

OBSCURITIES OF BALANCE

ONE man says purposefully, "I have a life to live," while another may reply, "No doubt you do, but whatever you expect to do with it, you'd better find out about the practical means of living—there is a whole world out there to know!" Sometimes the same man says both things—one on Tuesday, the other on Thursday. Yet it hardly needs pointing out that although both attitudes seem fully justified, both required for balance in life, there is a strong tendency in human nature to concentrate on only one of these tasks, letting the other go.

History plainly reveals these specializations. We speak of the age of Religion, followed by the age of Science. The one, we say, corrects the excesses of the other. But our adversary method of correction does more than correct. It is commonly assumed that the best way to make a correction is to stamp out the sources of the offending tendency, but this, it seems evident, pulls the correction out of shape. And then, after a while, the correction has to be corrected.

This means that, in a time of transition, and of valiant effort to get things right, there is an all-important question to ask, and keep on asking: *What are we leaving out?*

The question may be confusing for the reason that two languages or vocabularies are involved. The man who sets out to live a life thinks and talks like a subject. He thinks about human ends. The man who studies the world develops a language devoted to objects. The nouns and verbs operate at different levels and they don't really relate to each other. Subjects don't become objects except in Hell, and objects don't become subjects except in Nirvana. So, mostly, we skip back and forth from one language to another, first giving one dominance, then the other. And when one way of thinking and acting has priority, the

other tends to become flabby and subservient. Then, when the time for making corrections comes, a new or third language has to be invented in order to spread some really balancing ideas around. A devitalized and polarized language is no good for that.

Abraham Maslow, one of the great correctors of the twentieth century, called attention to the distortions which religious language had suffered during the time when science was imposing its corrections on the modern mind. Reduced to a subordinate role, religion became a sectarian, plaintive thing. Its own lack of balance—it had ignored the world and made up a lot of pseudo-science to take care of questions asked by common folk—was rigidly institutionalized and this made it easy for Galileo and others to knock down its brittle claims. True religion, you could say, had gone under ground, later emerging in various disguises—poetry, drama, nontraditional mysticism, and sometimes in the novel or the essay. Meanwhile, conventional religious language had become very dead. Basic confusion about the meaning of religion was the inevitable result.

Maslow makes this confusion the subject of his first chapter in *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*. Noting (and approving) the decision of the United States Supreme Court which banned prayer in the nation's schools, he said:

The Supreme Court decisions on prayer in the public schools were seen (mistakenly, as we shall see) by many Americans as a rejection of spiritual values in education. Much of the turmoil was in defense of these higher values and eternal verities rather than of the prayers as such. That is to say, very many people in our society apparently see organized religion as *the* locus, *the* source, *the* custodian and guardian and teacher of the spiritual life. Its methods, its style of teaching, its content are widely and officially accepted as *the* path, by many as the *only* path, to the

life of righteousness, of purity and virtue, of justice and goodness, etc. As a matter of fact, this identity is so profoundly built into the English language that it is almost impossible to speak of the "spiritual life" (a distasteful phrase to a scientist and especially to a psychologist) without using the vocabulary of traditional religion. There just isn't any other satisfactory language yet. A trip to the thesaurus will demonstrate this very quickly. This makes an almost insoluble problem for the writer who is intent on demonstrating that the common base of all religions is human, natural, empirical, and that so-called spiritual values are also naturally derivable. But I have available only a theistic language for this "scientific" job.

What could he do about this? The only thing possible, and still communicate with ordinary readers. He explained:

Perhaps I can get out of this terminological difficulty in another way. If you look up the words "sacred," "divine," "holy," "numen," "sin," "prayer," "oblation," "thanksgiving," "worship," "piety," "salvation," "reverence," the dictionary will most often tell you that they refer to a god or to a religion in the supernatural sense. Now what I want to say is that each and all of these words, and many other "religious" words, have been reported to me by non-theistic people in their effort to describe particular subjective happenings in "non-religious" (in the conventional sense) peak experiences and illuminations. These words are the only words available to describe certain happenings in the natural world. This vocabulary is the language of a theory which people have had about these subjective happenings, a theory which is no longer necessary.

I shall, therefore, use these words, since I have no others to use, to refer to subjective happenings in human beings without necessarily implying any supernatural reference. I claim that it is not necessary to appeal to principles outside of nature and human nature in order to explain these experiences.

Well, we need at least one example of "these experiences," and at hand is a passage in Henry Miller's *The Colossus of Maroussi* (New Directions, 1941). Miller tells about the day he came to Epidaurus, the birthplace and home of Æsculapius, the Greek god of healing:

The road to Epidaurus is like the road to creation. One stops searching. One grows silent,

stilled by the hush of mysterious beginnings. . . . There is nothing to be seized or treasured or cornered off here: there is only a breaking down of the walls which lock the spirit in. . . . You are no longer riding through something—call it Nature, if you will—but participating in a rout, a rout of the forces of greed malevolence, envy, selfishness, spite, intolerance, pride, arrogance, cunning, duplicity, and so on.

It is the morning of the first day of the great peace, the peace of the heart, which comes with surrender. I never knew the meaning of peace until I arrived at Epidaurus. Like everybody I had used the word all my life, without once realizing that I was using a counterfeit. Peace is not the opposite of war any more than death is the opposite of life. The poverty of language, which is to say the poverty of man's imagination or the poverty of his inner life, has created an ambivalence which is absolutely false. I am talking of course of the peace which passeth all understanding. There is no other kind. The peace which most of us know is merely a cessation of hostilities, a truce, an interregnum, a lull, a respite, which is negative. The peace of the heart is positive and invincible, demanding no conditions, requiring no protection.

For most readers, Miller will be absolutely right. There is felt truth in what he says. He uses language in a way that generates the meaning of a peak experience, without trying to say flat out what it is. He uses language which makes us aware, with him, of the peace beyond understanding. He goes on, dreaming of the healing art, and most readers will follow him to the end of this passage, in which he writes as an illuminated man:

The great physicians have always spoken of Nature as being the great healer. That is only partially true. Nature alone can do nothing. Nature can cure only when man recognizes his place in the world, which is not in Nature, as with the animal, but in the human kingdom, the link between the natural and the divine.

Now, using the light of his peak experience, Miller goes analytic and critical. Again, a great many will follow him:

To the infra-human specimens of this benighted scientific age the ritual and worship connected with the art of healing as practiced at Epidaurus seems like sheer buncombe. In our world the blind lead the

blind and the sick go to the sick to be cured. We are making constant progress, but it is a progress which leads to the operating table, to the poor house, to the insane asylum, to the trenches. We have no healers—we have only butchers whose knowledge of anatomy entitles them to a diploma which in turn entitles them to carve out or amputate our illnesses so that we may carry on in crippled fashion until such time as we are fit for the slaughter house. . . .

Man doesn't begin to live through triumphing over his enemy nor does he begin to acquire health through endless cures. The joy of life comes through peace, which is not static but dynamic. No man can really say that he knows what joy is until he has experienced peace. And without joy there is no life, even if you have a dozen cars, six butlers, a castle, a private chapel and a bomb-proof vault. Our diseases are our attachments, be they habits, ideologies, ideals, principles, possessions, phobias, gods, cults, religions, what you please. Good wages can be just as much a disease as bad wages. Leisure can be just as great a disease as work. Whatever we cling to, even if it be hope or faith, can be the disease which carries us off. Surrender is absolute: if you cling to even the tiniest crumb you nourish the germ which will devour you. As for clinging to God, God long ago abandoned us in order that we might realize the joy of attaining godhood through our own efforts.

A lot in this has the ring of truth. Miller, you could say, rode the beam of his peak experience and wrote magnificently—some would say extravagantly—but as Thoreau declared, "He who cannot exaggerate is not qualified to utter truth. No truth, we think, was ever expressed but with this sort of emphasis, so that for the time there seemed to be no other."

Yet we do have to use good sense, making footnotes for future reference on what is undoubtedly being left out. A Henry Miller in the midst of his vision can't tell you, and probably shouldn't, since the vision, after all, is the thing. But there is still the world out there with its major and minor mysteries. We always need to touch base—feel the sources of our nourishment here, as Anteus knew—before we look some more at the stars. If we do both, somehow the balance comes.

For a few it comes without even seeking it. In a section on leaders and leadership in his essay

on "Authority," John Schaar discusses the question of what men need to do to live their lives well:

Each man is born, lives among others, and dies. Hence, each man's life has three great underpinnings, which no matter how far he travels, must always be returned to and can never be escaped for long. The three underpinnings present themselves to each man as problems and as mysteries: the problem and mystery of becoming a unique self; but still a self living among and sharing much with others in family and society; and finally a unique self among some significant others, but still sharing with all humanity the condition of being human and mortal. Who am I as an individual? Who am I as a member of this society? Who am I as a man, a member of humanity? Each of the three questions contains within itself a host of questions, and the way a man formulates and responds to them composes the center and structure of his values.

Humanly significant authorities are those who help men answer these questions in terms that men themselves implicitly understand. . . .

Humanly significant leadership bases its claim to authority on a kind of knowledge which includes intuition, insight and vision as indispensable elements. The leader strives to grasp and to communicate the essence of a situation in one organic comprehensive conception. He conjoins elements which the analytic mind keeps tidily separate. He unites the normative with the empirical, and promiscuously mixes both with the moral and the esthetic. The radical distinction between subjective and objective is unknown in this kind of knowledge, for everything is personal and comes from within the prepared consciousness of the knower, who is simultaneously believer and actor. When it is about men, this kind of knowledge is again personal. It strives to see within the self and along with other selves. It is knowledge of character and destiny. Most of the facts which social scientists collect about men are in this epistemology superficial: information about a man's external attributes, rather than knowledge of who he is and what his possibilities are.

Mr. Schaar here writes about spontaneously achieved balance. He also has something to say about language:

The language in which the knowledge appropriate to humanly significant leadership is expressed is also very different from the language of

rational and objective discourse. It is a language profuse in illustration and anecdote, and rich in metaphor whose sources are the human body and the dramas of action and responsibility. This language is suggestive and alluring, pregnant, evocative—in all ways the opposite of the linear, constricted, jargonized discourse which is the ideal of objective communication.

And it follows that: "One who possesses and values this kind of knowledge bases his claims to its validity on grounds which are quicksand to the objective and rational man."

Quicksand or not, humans can't live without this kind of knowledge. Every day we must act, and we can't wait until all the "objective facts" are in. We are doers as well as researchers, and it is now becoming evident that even with all they already know, the researchers aren't able to translate much of anything important into the language of *human judgment*—the prerequisite of all intelligent action. They may be able to tell us how to melt some Alaskan glaciers to get more water for agriculture in the Imperial Valley, and elsewhere in California, but they don't go behind such questions and suggest to us that we might better do our planting elsewhere, and locate our future cities somewhere besides naturally desert country.

In short, the knowledge or craft of how to live a life despite our ignorance can no longer be neglected. And this is precisely the area of our impoverishment. We know what intuitive individuals do—Mr. Schaar has given an account of their ways—but our cultural authorities are no longer hospitable to the inspiration of intuitive insight. They have been locked in their grooves for generations. As Maslow says:

Certainly the young student coming to the study of the arts and the humanities will find therein no inspiring certainties. What criterion of selection does he have between, let us say, Tolstoy and Kafka, between Renoir and de Kooning, or between Brahms and Cage? And which well-known artists or writers today are trying to teach, to inspire, to conduce to virtue? Which of them could even use this word

"virtue" without gagging? Upon which of them can an "idealistic" young man model himself?

No, it is quite dear from our experience of the last fifty years or so that the pre-1914 certainties of the humanists, of the artists, of the dramatists and poets, of the philosophers, of the critics, and of those who are generally inner-directed have given way to a chaos of relativism. No one of these people now knows how and what to choose, nor does he know how to defend and validate his choice. . . .

We can no longer rely on tradition, on consensus on cultural habit, on unanimity of belief to give us our values. These agreed-upon traditions are all gone. Of course, we never *should* have rested on tradition—as its failures must have proven to everyone by now—it was never a firm foundation. It was destroyed too easily by truth, by honesty, by the facts, by science, by simple, pragmatic, historical failure.

Only truth itself can be our foundation, our base for building.

So, the old question must be repeated: What is truth? How do we know which intuitions are reliable? How can we learn to fit our intuitions in with scientific knowledge, and how can we make scientific knowledge adaptable to normative truth? How, in short, do we *validate* what we think about how to live our lives?

This is really the underlying question. When authorities break down, when institutions are no longer reliable, when education throws up its hands, when new religions are a dime a dozen and when science is beginning to be questioned by its best practitioners—how do you decide what is "true"?

We keep on quoting Maslow because he was one of the few who faced up to such questions, bringing them out in the open. In a concluding section of *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*, he writes at some length about validation, choosing the peak-experience to set the problem. Why, for example, do we feel so much in key with Henry Miller's reverie at Epidaurus? With what confidence can we embrace what he says? Validation is at issue.

Maslow says:

There is no doubt that great insights and revelations are profoundly felt in mystic or peak-experiences, and certainly some of these are, *ipso facto*, intrinsically valid *as experiences*. . . . Thus the peak-experiencer learns surely and certainly that life *can* be worthwhile, that it *can* be beautiful and valuable. There *are* ends in life, i.e., experiences which are so precious in themselves as to prove that not everything is a means to some end other than itself.

We need to take that last statement out and look at it. If a person experiences something that becomes his starting-point, his rock of ages, his first-things-first conception of reality, then *that* does not require validation. In thought it is the last stop. It is the feeling-knowledge-conception which validates everything else. Validation has to start somewhere. It must begin with a self-demonstrating reality, so precious to us that nothing can shake its authority.

For validation, then, we need to find something like that. Nothing else will do, and all plausible substitutes break down. Maslow also says:

Another kind of self-validating insight is the experience of being a real identity, a real self, of feeling what it is like to feel really oneself, what in fact one is—not a phony, a fake, a striver, an impersonator. Here again, the experiencing itself is the revelation of a truth.

Can we do any better than that? No, we can't. We simply can't. Of course, a person might say to himself that he has never had a peak-experience and probably never will, and listen instead to his hunches, his prejudices, and to the "authorities" he admires without understanding. And if we take that position, we'll probably belong to a large majority, but what is that majority leaving out?

Well, first of all, left out is Maslow's idea that all humans are capable of peak-experiences, and that many have them without noticing it. And left out, too, is the fact that when people ignore the need of self-validating insight, they inevitably fall into the-habit of relying on outside authority, not

only for their science but for how to live their lives. "Show me more facts," they say, and go off about their business.

But this, as Ortega shows in *Some Lessons in Metaphysics*, is the opposite of real science. The true scientist rejects authority and *creates* science. All science, in its *origins*, was born from some human being's need to include the creation of science as part of living his life. "He did not first find it and then feel the need to possess it; he first felt a need that was vital rather than scientific, and this led him to seek the satisfaction of that need." Some science was the result.

Validation, then, means going beyond the hearsay of the peak-experiences of other men, whether religious or scientific. It means finding our own self-validating foundation for life. It may take quite a while. At least seven lives, certain reincarnationists declare. Meanwhile, we can at least stop fooling ourselves concerning certainties that are not really our own. This has a wonderfully clarifying effect. It might even lead to a peak experience.

REVIEW

THE BUSINESS OF THE SUN

HANNAH ARENDT'S "resultless thinking"—its practical inapplicability and its wondrously illuminating effect—is illustrated in a brief essay by Lafcadio Hearn, "The Stone Buddha," which was first published in *Out of the East* (Houghton Mifflin, 1895). Here Hearn broods about the reflections inspired by a stone Buddha, ancient and somewhat defaced, he found on a ridge looking down on the Japanese college where he was teaching. On that day the sun was bright and high, making the slope of tiny terraced farm fields seem shadowless, almost a visionary reality—as though the scene were "not illumined from one side, but as if throughout suffused with light." Old Japanese picture books, he recalled, reveal no shadows, the rich color preventing notice of their omission. Hearn concludes that in their art the ancient Japanese saw and represented the world in its transcendent aspect. It was a declaration of the unshadowed real.

For Hearn, this becomes a means of interpreting history:

When their noon-day landscapes are flecked by shadows at all, 'tis by very thin ones only—mere deepenings of tone, like those fugitive half-glooms which run before a summer cloud. And the inner as well as the outer was luminous for them. Psychologically also they saw life without shadows.

Then the West burst into their Buddhist peace, and saw their art, and bought it up till an Imperial law was issued to preserve the best of what was left. And when there was nothing more to be bought, and it seemed possible that fresh creation might reduce the market price of what had been bought already, then the West said: "Oh, come, now! you mustn't go on drawing and seeing things that way, you know! It isn't Art! You must really learn to see shadows, you know—and pay me to teach you."

The guns of Commodore Perry's fleet were persuasive:

So Japan paid to learn how to see shadows in Nature, in life, and in thought. And the West taught her that the sole business of the divine sun was the

making of a cheaper kind of shadows. And the West taught her that the higher-priced shadows were the sole product of Western civilization, and bade her admire and adopt. Then Japan wondered at the shadows of machinery and chimneys and telegraph-poles; and at the shadows of mines and of factories, and the shadows in the hearts of those who worked there; and at the shadows of houses twenty stories high, and of hunger begging under them; and shadows of enormous charities that multiplied poverty; and shadows of social reforms that multiplied vice and shadows of shams and hypocrisies and swallow-tail coats; and the shadow of a foreign God, said to have created mankind for the purpose of an auto-da-fé. Whereat Japan became rather serious, and refused to study any more silhouettes. Fortunately for the world she returned to her first matchless art; and, fortunately for herself, returned to her own beautiful faith. But some of the shadows still clung to her life; and she cannot possibly get rid of them. Never again can the world seem to her quite so beautiful as it did before.

And the return, alas, was not whole-hearted. The shadows eventually dictated policies, and while friendly travelers say that, out in the country, you can still find the old Japan, the West now sees a mirror image of itself in Japanese industry, commerce, and pollution.

Next Hearn draws a comparison between the timeless image of a peasant toiling in the fields—everywhere portrayed in Japanese art and the organized knowledge and "progress" of the West, with which Japan became amply infected.

Hearn is not making a case, but seeing the world and man across the ages—a sadly pessimistic view, some will say. Yet it is more than that—much more—although we can hardly tell why. What does this changeless peasant stand for?

Exactly the same! Other fashions beyond counting have passed: the peasant's straw hat, straw coat, and sandals of straw remain. He himself is older, incomparably older, than his attire. The earth he tills has indeed swallowed him up a thousand times a thousand times; but each time it has given back to him his life with force renewed. And with this perpetual renewal he is content: he asks no more. The mountains change their shapes; the rivers shift

their courses; the stars change their places in the sky: he changes never. Yet though unchanging, he is the maker of change. Out of the sum of his toil are wrought ships of iron, the roads of steel, the palaces of stone; his are the hands that pay for the universities and the new learning, for the telegraphs and the electric lights and the repeating-rifles, for the machinery of science and the machinery of commerce and the machinery of war. He is the giver of all; he is given in return—the right to labor forever.

If, for the moment, we take Hearn's essay as a gospel text, what can we make of it? What does it say we should do?

One thing seems obvious enough. Hearn does resultless thinking, yet if we should read Lappé and Collins' *Food First*, adding Berry's *The Unsettling of America*, we might learn what happens to people when the peasant is barred from his land and his labors; or, no longer knowing the gospel truth, he shuts himself away. In short, the man must rejoin with the land, or the world will wither and he with it.

Today there are those who see once more that the landscape is suffused with light and therefore heat; they are learning how to extend and amplify the solar generousities of a shadowless world.

Hearn might nod gravely—as the Buddha might or might not—in approbation of these labors. But a sadness comes over him on that day on the ridge:

Then the Stone Buddha and I look down upon the college together; and as we gaze, the smile of the Buddha—perhaps because of a change in the light—seems to me to have changed its expression, to have become an ironical smile. Nevertheless he is contemplating the fortress of a more than formidable enemy. In all that teaching of four hundred youths by thirty-three teachers, there is no teaching of faith, but only teaching of fact—only teaching of the definite results of the systematization of human experience. And I am absolutely certain that if I were to question, concerning the things of the Buddha, any of those thirty-three instructors (saving one dear old man of seventy, the Professor of Chinese), I should receive no reply. For they belong unto the new generation, holding that such topics are fit for the consideration

of Men-in-Straw-Rain-Coats only, and that in this twenty-sixth year of Meiji, the scholar should occupy himself only with the results of the systematization of human experience. Yet the systematization of human experience in no wise enlightens us as to the Whence, the Whither, or, worst of all!—the Why. . . .

And I ask myself, Must the teaching of Science in this land efface at last the memory of the teaching of the Buddha. . . .?

What is this "systematization" that Hearn speaks of? Obviously, it is an application—first a thrilling, then a monstrous, application of the human power to generalize, to make declarative statements about law or the laws of nature. Apparently, the potentialities of both good and evil are in *everything* that we do. There is no way of confining the effects of what we do to only one sort of result . . . or is there? Is *that* the Buddha's secret?

We may note that the beauty and penetration of Hearn's essay are also the result of his power to generalize—to take a long look at the world, then draw back and speak in timeless accents about the laws of the cosmos. We are now saved, now damned, by our power to generalize, and one thing seems "absolutely certain"—that we cannot stop generalizing. The very stuff of our being is evolved by doing it. Through generalizations we are able gradually to become the world to think of the world as self and to act as its conscious mind and heart. But we are also able to ruin the world with our presumptuous systemizations: How is this? *Demon est Deus inversus* makes the only answer we know.

Hearn's final reflections take inspiration from the Buddha, but like his employment of Japan as a symbol of intuitive recollections of an ancient wisdom, we may think that what he says in conclusion is also a distillation of his own thinking, with, like all truth, no locatable origin:

It may remain for us to learn, after having vanquished all difficulties possible to meet upon this tiny sphere, that there await us obstacles to overcome beyond it,—obstacles vaster than any system of worlds,—obstacles weightier than the whole

inconceivable Cosmos with its centuries of millions of systems; that our task is only beginning; and that there will never be given to us even the ghost of any help, save the help of unutterable and unthinkable Time. We may have to learn that the infinite whirl of death and birth, out of which we cannot escape, is of our own creation, of our own seeking;—that the forces integrating worlds are the errors of the Past, that the eternal sorrow is but the eternal hunger of insatiable desire;—and that the burnt-out suns are rekindled only by the inextinguishable passions of vanished lives.

How shall we learn to endure all this, without losing heart? Well, there is that right to labor which goes on and on. It teaches us how to endure, and ultimately, to smile as the Buddha smiles. Or so they say . . .

Hearn's "The Stone Buddha" was reprinted, together with an excellent sketch of the writer's life, in the April *East-West Journal*.

COMMENTARY
A SINGLE MEANING?

A FEW years after Lafcadio Hearn described the "ironical smile" that seemed to come over the face of the stone Buddha in Japan (see Review), an English traveler held silent dialogue with another stone Buddha one of many at the famous temple of Borobudur in Java. In *Appearances*, published in 1914, G. Lowes Dickinson took issue with the Buddha's teaching, "There is one beauty—that of a soul redeemed from desire." The spirit of rebellion stirred in the visitor, making him cry out, "Desire is the heart and essence of the world." We seek perfection, not extinction. As spokesman for the West, Dickinson was one of the best:

"We have access to the youth, the strength, the life of the world. Man is born to sorrow. Yes! But he redeems it. . . . We want more labour; we want more stress; we want more passion. Pain we accept, for it stings us into life. Strife we accept, for it hardens us to strength. We believe in action; we believe in desire. And we believe that by them we shall attain."

The Englishman then muses:

So the West broke out in me; and I looked at him to see if he was moved. But the calm eye was untroubled, unruffled the majestic brow, unperplexed the sweet, solemn mouth. Secure in his Nirvana, he heard or he heard me not. . . . Unhelped by him, I must go my way. . . .

That was in 1914—an ominous year for the West. Little more than a quarter of a century later—in 1942, an even more ominous time—Albert Camus ended "The Myth of Sisyphus" with these words:

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the

heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.

Was this, perchance, the answer the Buddha might have given to the English defender of action and desire, had the year of their meeting been later in this fateful century, when his meaning could have been better understood?

The changeless peasant, the eternal labors of Sisyphus, the Buddha's ironical smile have they, somehow, one meaning?

The next issue of MANAS will be dated September 6.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

NO INVITATION TO LEARNING

HARPER'S for April printed several articles on "The Child's Mind," material of uneven interest for the parent or teacher. One contribution of outstanding value is by Bruno Bettelheim, who discusses the way reading is taught in the vast majority of schools. His point is that most of the readers used in the early grades bore and insult the intelligence of children. First, he stresses the importance of learning to read well:

During the first years of life, when the child is reaching out simultaneously in all directions and trying to understand what goes on around him, two developments are like quantum leaps that open up for him new and vast vistas on other people and what they are all about, on the universe that surrounds them, and on himself. Learning to read builds directly on this achievement and adds to it tremendously. Reading permits the child to procure man's accumulated knowledge for himself, without having to rely on the verbal communications of others.

Enlarging his vocabulary is natural for the child when learning to read. The school texts seem to discourage this process:

The child who is forced to read:

Come, Mark. Come, Mark, come. Come here, Mark. Come here. Come and jump. Come and jump, jump, jump. Here I come, Janet. Here I come. Jump, jump, jump.

is being asked to acquire a skill which is at that moment meaningless, and demeaning. . . . such texts make reading a difficult and odious task. It is difficult, because everything boring is difficult to learn. It is odious for at least two additional reasons. First, because the young child hates the way he is always called to come and do what his parents want him to do, and in the text a child like himself is told to come. Second, because it is difficult enough for a first-grader to sit still and pay attention, but requiring him to do so while repeatedly calling on him to *jump* is certainly poor psychology, and hence offensive.

In a passage which has rich confirmation from Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Dr. Bettelheim describes the eagerness of children to learn new words:

It is impressive to observe how much pleasure a child derives from struggling to say some big word he had heard the meaning of which he barely guesses. If the parent shares his enjoyment in overreaching himself in this manner, the word soon becomes a permanent addition to the child's vocabulary. The child begins by trying to participate in what he views as his parent's magical ability to use complex language; in his efforts to make this "magic" his own he masters unfamiliar words and develops the ability to comprehend more complex thought processes. . . .

This is why the least pleasurable and hence the least effective way of teaching a child to talk is for the parent to decide which word the child should learn to say at a given moment, regardless of the child's own interests or desires, or to deny him any idiosyncratic distortion of a word by forcing him to repeat it over and over again until he has it exactly "right," or to refrain from introducing new words until the child has mastered to perfection those taught him previously.

Everyone who has read to a child a fine book—perhaps a simple adult book—which is in many ways over his head has learned from experience, the truth of what Dr. Bettelheim says. Especially noticeable is the way the child picks out some words to ask the meaning of, while ignoring others equally unfamiliar to him. He gets the general drift of the story, but some words, perhaps because of the way they sound, or because comprehending the action requires them to be explained, attract his attention. So he asks what they mean, not needing to have a lot of others explained. Why is it, one wonders, that "everything that parents know about teaching their children to talk seems to be forgotten or deliberately ignored in many of our schools when we begin teaching our children to read"?

As he enters school, the child is both proud of his past achievements and apprehensive about his ability to learn. He resents nothing more than feeling belittled. By this time, there are probably at least 6,000 words that he knows well and comprehends accurately; the vocabulary of many children is greater than that. Yet he may very well be presented with

basic readers that will treat him as though he possesses no vocabulary at all. For example, all four preprimers in one widely distributed series of readers contains only 78 extremely simple words, which are endlessly repeated. The basic primer of the series adds but another 104 words. This limited word usage is typical of the most widely used series.

Imagine how we would feel if in conversation or in our reading we were suddenly reduced to no more than 2 per cent of the words we commonly feel we need to express ourselves, and only the simplest words at that.

This is criticism people can do something about. They can pick the right things to read to children, and, as John Holt says, see that the young are miscellaneously exposed to "print." Nobody knows just when, or why, or how a child's mind will spring into action, and trying to "program" their learning is really somewhat ridiculous. Invitation and hospitality to learning is all we can do, and it is in fact enough. Dr. Bettelheim concludes:

If the stories we use in teaching our children to read do not reflect purpose (greater purpose, that is, than killing time or getting through the day), if they do not give the child immediate pleasure, and add meaning to his life by opening up new perspectives—if, in short, these stories fail to provide the child with deep satisfactions—then they also unintentionally belittle reading itself. Children want to be taken seriously, and unless we do so they will have a hard time being serious about the things we want them to achieve, such as becoming literate.

If Dr. Bettelheim (and various researchers, he says) as well as many parents know all this, why are the school readers so uniformly bad? He found some good primers in Austria, but offers no relieving exceptions published in this country. Why should this be? Why are poor texts issued year after year, when intelligent people know better?

Conceivably, the *Harper's* editor, Lewis Lapham, provides the basic answer to this question in "The Easy Chair" for April. Writing on "the American grudge against children," he says in one place:

The nation spends \$150 billion a year under the rubric of education, but of this sum only a small part pays for the teaching of children. As with the numerous poverty programs, the bulk of the money finds its way into the hands of people lucky enough to have something to do with the disposition of funds. In New York I have heard it said by textbook publishers that without the guarantee of federal price supports they couldn't make a decent profit. It doesn't matter if the students never learn to read or write. In the same way that the Vietnam war provided a market for the makers of munitions, so also do the schools, no matter how degraded, provide a market for inept translations from the French.

By assigning the management of its schools to a bureaucracy, the society achieves in the realm of public policy what parents achieve in the realm of private decision by assigning the management of their children to the medical, educational, and psychiatric establishments. In all instances the authorities can be counted upon to discourage the movement toward radical change. The indoctrination begins at birth.

The hospitals insist that the newborn child be taken away from the mother and placed in a nursery, under strong lights and on a feeding schedule that may or may not accord with its needs. Like most other things prescribed by hospitals, this is done for reasons of institutional convenience. Pediatricians offer advice that conforms to codes of preferred behavior rather than to the development of a particular child.

In short, the system is the thing, and wherever the system is connected with business, profits determine what happens on a large scale. Nobody bothers to exploit what happens on a small scale it's not part of the "mass market." So, for good education, and good everything else, get out of the mass market, as far as you can.

FRONTIERS

Various Scores

WE have a collection of items which may or may not have "frontier" implications, but are too good to be ignored. Here they are, one by one.

Reviewing a book on the influence ("manipulation," the authors call it) exercised by television on American life (*Remote Control*, by Frank Mankiewicz and Joel Swerdlow), Maya Pines says:

By now, roughly 75 per cent of all Americans get most of their news from television, and half the population gets all its news from the home screen. Unlike newspapers, television is a national medium which reaches millions of people simultaneously with the identical message. It is thus the perfect tool for organizing a revolution—and its potential effect in a totalitarian regime boggles the mind. (*Manchester Guardian*, March 5.)

Television strives to be an effective story-peddler, in order to prove an effective merchandise peddler. In the 60s, reports of the Civil Rights leaders grew dull and attracted only small audiences. What did the program-makers do?

So television turned to more colorful (meaning violent, or extreme) leaders, no matter how minor, and made them into national figures through exposure. The more outrageous their statements, the more time they got on the air. Later on, when the urban riots started, television's dramatic coverage helped to spread the idea of rioting from one city to another. Thus, "television unquestionably hastened and abetted the black revolution in its first years, and then, equally clearly, delayed and distorted it and, indeed, provided the images that led to the 'white backlash,' an epoch from which we have yet to emerge," . . .

In a letter F. J. Waldrop, in West Virginia, says:

Actions, to be genuine, must be prompted from within. Of course, the prompting of another might just at that instant correspond with movement from within. In a book about Leo Tolstoy his daughter describes an incident in which one of the Tolstoy

family was being troubled by his relation to the military. Tolstoy was a pacifist, and the young man in question was considering that position for himself. Tolstoy advised him to go on with the military until it was as repulsive to him as it would be to strangle a child. Only convictions arising within oneself—convictions which are his own—will mean much to anyone.

In Barbourville, Kentucky, there is a store that stocks clothes and household items which poor mountain people can purchase with their labor. Liz Hollinde, a transplanted Yankee from Michigan, runs the store (started ten years ago by a local priest), which now has some two thousand customers. Customers without funds work off their obligations, helping in the store or by making quilts, dolls, and other "mountain" items that can be sold there. Some bring in garden products they have raised, and occasionally an antique. A story in the *Louisville Courier-Journal* (Jan. 16) relates:

Its [the store's] income has grown from \$440 in 1966 to \$23,861 in 1976. The number of families helped grew from 34 to 410 in the same period. The sales from crafts—and many are as rough-hewn as the people that made them—have risen from \$35 in 1969 to \$4,340 in 1976.

Needy people in the region are now able to earn credits at Mrs. Hollinde's Charge-Card Store by working in twelve community centers around Knox County. Defaults on cash loans, she says, have been very small, while the success stories included "children who were able to work their parents out of debt, backwoods inventors who bring in their products to sell with pride, a rural painter who has become better and better with encouragement." The Charge-Card Store, housed in an old community center, now has a woodworking shop, its own kitchen to feed the workers, offices, and a living area for Mrs. Hollinde.

We borrow from an article by Stephen Brush in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (April, 1976) a quotation from Albert Einstein that would have had wholehearted approval from Simone Weil:

I am convinced that we can discover, by means of purely mathematical constructions, those concepts and those lawful connections between them which furnish the key to the understanding of natural phenomena. Experience may suggest the appropriate mathematical concepts, but they most certainly cannot be deduced from it. Experience remains, of course, the sole criterion of physical utility of a mathematical construction. But the creative principle resides in mathematics. In a certain sense, therefore, I hold it true that pure thought can grasp reality, as the ancients dreamed.

The *Progressive* for March presents an appreciation of the late Charles Spencer Chaplin by Edward P. Morgan, which concludes:

Charlie Chaplin was a kind of one-man ambassador to the world. His films—most of them—were almost universally acclaimed, except in the totalitarian societies where they were forbidden to be shown.

It is tempting to suggest that he might have been a sort of one-man United Nations. He punctured arrogance and pomposity with the twirl of his cane. He identified with the world's poor by eating with relish a boiled shoe in *The Gold Rush*. But there is the rub: Chaplin identified with the hapless poor so powerfully, he showed up the cruelty of authoritarianism and the insanity of the assembly line so refreshingly, he would have been stopped in his tracks as a one-man United Nations before he started out. Authorities don't like to make the poor feel important; they are nervous when somebody illuminates the faults of their systems—especially by the devastating weapon of satire.

Although it couldn't have happened, it would have been an interesting experiment for the United Nations to sponsor Charlie Chaplin in a series of one-man appearances to dramatize the idiocy, for instance, of combined world military budgets approaching \$400 billion. That's something really funny.

Another *Progressive* article—in the May issue—begins:

Drastic changes in our eating patterns since the turn of the century have played havoc with our physical wellbeing. Diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and cancer are among the major health problems identified as nutrition-related. Less certain is how a diet that includes more than 126 pounds of sugar and nine pounds of additives each year has

affected our mental well-being. A growing number of scientists and physicians are convinced that many of the 6.4 million Americans now under some form of mental health care—as well as the estimated 13.6 million in need of such care—could be cured by better nutrition.

The *Progressive* writer, Jeanne Schinto, accumulates some of the evidence for this view, then says:

Finally, what is the role of the medical community in all this—not researchers, but practicing physicians? Historically, nutrition was a physician's first line of defense against both physical and mental ills. Now, according to a survey of 114 medical schools by the AMA's Department of Foods and Nutrition, only 63 per cent of the responding schools *offered* nutrition courses, and only 23 per cent *required* a nutrition course.

This score is not so surprising. Recently, when a Senate Committee report recommended some mild reforms in the national diet, the American Medical Association declared that it had not been scientifically shown that there is a relation between diet and disease.