religion—undogmatic, inquiring, unpretentious, leading to friendly cooperation in all directions—may prove a sufficient guide for future modern man.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

ET CETERA, ET CETERA

ABOUT four hundred years ago Michel de Montaigne, with no research beyond thoughtful observation of his time, reached a conclusion about educational processes which needs no amendment today. He said in one of his essays:

There is an alphabetical ignorance, which precedes learning; but there is also another kind of ignorance, which we might call doctoral, that is created by learning and replaces the alphabetical ignorance which has been destroyed.

This is the sort of wisdom which cannot be passed on from one generation to another, but must be discovered anew. Sometimes the young discover it before their parents, to the frustration of the young and the anxiety of the old. It might help anxious parents to realize that sometimes there are better ways to be launched in life than continuing in school. Parents, of course, tend to fear the autodidactic approach: What if the child moves from Eccentricity to Failure?

The idea, of course, is to move from school to independent thinking, and if a youngster has no propensity for self-reliance he had better stay in school. In a society where these things are understood, there would be no threat of ne'er-do-well doom for the youth who deliberately leaves school because he finds it better to do something else. Was there ever a time in history when the established authorities were less likely to be right than they are today?

Happily, there are a lot of Davids around these days, demonstrating the fallibility of the Goliath of doctoral ignorance. We found this example in the September-October issue of *Self-Reliance*:

In 1974, the huge British Columbia hydro-electric company, B. C. Hydro, decided to investigate the potential for wind power in the province. At a capital cost of \$66,841, the company chose two sites for windmills; but the installations ran into so many

problems that neither windmill ever produced even one kilowatt of power. In April 1976, B. C. Hydro issued a terse press release that explained that "Commercial wind generating units presently available have been found unsuitable for the provision of electrical energy in areas served by B. C. Hydro." In 1974, the three-member Swets family installed the same type of windmill on their home. It has been working perfectly for three years. B. C. Hydro spent \$33,000 for each non-functioning windmill; the Swets family spent a grand total of \$4800. The windmill was raised and installed by Mr. Swets and his ten-year-old son.

Under the natural law of probabilities, a boy who participates in such enterprises is far more likely to make something out of his schooling, or of the time when others are going to school, than children whose parents never build anything for themselves. Alternative energy activities are packed with educational experience that is *sure* to be productively valuable in any conceivable future.

Another sort of education not obtained in school is reported by *Interchange* for last April. This monthly newsletter and forum for Minnesota state court personnel, published by the Minnesota Supreme Court, reports on a restitution program of justice for persons convicted of misdemeanors. It began in 1972, put into effect by Judge Dennis A. Challeen of the Winona County Court. No other Minnesota court offers this sort of alternative to punishment. While the program was originally intended for adults, many of the offenders are minors. The procedures were designed by James F. Heinlen, a juvenile probation officer for some twenty years:

The Winona work restitution program works like this: At the time of pleading to the charge, if the judge feels that a fine or jail sentence alone would be inappropriate, he informs the defendant of the more than 50 alternatives available and refers him to Heinlen, who is now called a court services officer. Soon after pleading guilty, the misdemeanant and Heinlen confer to work out a sentence that will be (1) fair to the offender insofar as the state is concerned, (2) fair to the offender insofar as he is concerned, and (3) fair to the victim. The judge is not involved in this stage of the case and usually knows nothing about a proposed sentence until Heinlen and the

offender return to his courtroom on the sentencing date.

At that time Judge Challeen is informed of the proposed arrangement. Often the offender has agreed to make restitution to the victim, or repayment in services. But the most important aspect of this program is service to the community by an offender in an attempt to repay society.

A list of suggested alternatives includes, for example sweeping sidewalks, painting government buildings, working for a charitable organization and donating blood to the American Red Cross. Offenders may, however, opt to pay the fine; but statistics show that for the year 1975 a majority chose some form of alternative service.

And, most importantly, Winona County claims a recidivism [repeater] rate of two per cent. That represents a 67 per cent decline since the program was initiated. . . .

Judges in other states have undertaken similar programs, finding that they work. People learn from their "sentences" and sometimes change the direction of their lives. The offender takes part in the courtroom situation:

Judge Challeen believes that a key factor in the success of his concept is the offender's direct participation in his own sentencing the ability to receive a "fair" sentence.

"Often times," said Judge Challeen, "the defendant is watching between the attorneys and the prosecutors and is just sitting there thinking, 'I guess they're talking about me, but I don't understand what they're saying.' He's completely ignored.

"He's the 'thing' over here that we've got to do something about. He's our 'problem,' the thorn in our side. What shall *we* do about it?" . . .

Winona is home to several thousand college students. This poses peculiar problems, according to Judge Challeen. First, most students are supported by their parents, who normally would be paying any fines that might be imposed on their children. The judge feels that this is unfair and teaches the offender nothing.

Second, many of the offenses are "selfish," a favorite word Judge Challeen uses to characterize shoplifting or other forms of theft. He stresses the unselfishness of alternative service.

Third, many college students "have an allergic reaction to paying fines into the county's general fund," which is used largely for road maintenance, and would rather do something good for the community. "Besides," said the judge, "we don't need any more road graders."

Judge Challeen's court handles a lot of such cases in three mornings a week.

FRONTIERS It' Harder for Us

WE have an allegory from Zaire. It is the story of how a male nurse in this midcontinent African country transformed the everyday life of, first, his own village in "the middle of the bush," and then, in the course of the years since 1970, expanded his program and helped between forty and fifty other villages to do the same. As a nurse, he knew something about health—that, for example, it begins with sanitation. How, without any authority except his own common-sense persuasion, he taught his friends and neighbors elementary sanitation, and then went on to general development, is told in the *May Appropriate Technology* (issued quarterly by the Schumacher-founded Intermediate Technology Development Group, 9 King Street, London, WC2E 8HN, U.K., £4.00 a year).

The writer, Konde Pambu Yemba, was in charge of the dispensary in the health center of Sadi-Kinsanga—a hundred kilometers from the nearest hospital in Kisantu, on the road from Matadi to Kinshasa. (Zaire is a constitutional republic which until 1960 was known as the Belgian Congo.) Introducing his report, the *AT* editors say:

The problems seem to be the same everywhere in rural zones: installation of latrines, the cleanliness of the village and its inhabitants, clean drinking water, health examinations for babies and diet counseling. Konde Pambu Yemba thought it was better to create development committees instead of sanitation committees because he feels that beyond health improvement proper, other schemes can be introduced: new crops (soya-bean, for example, was previously unknown in Sadi-Kinsanga), duck and rabbit breeding, which was also unheard of in this village, and encouraging the villagers through "Operation Adobe" to transform their dwellings to make them more hygienic.

The story this male nurse tells is inspiring—village improvement through education, with self-reliance the keynote from the beginning. Why call it an allegory for us? Because—greatly

simplifying—the problem in Zaire was to overcome pollution at the elementary level of physical life, which seems to have little relation to the issues confronting our own lives. This makes the report by the nurse an allegory, since its meaning must be rendered into our own terms of concern. A paragraph by John Steinbeck about the polluting habits of the "villagers" of the United States will serve as a first step of interpretation:

Since the river-polluters and the air-poisoners are not criminal or even bad people, we must presume that they are heirs to the early conviction that sky and water are unowned and that they are limitless. In the light of our practices here at home it is very interesting to me to read the care taken with the carriers of our probes into space, to make utterly sure that they are free of pollution of any kind. We would not think of doing to the moon what we do every day to our own dear country.

There's not really much difference between us and the Zaire villagers; our pollution is, like our neuroses, more sophisticated, that's all. Nor is there much difference in the human nature involved. At first Konde Pambu Yemba had some problems with the villagers. He got some of them to build latrines, explained why they should use them, but then found they weren't. He had to keep after them:

At first, I made motivation and check-up visits twice a week; I took advantage of the "nsons"—a day a week which the Bakonga usually take off—to hold my meetings. I sometimes went off to practice health education on Sundays as well. Things were difficult at first. After two or three supervision meetings, people were against me and were mumbling among themselves, "This man is beginning to be a nuisance. Before he came, we were content. Didn't our ancestors have illnesses? Does he think we will no longer die, now that he is here?" These rumors always found their way back to me. I said to myself each time, "Never mind, this is a good sign. It is encouraging." And I went on with my work. I then reached a second stage: that of health education itself. Everyone had a latrine. Even if it wasn't always used, it existed, if only for the purpose of making me happy. That was already something. The rest would follow, I told myself, as a result of the health education meetings.

Once in a while, he had—or was able—to pull rank on an objector, not his own rank, since he didn't have any, but the rank of some higher-up:

I remember one day, in the course of my supervision rounds, coming on a plot which was really filthy in all respects. It belonged to a leader of the People's Revolutionary Movement. I went to see him and I said: You are a leader of the Party. I think you had better help me in my clean-up work in the village. You don't have a latrine and your plot is full of weeds. Do you think that is right? You are a scandal for other people." "Listen," he said to me. "You go away. I have nothing to learn from you here. And if you go on, I'll box your ears." I was very embarrassed, especially as people had already gathered around us. I went to complain to the head of the collectivity, and the Party leader was punished. He spent three days in jail. But when he came out, he became an active member of the committee. I rely on him a great deal.

This is of course an ideal case, but think how much more difficult it would be here. Objectors would call him an ecology freak. Industrialists would point to all the unemployment that would result from really cleaning up their own and the common life. And in America people don't change from being in jail. They get worse. The level of institutionalization is very different. All that the people of the Zaire village said was that their daddies didn't mind getting sick now and then. But here, if you try to change things a little bit, such as, for example, getting people to improve their diets, half a dozen big trade associations—tycoons of meat, sugar, and canned foods—wheel into action. These people control the most of the white space in the media and they fill it with their plausible arguments written by public relations experts, and by professors with Ph.D.'s, if they need them.

In a simple society, things work far more smoothly for people with common sense and good will. One project was a village drinking fountain, which would cost money. So the villagers raised it. The project was in scale in their society and they *could* raise it. They brought the money to the nurse, but he said, "Give it to the chief;

handling money is not my department." And they did. Then—

We bought cement, and we found a mason to build the fountain. When it was finished, we set up a white flag. At that time, we had a system whereby a white flag was given, as a sign of encouragement, to each village which had built a fountain. Thus a white flag was presented to the village of Sadi-Kinsanga. Following this achievement, all the neighboring villages asked me when I would come to work with them so that they could also have a white flag. I always replied, "Don't worry, I shall come."

The allegory goes on and on—a magnificent tale of the good, bad, and indifferent in human nature, and how to work with the good, discourage the bad, and stir some ferment in the indifferent. The problem is translating the allegory. Mr. Schumacher wrote the first rendition, but it needs additions in all directions. The psychological wilderness of "advanced" human institutions is far more difficult to cope with than the conditions of the African bush. Out in the bush, people can still be helped to recognize what is for their own good, and what is not. This is a lot harder for us.