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ONE OF A KIND

ONE day last year a motorist traveling an unfamiliar canyon near the Pacific Coast saw a woman of indeterminate age—sixty or seventy—picking up beer cans and paper trash along the weedy margins of the road. A small boy—nine or ten—was with her, dashing around, finding more stuff to put in the gunny sack for their collection. Well, the motorist thought, there are a few people like that, but not enough of them. He didn't smile at the lady; he wished he had, but by the time he reached this conclusion he was a quarter of a mile away.

The thinking, however, didn't stop. The motorist was from the East and he began comparing the California roadside with the corridors of public buildings in New York. If you have ever been in a municipal court building in New York—or any large city—you can't help remembering how the corridors smell. Urine and carbolic acid seem the dominant odors. Even the public library is not immune to these characteristic smells. The most unloved and reluctantly cared-for places in modern cities are the public buildings—symbolic of the common interest and common good.

You can jump to a lot of conclusions from an observation like that. Just one thing or condition tells you a great deal about a whole range of other conditions. The crude, popular indifference to the quality of public places is matched by the litter in the canyons, which are public places, too, although the farther you get from the cities the better the hiding effects worked by nature. The canyons don't really smell, for one thing, except of sage, and leaf-fall covers up some of the trash. Sometimes you have to look to find it.

Sooner or later, of course, nature begins to suffer defeat. A lot of the majestic trees in the forests of Southern California are dying. The smog is getting to them, weakening the cambium layer and rendering the trees defenseless against their natural enemies such as bark beetles. Nature, after all, is not only a wonderful harmony; it is also a ceaseless war, although the wonderful thing about this "natural" war is the way the countless casualties seem somehow turned to the service of more life. When human indifference or pollution and vandalism are added, the destruction is accelerated and the good coming out of it all diminishes, sometimes to less than nothing.

Well, people see this—a few people, that is, see it. But not enough of them. Rachel Carson saw it, and wrote her book. *Silent Spring* was a quiet, thoughtful treatise, but the contents added up to a scream. *Look* what we are doing to the world! Both nature and man found a voice in Rachel Carson. Mutilated nature and responsible humanity speak in her book. While no one may yet know the full measure of collaboration between man and nature—and what it means or stands for—we do know, or can easily find out, what we are doing wrong. We are able—speaking rhetorically—to stop doing bad things and to start learning what good things at least some people already know how to do. A lot of books have been written on this subject; they come out all the time.

But only the converted read those books, it is often said, which is alas largely true. Yet they have an effect. Sometimes the right book at the right time helps a few people to turn themselves around, or stirs more animation for moving in the direction they were already going. They may begin to think out loud. Some kind of chain reaction may take place. But there are slowing-down processes, too. Still more books are written about these—Engler's *The Brotherhood of Oil* is a good example. Then there is the Academy, where the corridors don't smell but where the classrooms

are likely to be filled with the stale air of irrelevance and sterility.

These are harsh words, but read Alston Chase's article on the high schools and colleges and universities in the *Atlantic* for September. He doesn't sound like an habitual exaggerator. He is a teacher, and there are other teachers writing books and articles which say the same thing. They are doing what they can—which may be a lot—but there aren't enough of them.

Meanwhile, people who have been working hard for change say that the main barrier is in laggard institutions. Wilson Clark, who knows as much as anyone about the potential of alternative energy production, said recently: "Reversing the institutional trends offers the only valid hope of rapidly developing new technologies and conservation approaches." The Academy is one of the institutions which need reversing, but if you read the young men and women who are now doing good things well, you find them saying that they had to get out of the academy in order to get going. One must add, however, that, somehow or other, they also learned in the academy some of the reasons for getting out. The process of authentic awakening is a mite mysterious.

Interestingly, on this matter of reversing institutional trends, E. F. Schumacher said that he never talked to institutions or corporations: he talked with *people*. He left the problem of changing the institutions they worked for to time and the river. Yet he did some reversing just the same. And a little before he died he said:

> Traveling across the United States quite recently, I met many people with a splendid spirit of self-reliance. Many of them had a better time than they ever had in their lives because they were discovering a *new freedom—th*e less you need, the freer you become. The idea of possible scarcity did not give them nightmares; on the contrary, it stimulated and exhilarated them. "Let's discover whether we really need all that."

Well, banks and oil companies and universities may have nightmares when it looks as though "progress" will grind to a stop, but some of the people who work in these places are more like the ones Schumacher met on his journeyings. Again, you could say that there are not enough of them. Yet even a vice president of an oil company can sometimes see the light—in one case, Ben C. Ball of Gulf, who said recently:

> Our "energy problem" does not have a solution in the sense that we can win a war or put a man on the moon; rather, ours is a brand-new, long-term situation in which we must learn to live. And it raises a whole new set of issues with which we are largely unfamiliar and a set of social conditions with which we are poorly equipped to deal.

Of course, Mr. Ball, as we remember, has substantial Academy benefits under his belt. We hear from good professors right along. But these are *people*, not institutions. Yet, as we are now in the habit of saying, there are not enough of them.

The answer to that is, people are all we've got. And if educational institutions are at fault, they seem to turn out a somewhat higher proportion of change-agents than other grout enterprises. This doesn't of course make them good places, but perhaps less bad, you might say. The limitations of even well-intentioned institutions are made clear by a letter to the *Ecologist* (*English* magazine) last November. The writer is Simon Lewis, who says:

> I have been aware throughout my course in Environmental Sciences at the University of East Anglia (which I originally saw as a prime vehicle for increasing my environmental awareness), of the constricting nature of our academic institutions. The course at U.E.A. does offer potential in that a thorough grounding in the environmental sciences is offered. There are also future hopes for the development of the intermediate technology side. But for the moment, the bias most of us feel is to turning out environmental technocrats, more able to monitor the ablutions of industry than to develop divergent thinking on environmental matters. In fact, in practice the gap between environmental knowledge, attitude and behaviour has never been more poignantly exposed than in the members of the school.

The reason? Well, some of the reasons are:

> The academics, one must remember, begat and nurtured by the present system, look for work that neatly quantifies and isolates environmental problems, because undergraduate courses are mainly geared to sifting out the five per cent who will go on to do research. The multifaceted nature of environmental problems emphasizes the particular waste of this process. For example, high marks are often given in projects which correctly identify the spatial occurrence of trace elements in crabs, but not those who set themselves the difficult task of bringing together many diverse elements in an environmental plan. The lecturers were bred in pure science, and this is what they seek to perpetuate and foster. . . .
>
> The potential of the School of Environmental Sciences is not recognized at present, except by a few deviants.

And there are not enough of them.

If we keep on speaking in institutional terms we shall have to admit that the outlook is not at all bright. So, if you talk to a youngster about his future schooling, it may be a good idea to tell him that he should stick at formal studying only until he can't stand it any longer. As Gandhi said to Richard Gregg, "Keep your books until you no longer feel deprived without them."

This, you could say, is a tempered version of Ivan Illich's *De-Schooling Society*, and John Holt's *Growing Without Schooling.* In any event, this seems a time, not for designing new institutions, but for making do without them, or for putting better foci of influence in their place.

Well, back to the canyon on the California coast and the lady and her grandson (?), picking up beer cans. Why did they do it? Who knows? The grandson doubtless did it because he was with his grandmother, who set an example and wheedled him into helping. They didn't exert much influence, those two, since no one else was likely to see them on a weekday morning. Still, they made the canyon a somewhat nicer place, and they did it because they (she) wanted to. This is the principle of the thing, and according to the wise we should always start with principle.

Another example, not really different in character, goes further in the direction we are aiming. Five or six years ago a fifteen-year-old boy, exposed by the Academy (high school) to biological studies, learned that the trees in California (Southern California) are dying at the rate of about 50,000 a year. This, for that boy, was worse than finding mountains of beer cans along the canyon roadside. He couldn't stand the idea of the forests fading away. What a picture—the mountains turned to wasteland, a moonscape without trees! All the little animals gone. No birds. Maybe not even crickets. Just wisps of greenish yellow smog blowing around. Well, this youth—the Sierra Club has published a book about him, *Tree Boy*, by Shirley Nagel—went to work to replant the forests with smog-resistant seedlings. He organized help wherever he could find it—children, old men and women, handicapped people—and they all worked together to replant trees. He made friends with county, state, and national forest service people—which requires a bit of doing for a lad in his teens—so that they took him seriously, valuing the help of his crews of earnest youngsters.

Today the Tree People go on planting trees, and telling about planting trees to school children, running educational classes and workshops at their environmental educational center (some old fire department buildings with ten acres for growing things, and being reinhabited and rehabilitated by the Tree People). Now and then the "older" Tree People—hardly one of them yet twenty-five—go out on speaking dates. Other people ask how do they do what they do. How do they fan this spark of theirs to a flame so that several thousand youngsters want to help plant trees every year? The top men in the forestry departments, the professors in forestry schools, and others of like mind don't seem embarrassed to ask why this tree-planting program is such a great success. At any rate, they listen to what the Tree People have to say. On one occasion, a Tree People speaker at Berkeley, after addressing an audience made up of foresters, professors, and

people like that, wondered if he had had any effect at all. He was twenty-two, and they were forty and fifty, out in the world, doing their difficult and complicated jobs.

Well, the eventual response, in the form of a swelling tide of feedback, almost made the boy weep. The hidden longings in that audience started coming to the surface. They let him know. But what they learned from him, heaven only knows. What could he tell them? "You go out and put plants in the earth. Then water them. A token contribution is all it is; we're not even catching up with the mortality of California trees, but we go on doing it. We don't want to do anything else, right now. What would California be without trees?"

The question has infection in it. Knowledge and some skill are required for planting trees, which keeps the operation from being "all heart." The heart is there, of course, but after you admit this it's best to talk about trees and what they live by and die by. Which is what the Tree People do. And they plant five to ten thousand trees a year, some in the cities, some in parks where a lot of people see them and see them being planted.

Could anything like this momentum be generated in the academies of the land? It doesn't seem likely. Involved is a non-academic sort of transmission of insight, impulse, and persistence. A school may be a place which helps this sort of thing to go on, or it may get in the way—suppress the insight, stifle the impulse, waste the persistence. But we should most certainly separate our thinking about these things from places and institutions. If you wanted to see if you could produce a modest generation of Johnny Appleseeds, would you establish a graduate school or go to the Tree People for advice? In any event it is obvious that Johnny Appleseeds come one of a kind and there can't be any ordinary educational program for producing them.

But there must be *something* we can do!

Well, E. F. Schumacher, who was so often asked for help by people in need, gave some thought to this question. He tells what he decided in his Foreword to *Forest Farming* (London: Watkins, 1976, by Douglas and de J. Hart):

> Travelling through India, I came to the conclusion that there was no salvation for India except through TREES. I advised my Indian friends as follows:
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> "The Good Lord has not disinherited any of her children and as far as India is concerned he has given her a variety of trees, unsurpassed anywhere in the world. There are trees for almost all human needs. One of the greatest teachers of India was the Buddha who included in his teaching the obligation of every good Buddhist that he should plant and see to the establishment of one tree at least every five years. As long as this was observed, the whole large area of India was covered with trees, free of dust, with plenty of water, plenty of shade, plenty of food and materials. Just imagine you could establish an ideology which made it obligatory for every able-bodied person in India, man, woman, and child, to do that little thing—to plant and see to the establishment of one tree a year, five years running. . . . It could be done without a penny of foreign aid; there is no problem of savings and investment. It should produce foodstuffs, fibres, building material, shade, water, almost anything that a man really needs."

The idea is so great that you immediately see the sense in it. And if one is limited to words, how could it be better described? You also realize that a tree-planting population, if it should ever exist again, would be a population whose habits would probably be admirable in nearly all ways. What goes naturally with planting trees? What must exist before you begin to want to plant them? These are questions we have no answer to; they may be questions we shouldn't need to ask.

Today it is the one-of-a-kind sort of people we need more of, since all the others will continue to be shaped by institutions, until some Pied Piper comes along to turn them aimlessly loose in the wide, wide world. A school is a place where you learn the alphabet, how to spell, add and subtract, and where you cherish your timidity until you have the nerve to become one of a kind. You can learn those things anywhere, if you want to. Not enough people want to, of course, so they learn

them in school. Not very well, these days, according to the college professors who inherit what the high schools turn out.

But the fact is that we want them to learn *something else*—which is why those professors went to hear the Tree People spokesman talk. What do we want them to learn? At root, we want them to learn what Booker T. Washington saw in his fellow students at Hampton Institute where, a hundred or so years ago, he began his own higher education: In *Up from Slavery* he tells about those students and what animated them:

> Nearly all had had enough actual contact with the world to teach them the need for education. Many of the older ones were, of course, too old to master the text-books very thoroughly . . . but they made up in earnestness what they lacked in books. Many of them were as poor as I was, and besides having to wrestle with their books, they had to struggle with a poverty which prevented their having the necessities of life. . .
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> The great and prevailing idea that seemed to take possession of everyone was to prepare himself to lift up the people at his home. No one seemed to think of himself. And the officers and teachers, what a rare set of human beings they were! They worked for the students night and day, in season and out of season. They seemed happy only when they were helping the students in some manner.

Who were the teachers? Damnyankees, of course.

What have the qualities of these students to do with institutions? Practically nothing.

What can be said about them? Practically nothing can be said about them, unless you want to wither or sentimentalize what you are trying to say. Why should this be? Kierkegaard attempted to explain, and while others doubtless have too, we have enough space for what he said:

> Ordinary communication, like objective thinking in general, has no secrets; only a doubly reflected subjective thinking has them. That is to say, the entire essential content of subjective thought is essentially secret, because it cannot be directly communicated. This is the meaning of the secrecy. The fact that the knowledge in question does not lend itself to direct utterance . . . makes it a secret for everyone who is not in the same way doubly reflected within himself. And the fact that this is the essential form of such truth, makes it important to express in any other manner. Hence when anyone proposes to communicate such truth directly, he proves his stupidity; and if anyone else demands this of him, he too shows he is stupid. Over against such an elusive and artistic communication of truth, the customary human stupidity will always raise the cry that it is egoism. And when stupidity at length prevails, and the communication becomes direct, stupidity will have gained so much, that the author of the communication will have become equally stupid with the pretended recipient.

And that, alas, is what the good people in the Academy have to cope with, not only in other people, but mostly in themselves. So, for a wholesome change, some people prefer to pick up cans, or plant trees, or build windmills, or sometimes, like Francois Villon, sing songs. The idea is to join others in being one of a kind. "Shakespeare," T. S. Eliot said, "acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum." This is the sort of goal that curriculum-makers need to keep in mind. Until they no longer feel obliged to remain curriculum-makers.

REVIEW
SIGNPOSTS OF CHANGE

ANTHOLOGIES are both useful and frustrating to the general reader. While you are enjoying the gems, one after another, you keep wondering what you are missing. What *else* did this writer say? Anthologies have some sort of cultural symmetry—mainly, perhaps, the symmetry taken from the editor's decisions—but not the symmetry of one man's thinking, except, now and then, what comes through by happy chance.

The anthology we most enjoy dipping into is *The Modern Tradition* (OUP, 1965) edited by Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, Jr., which is of course full of major and minor mysteries, but so luminously presented! The ingredients are courage, agony, and an exquisite sense of form which draws you back into the book again and again. The freedom the moderns were determined to enjoy was lacking in resource, but they made swan songs out of their failures.

The egoism of identifying work as "modern"—which seems to mean "we are the people"—should have been enough to predict its failure, but everyone, critics and readers alike (with the possible exception of an artist or two), shared in the vanity, which seemed to come so naturally. We know better now, and may stop using the word. AS Robert Martin Adams says in the Spring *Hudson Review:*

> Of all the empty and meaningless categories, hardly any is inherently as empty and meaningless as "the modern." Like "youth," it is a self-destroying concept; unlike "youth," it has a million and one potential meanings. Nothing is so dated as yesterday's modern and nothing, however dated in itself, fails to qualify as 'modern" so long as it enjoys the exquisite privilege of having been created yesterday.

So, when you read *The Modern Tradition* it seems best to forget that category and find a better name for the blending of wonder and pain those magnificent extracts generate. What do "modern" works have in common? The editors say briefly:

> If we can postulate a modern tradition, we must add that it is a paradoxically untraditional tradition. Modernism strongly implies some sort of historical discontinuity, either a liberation from inherited patterns or, at another extreme, deprivation and disinheritance. Committed to everything in human experience that militates against custom, abstract order, and even reason itself, modern literature has elevated individual existence over social man, unconscious feeling over self-conscious perception, passion and will over intellection and systematic morals, dynamic vision over static image, dense actuality over practical reality. . . . Interwoven with the access of knowledge, the experimental verve, and the personal urgency of the modern masters is, as Trilling . . . finds, a sense of loss, alienation, and despair. These are the two faces, positive and negative, of the modern as the anti-traditional: freedom and deprivation, a living present and a dead past.

So modern is, we might say, the very model of an adolescent phenomenon. Its creators had so much reason to hate the past that they could make no use of it. Today we read the *Gita* to make sense out of such dilemmas, hoping to see why breaking with the past is both a necessity and a terrible risk, to learn what might be done to keep from falling into further abysses.

Well, we have for review another anthology devoted to this problem—*Humanistic Psychology: A Source Book* (Prometheus Books, 1978, $16.95) edited by I. David Welch, George A. Tate, and Fred Richards. Here there is the same sort of question—you wonder what you are missing, what Maslow or Rogers or Frankl may have said elsewhere—and also another difficulty. Psychology is a profession, an academically organized profession with leaders and pioneers and a rank and file. A literary anthology commonly excludes the mediocrity of the rank and file, but a professional anthology has to be "representative," and this may mean that a lot of the "ordinary" gets in. But happily, humanistic psychology, as a branch of a profession, is scarcely more than a quarter of a century old, so

that its spokesmen have a high proportion of genuine pioneers, not yet submerged by the crowd.

Still, every book representing a "movement" is bound to be a mix of signals and noise. The signals tell what is really going on, while the noise is made up of weakened and distorted echoes. Telling the difference between the signals and the noise is likely to be seen as a somewhat presumptuous undertaking for a lay reviewer, guaranteed to irritate various readers, so here we shall focus on what the few leaders have to say. By common consent, their contributions are likely to have the most signals.

For example, Abraham Maslow, who has three papers in the book, says (in "Some Educational Implications of the Humanistic Psychologies"):

> The upshot of the past decade or two of turmoil and change within the field of psychology can be viewed as a local manifestation of a great change taking place in all fields of knowledge. We are witnessing a great revolution in thought, in the Zeitgeist itself: the creation of a new image of man and society and of religion and science. It is the kind of change that happens, as Whitehead said, once or twice in a century. This is not an *improvement* of something; it is a real change in direction altogether. It is as if we had been going north and are now going south instead.

What does he mean? He seems well aware of what he is after. Contributing a useful bit of history, Maslow's early associate, James B. Klee, tells how they began the department of psychology at Brandeis University in 1951. The intent was to restore to psychology its lost dimensions:

> Maslow's early work on the self-actualizing personality had disclosed the strength of holding relatively positive values in comparison to the deficiency of the want/need orientation of the average person. In an attempt to formulate a theory of human motivation for the individual as an integrated or organized whole, Maslow proposed a hierarchy of basic needs. The hierarchy of basic needs—physiological needs, safety needs, the needs for belongingness and love, esteem needs and the need for self-actualization—can be viewed as a pyramid with the more basic needs forming the large base and the higher needs emerging at the top. The peak experience was the culmination. Seen by Maslow as experiences of awe, self-sufficiency, playfulness and wonder, peak experiences are those moments in which life is experienced as full of meaning and purpose.
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> In his later years, Maslow began to explore a whole new list of needs related to self-actualization which he described as growth or Being needs in contrast to deficiency needs. In the self-actualizing personality, the so-called deficiency needs were seen to give way more and more to positive Being-values. As they were satisfied, the basic needs became relatively inactive or functionally absent as forces of motivation. Thus, the need for self-actualization became more active and capable of fulfillment as the basic needs were met. The self-actualizing personality became increasingly motivated by such higher needs as the needs for truth, goodness and beauty. This metamotivation, as Maslow termed it, found its best expression in those self-actualizing persons who, more than most, could be described as spontaneous, natural and free. Such persons were motivated by a movement toward wholeness, completion, simplicity, honesty and justice.
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> During the last years of his life Maslow defined normalcy in terms of these Being-values and cognitions. . . . Maslow's "peak" became a range, a way of being in the world, a plateau that included, it seemed to him, the so-called basic needs as simply some among the many needs of whole human beings. Such a conception of motivation made more comprehensible those persons who, while sacrificing so much of the basic comforts of life, had held on to their creative visions, findings and insights. It is equally significant when we attempt to understand and experience this process of self-actualization in a world now faced with a scarcity rather than an abundance of many resources.

From this we see that psychologists who look at man as Maslow saw him are regarding the human being rightside up. This is a psychology of health, nobility, and aspiration. It leaves behind the theological language but brings back the untarnished meanings found in the teachings of Buddha, of Lao tse, of Plato, and in various heroic expressions of Promethean men. You hardly realize that all this is happening. Whatever else

you say about humanistic psychology—and there is a lot to be said, as Richard Farson showed recently—you must say something about this. If the adjective "humanistic" applies, then this psychology regards man in an upright position. There are still many mysteries—right side up or crawling on the ground, human behavior is filled with contradictions—but a source of self-discovery is at least admitted, whatever the misleading simplifications of what this means. It is "a real change of direction."

Dozens of humanistic psychologists contribute to this book. In addition to Maslow we especially recommend papers by Carl Rogers, Viktor Frankl, and Floyd Matson. Rogers writes of the great changes in outlook (in which he has been a major force), reaching far beyond the confines of what is thought to be "psychology." Speaking of the work of Philip Slater, Theodore Roszak, and others, he says: "I believe these writers are essentially correct in predicting that our American way of life will be radically altered by the growth of a new value system, a new culture in which feelings and subjectivity and openness (rather than hypocrisy) have a prominent place, alongside intelligence." Frankl dares to identify the "pursuit of happiness" as aimed in fact at "intoxication and stupefaction," and he repeats a timeless verity: *"Happiness cannot be pursued because it must ensue,* and it can ensue only as a result of living out one's self-transcendence, one's dedication and devotion to a cause to be served, or another person to be loved."

In evidence of the far-reaching character of the cultural change of which humanistic psychology is but one noticeable expression, the editors have included E. F. Schumacher's paper, "Economics Should Begin with People, not Goods," and Sam Love's essay: "We Must Make Things Smaller and Simpler."

A careful reading of this volume shows that the humanistic psychology movement has helped to open a way for expression of a psychology and philosophy of the heights of human life. Some resulting confusion was to be expected.

COMMENTARY
LOOKING FOR A RAINBOW

THE people at *Rain* are putting out another reader—*Stepping Stones: Appropriate Technology and Beyond*, edited by Lane deMoll and Gigi Coe, published this month by Schocken Books at $7.95. We haven't yet seen the book, but hardly need to, since the October *Rain* lists the contents and contributors. Owners of this book will have in one volume such classics as Schumacher's "Buddhist Economics," Howard Odum's "Energy, Ecology and Economics," Amory Lovins' "The Road Not Taken," Ivan Illich on "Radical Monopoly," essays or extracts from Stewart Brand, Wilson Clark, Joel Schatz, Lappé and Collins, Sim Van der Ryn, Murray Bookchin, Leopold Kohr, John Todd, Scott Burns, plus some of Albert Howard, and of Douglas and Hart's *Forest Farming*, Richard Gregg's "Voluntary Simplicity," two contributions by Wendell Berry, Hassan Fathy on mud brick, Malcolm Wells on ecological architecture, some musings by Karl Hess, material by Gil Friend and David Morris, Andy Alpine on "The Briarpatch Network," essays by C. R. Ashbee and Steve Baer, some testimony on small business by Barry Stein, and lots of stuff by the *Rain* writers, Tom Bender and Lee Johnson—not to forget Margaret Mead. Copies may be bought from *Rain*, 2270 NW Irving, Portland, Ore. 97210.

Stepping Stones promises to be the best collection ever of the work of people who both act and write (see Frontiers), and about the best Christmas present we can think of, too. *Stepping Stones*, you could say, shows the health that is in us, now beginning to be realized in practice.

What would a healthy society be like? Well, one indication of health would be that a magazine like *Rain* could be self-supporting. It isn't yet. The editors and publishers work for very little—you have to, if you try to pioneer—but the paper is not yet breaking even. It needs and deserves support.

What is the best way to help *Rain?* Subscribe to and tell other people about this stimulating and informative monthly which costs $15 a year (address above). Readers get other readers, *Rain* has found out (so has MANAS).

Incidentally, *The Sane Alternative* by James Robertson can be purchased from the author for $4 (plus postage) at 7 St. Ann's Villas, London WII 4RU, U.K.—information inexcusably omitted in our (Oct. 4) review!

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
NO CATHARSIS IN SIGHT

IN *Notes from the Underground* (1864), Dostoevsky, greatest of the diagnosticians of "modern" ills, described the impotence of critical self-consciousness:

> I'm a sick man . . . I'm a spiteful man. I'm an unattractive man. . . . I'm convinced that not only a great deal of consciousness, but even all consciousness, is a disease. . . Why did it always happen as if on purpose . . . in those very moments when I was most capable of being conscious of all the niceties of "the lofty and the beautiful" that I not only felt, but did such ugly things—things that everyone does, but which as if on purpose occurred to me precisely when I was most conscious that they should not be done at all? The more conscious I was of "goodness" and of all that is "lofty and beautiful," the more deeply I sank into my mire, and the more ready I was to get completely stuck in it. . . .
>
> The direct, legitimate result of consciousness is inertia. . . . I emphatically repeat: all "direct" people and men of action are active only because they are mentally undeveloped.

The brilliance of Dostoevsky's insight, briefly sampled here, seems repeated again and again in modern criticism. We see—oh how clearly we see—what is wrong, but taking action requires the courage shaped by a simplicity we do not possess. This is nowhere better illustrated than in current essays in our good magazines. In the *Atlantic* for September two writers, one an educator, the other a teacher of literature and an all-purpose critic, look at major aspects of the American scene—education and social class. It is difficult to disagree with what they say. The resulting clarity *is* startling.

Benjamin DeMott, the critic, reviews a book about class in the United States, then turns to a recent film (*Blue Collar*) and a rock singer for the raw reality sociology texts can't seem to get hold of. While Americans claim they don't believe in class and don't often use the word, they talk about it with other words. Meanwhile, we declare that class is becoming less and less important in America. Mr. DeMott comments:

> The conviction that attitudinal change is in progress isn't accompanied by enthusiasm for legislation aimed at altering the social system. The idea of automatically according higher status to a person simply because of the standing of his profession or the reputation of his fortune vaguely bothers people, and a third of us want to see "reputational inequality" abolished. (The innocent idea seems to be that this could be done without altering income differentials.)
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> But there's deep and broad opposition to "a major change in the American class system." And in the heart of that opposition is belief in the American record of social mobility . . . that, in this country, the success myth—the myth of the Rise—is no myth at all.

That's how we say we feel, but the book under review (*Social Standing* by Coleman and Rainwater) says something else: "Everything *is* permitted . . . including social put-downs. Evaluations by class, stoniness about 'inferiors,' helpless envy of 'superiors'—all of it is, in this text, right as rain.

Harvey Keitel, an actor in *Blue Collar*, gets across some of the consequences:

> In one sequence we watch his face as he stares unbelievingly at his daughter, having discovered that she has mutilated her mouth with home-made wire braces. The child, supercharged with dreams of drum-majorette stardom, has been rejected because of buck teeth by her school marching corps. (No money in the budget for an orthodontist.) Feelings come in a rush—helplessness, pity, confusion, anger, awe. But in the corner of the actor's eye, or in the frown, you also sense determination—a refusal not to attempt to understand.—*The System is responsible, but still . . . my daughter did this to herself. So what is the System? Is the System us?*

The rock singer, Bruce Springsteen, becomes the voice of an expanding social layer:

> Like the rest of us, greasers are teased and raddled by false promises, crazy aspirations, and media hype. Unlike the rest of us, they're never awarded a minute's playing time in the great American upward-mobility match. And Springsteen seems to sing from the dead center of their sense both

> of possibility and of possibility frustrated. The longings (gonna win, gonna be Somebody) are, God knows, commercially contrived—but they're undeniably vibrant. As is the singer. His voice is full of cocky, choked, brazen-it-out fury—the anger of the unfashionable and unremediated and unknown, leaderless, lobbyless people on whom, as they cruise and booze, it's just now dawning, in the songs at least, that they've been sold out. Who's guilty? Who sold them? Teachers, testers, "guidance counselors," principals, you and I, Everybody Nice. How exactly did it happen? Why, they were suckered—suckered by shop, by voc. ed., by legends of The Stars, legends of good ol' boys, by Speed stores and Dallas Cowgirls and stock car racing flicks and ten thousand country and western "hits" . . . in a word, they were had by The System. And, boy and girl, they're going absolutely nowhere.

It's all there in what Mr. DeMott says—the nervously twitching longings, as impotent as Dostoevsky's Underground man, and all the nuances of disappointment and the outbreaks of anger and blame that come in great waves of resentment which, being only resentment, can hardly go anywhere either.

We're not saying Mr. DeMott ought to tell us what to do. We're saying that at times he seems as good as Dostoevsky in telling how it is. For the stern and, as it seems, impossible counsel on what to do, one must read Tolstoy and Gandhi.

The other *Atlantic* writer in this issue is Alston Chase. His article, "Skipping Through College," seems among the clearest analyses of what is wrong with higher education in America that we've seen in years. He provides an account of the cycles which educational thinking in America has been going through, while the quality of education has been going down. The good writers on this subject have switched from arguing about what ought to be done to pointing out that whatever we are doing or even planning, *it won't work.* They show this from history—fairly recent history. Both achievement and standards keep going down. Mr. Chase interrupts his grim recital to remark:

> Nothing is more trendy than education. Yesterday's heresy is today's creed. Five years ago everyone was still calling for more "relevant" courses and dropping "obsolete" requirements. At that time those who saw a decline in academic standards were either afraid to say so or were not listened to when they talked. Now it is respectable to decry the decline, to advocate quality and getting back to basics.
>
> This bandwagon effect leads to the periodic reinvention of the wheel. For the last 150 years or longer, American education has seen a swing of the pendulum between scholasticism and vocationalism and between permissiveness and authoritarianism.

The present swing is toward "core requirements," notably at Harvard. "It appears," Mr. Chase remarks, "we are about to reinvent the wheel again."

He is not impressed. He proposes that the contest is between ineffectual Platonists and self-interested relativists (the Sophists of today), and that while calling for a return to "core" studies may seem a shrill Platonic cry, the relativists are whittling away at the proposed reforms.

In general, the modernization of education has meant the trivializing and demoralization of the curriculum. The social scientists, Mr. Chase says, are now in charge:

> If Platonism was at the heart of the old academic ideology, sophism was at the heart of the new. For this new egalitarianism of ideas was based on a new relativism which was derived from the methodology of the social sciences. . . . This methodology was borrowed from the teachings of the logical positivists, who held that, roughly speaking, no proposition is meaningful unless it is verifiable. . . . For instance, they held that all moral statements were meaningless. When I say "Stealing is wrong," they said, I am not saying anything at all; what I am doing instead is announcing my opposition to stealing. . . . Moral utterances, therefore, only express emotional attitudes which have no objective validity.

There must be some kind of "dialectical" relationship between what Benjamin DeMott reports and Alston Chase describes in the September *Atlantic.* Both articles qualify as contemporary Notes from the Underground.

FRONTIERS

Words from England

THERE doesn't seem to be any way to avoid giving the impression that the good things happening around the world are all the result of people who write. This is an unhappy distortion, inevitable, perhaps, in an age of so many words. Here we take note of what seem the best words available on what seem the best things that are happening. We would not know about them except for people who write about things done by people who seldom write. There is a fairly good supply, of course, of people who do both.

An example of the latter is available in an English quarterly, *Whole Earth*, published at 11 George Street, Brighton BN2 1 RH, U.K. at £2.20 a year (overseas) and 35 pence for single copies by mail. The paper is filled with progress reports from people who have devised a life "out of the crazy consumerist rat race"—working toward what self-sufficiency is possible, which sometimes turns out to be more than you think. The paper is about three years old and keeps growing in circulation—the early back numbers are all sold out.

The reviews are good, telling about English books and magazines that may never be noticed in the United States. An inside-back-cover story describes the "Simple Supplies" store located at the address of the paper:

> The shop is becoming established in the community as a thriving center for local and ecological issues. Besides selling food, some hardware, and such things as toilet rolls made from recycled paper we would like to broaden the scope of our simple supplies still further. But we are aware of the dangers of becoming too big. Small, closely linked units are what we prefer to develop.
>
> Simple Supplies is more than a wholefoods shop—it is part of an alternative approach to established values. If you want to form a collective for crafts, recycling or other work be brave—have a go. If you want advice or support come visit us. The future looks exciting.

The rest of this story tells about the store's development and the people who work there:

> On the most fundamental level the business has been growing steadily. Our turnover is about £700 a week, which enables us to order large enough quantities to benefit from discounts and thus bring down prices and expand our range, so that our little shop is almost at bursting point. Because of the pressure on space we are converting an adjoining alley into a storage room. . . .
>
> One of the nice things about the shop is that there are always volunteer workers and new faces. Sometimes children contribute their own vitality.
>
> Other people in our wider group include Derek White and Pete Blench, founders of Simple Supplies, who still maintain an active interest. Penny Fox cooks food to sell in the shop, Horace Herring works upstairs in the Whole Earth office, and Kevin McNulty is establishing the Wonderwheel Bicycle Workshop.

An especially good feature in this issue (March, 1978) is an interview with Tony Benn, British Minister of State for Energy, who was asked questions which led to the following replies:

> Well, I think there are dangers in all energy, and I must not give the impression that the only environmental factors arise from nuclear power. If you take the mining case and go in for open cast mining, it has a terrific effect on the countryside. . . . So I don't want to give you the impression that it's only nuclear power which has environmental hazards. . . . But there are special dangers arising from the long life of nuclear waste, and the risk to the proliferation of nuclear weapons. All you can do is bring them out in the open, publish everything you know, let people reach a view. . .
>
> Ah, well, then there are other questions here which arise. High technology of all kinds, including but not exclusively nuclear power, do have an impact on the nature of democracy. If you are dependent on a very centralized system involving very high technology, then you have focused a great deal of your dependence on very, very small centers, vulnerable to terrorism, vulnerable to sabotage, vulnerable to all sorts of things, and then in defense of these positions, you are liable to provide a sort of defense system which may impact on civil liberties. It's what one would call the vulnerability factor of high technology. I'm glad it's come into public debate

> because I think we have under-estimated the full cost of the paths open to us in social, political and democratic terms. But it isn't a totally one-sided argument, because we have to consider, also, the impact on civil liberties in a society which was quite incapable of maintaining decent living standards due to a shortage of energy.

Apparently, British politicians are a cut above the kind we have in the United States.

A review of Amory Lovins' *Soft Energy Paths*—which seems to have had an effect on Mr. Benn's thinking—gives further evidence of the open-mindedness of British officialdom. The Economics Director of the UK Atomic Energy Authority, reviewing Lovins, has declared: "This book stands as a first class lucid and concise diagnosis and exposition of the energy problems facing the world." Agreeing, the *Whole Earth* editor, Horace Herring, says:

> Amory Lovins, the American Friends of the Earth analyst, has written a book which for the first time examines all the energy options from a consistent set of values and assumptions. . . .
>
> He is humble enough to admit that "nobody can make a completely value-free analysis." . . . With great honesty he outlines his basic opinions and values and goes straight to the heart of the energy problem by saying: "Underlying much of the energy debate is a tacit, implicit divergence about what the energy problem 'really' is."
>
> He defines the problem by using the analogy of a bathtub which cannot be kept filled because the hot water keeps running out. Is the answer to get a bigger water heater or could we do better with a cheap, low technology plug? This analogy neatly illustrates what Lovins calls the hard and soft energy paths.

The review is long and well conveys the force of Amory Lovins' arguments.