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SOCIETY BY DESIGN

BREAD LABOR: II

AT this time in the U.S. there is much agitation for the right of men and women to do the same work. While I have no quarrel with the right of each person to do the work he chooses, I question the wisdom of both sexes doing the same work. (My thoughts here refer mainly to rural or homestead living—urban living is a very different situation.) This is not a matter of equality but a question of roles. We need a greater appreciation of the contribution of the opposite sex and not just a shift to doing the same work. The push for sameness in work is an urban phenomenon and receives much media space, but it makes little sense in a subsistence economy. We have been developing rapidly into a society of independent people as regards dependence on family, friends, and neighbors, yet remain very dependent on the impersonal society at large for our daily needs. This makes us a much more mobile and emotionally unstable people. Each unit in the society becomes more interchangeable (and less needed personally). I suggest that we need to reverse this trend. We need to become more dependent on our families, neighbors and friends (and more needed as a result), and more independent of the society at large for meeting our needs. As a result we will be more needed, less of an interchangeable part, more emotionally stable, and a happier person as well.

One by-product of making men and women interchangeable in their jobs is to make them less needing of one another in practical, everyday things, yet needing each other emotionally as much as ever. However, recognizing the need of one another for emotional health is much less concrete and more easily disregarded than the physical necessities of daily life on the homestead. When you need your spouse for such visible physical things as baking bread or hauling logs from the woods, it can be a stabilizing force during emotional storms that otherwise might cause separation. To me, hauling logs and baking bread are jobs of equal status. Down through history respect for women has been part of the thinking of all sensitive people. But when we each can do each job equally well we are less dependent on one another and less needed.

Baking bread and hauling logs tend to be rural jobs, admittedly. It is my contention that urban living makes us less dependent on one another in meeting our daily needs, so we fall back in impersonal dependence on society at large. Our spouses become interchangeable, as do we, and we are on the way to becoming impersonal cogs with resulting emotional stress. This is one of the major ills of our present social arrangements and a main concern of the present writing. We need to design where we can see very directly our need of others and their need of us. This will require developing certain special skills—as highly as possible—so that we will be of more use to our neighbors and feel more needed. To the extent that we do not specialize—are able to build docks as well as spin—to that extent we are less needing of others. We have a vested interest in the work roles of the sexes being separate, in order to create dependence on one another, to increase the quality of our work by specializing and to create a feeling of teamwork, cooperation and care in the family unit rather than competition.

Work roles can give stability in an unfirm social environment. Many societies have clear-cut roles in human relationships that aid in reducing tension and give emotional support, i.e. husband-wife, mother-daughter, etc. Work roles give people areas of responsibility and a resultant feeling of worth. They reduce competition, conflict and criticism, and develop a higher degree of excellence in the work.

Women's liberation is an urban movement in response to urban life. Those who adopt its values for decentralized living may find that, like many urban fashions, they are not only ill-suited to, but destructive of, rural life. It is fighting the wrong battle too late. Changing titles from Mrs. and Miss to Ms. may be chiefly symbolic but it is fifty years too late (maybe 150 years too late). What we need now is the elimination of *all* useless titles. The battle that needs joining is the liberation of all enslaved and oppressed people. We need greater respect for children and for the elderly, for ethnic and religious minorities as well as for women. We need an alliance of all concerned people to work for this common end—without the blindfold of partisanship.

It is sad that more marriages do not make use of the mental abilities of both partners. Usually one person gets the challenge and excitement and the other does not. What a waste to the world and to their own development and happiness. It is better for one to help the other in the work, even to be used by them, than to stagnate. (We all need to be used—in the right way. What could be more sad than living an unneeded life?) Better still is to work as a team where the input of each aids the other.

One of our greatest poverties is the misuse of our energies. We have avocations, sports and hobbies *ad nauseam*, most of which are escape hatches from jobs we do not enjoy. We have then a double loss: the loss of selling ourselves for work which we neither enjoy nor believe in, and in addition the waste of energy spent in avocation to ease our frustrated lives. Until the basic needs of health, food, clothing and shelter for all people are met, this waste of energy in sport and avocation is a crime against humanity—it is irresponsible living.

Think of the tremendous amounts of energy and time spent on preparedness. I'm not referring here to the great drain of human ability and energy that goes into police forces and armies, but to the daily energy expended in exercises, drilling and fitness games, in jogging and sports. What a boon to mankind if these energies could be channelled in ways that would alleviate suffering, without any loss in the fitness involved. Wouldn't it be grand to pedal exercises that store electricity instead of jogging? Why not hook up the weights in the gym to generate the energy to light the school? Has there ever been a school powered in this way—by exercising students and the staff? If anyone demanded that we lift weights and set them down again until exhausted, it would be considered torture, yet in athletic training we do it all the time. Why not seek a way to have the energy doubly useful—to build up your body and help others at the same time? If you were to dump out good fuel oil regularly, it would be shocking. You would lose friends rapidly and possibly end up in court, yet you can squander energy in jogging and tennis and be in style. This is another of the many reasons for designing a better way to live.

Many of us are concerned that so much of the world's material, time and energy is spent on space programs weapons and the military. These are tremendously dangerous aspects of our society, wasteful and insensitive to human needs. But among those of us who are aware of that sickness and oppose it, how many note that already we are spending more on sports than on all the military programs combined? (If one half our population spends one and one half hours each week in sports related activities—playing, earning money for equipment, watching, tickets, travel costs, etc.—the total expenditure of time, energy and money is as great as our expenditure for weapons. So while we work to move those funds slated to be spent on preparation for killing into positive channels, let's remember that we have as well another huge store of energy that can also be diverted to making a more decent world for all.)

I have not always been opposed to sports. I have greatly enjoyed mountain climbing, skiing, tennis, and I spent eight years using a long stick to hop over a bar. But the idea of sport as presently conceived has begun to trouble me. There seems

injustice in my playing while many suffer from war, from malnutrition, from over-work, poor health, and inadequate shelter and clothing. (It is a long list and you probably have your own.) I am not asking that we live a joyless life of misery and guilt, continually rubbing our nose in the world's suffering. (We may not be to blame for the world's being the way it is, but we do have the responsibility to see that it does not remain so.) I ask only that we become aware of this suffering and design our lives so that we help rather than hinder the world's progress toward equality and justice. It does not mean living an austere life with no fun. Pleasure can be found in many ways. With some practice, it can even be found in relieving suffering. Who among us would continue drinking coke and eating potato chips while watching TV, if the children next door did not have enough milk and oranges? That they are not "next door" but in the next block or in a neighboring country means that they are merely out of the line of sight: the suffering is still there, they are still our neighbors. When we redesign our lives so as to unite our ideals and practice we will be contributing toward building a better world, and will be happier within ourselves.

Each time we find a way to live more simply, we aid the world in two ways: (1) We use less of the world's resources for our own life; (2) We help set an example for others who are now striving to copy the affluent life of their neighbors. The greater the striving for affluence, the more wretched will be the poor, and the greater will be the chasm between the haves and the have-nots. Violence will be inevitable.

There are sports and games that do not take a great deal of equipment, or need special fields or courts. Sand-lot ball with the neighborhood children takes only a ball and bat and a vacant lot—no special shoes or uniforms. Hiking in the mountains does not require the expensive gear sold by the mountaineering houses. Most of the people I know who climb would have no difficulty in giving the money for a new pair of boots to a needy child, but it simply does not cross their minds. You say, "Why not attack television sets instead of climbing boots? Think of all the garden tools represented by the cost of TV sets." You are right, of course. The beer, the TV and the potato chips are much less sane than climbing boots and back packs, but I'm assuming that the madness of spending life-energies on producing, buying, and watching TV is obvious to anyone who would read this. The next step—of examining our use of time in sports is not so obvious—so—I'm sharing my deliberations with you.

I'm troubled by the amount of vicarious living we do—the time we spend watching someone else play ball, have adventures. It is said that William Baden-Powell got the idea for the Boy Scouts from seeing a crowd of people watching a soccer match. He suddenly realized that the cart was before the horse—the crowd should have been playing rather than watching.

Learning vicariously is an important element in our growth. We learn from others and from books in ways that speed up or short cut the learning process; we learn more quickly, but only up to a point. Past that point the vicarious experience takes over and we develop less and less rapidly. Each person must make the decision as to where the optimal balance between real experience and second-hand experience lies. But choose we must—or be doomed to never realize our full potential.

I'm troubled that so much of the vicarious world of the media is sheer fabrication. Vicarious learning based upon another's true experience and honest judgment is one thing, but experience based on a commercial interest in making money through exciting our senses is another. We have a fake world presented in most movies, TV programs, novels, and songs; fake reality, fake love, fake anger. So much that is pouring into our lives from the media is false. Some say that we must be selective in the use of TV—I suspect this as a trap. To select wisely one has to know the

choices. I've chosen not to use TV or newspapers, relying on books, magazines, and the shared experience of others blended with my own for mental food.

Reading is both a blessing and a curse. It is one of the finest and most ingenious inventions of the human mind. Used selectively it is a marvelous aid to growth. But it can be over-used until it dominates our lives, acting as a consumer of time that should be used for direct, first-hand experience. With many of us it is an addiction. We get the reading habit and it stifles our real lives. Aldous Huxley, a reading addict of many years' experience, called it a disease.

There are a goodly number of words in our culture to indicate that we are not engaged in the work that we would like best to be doing. A few of them are: entertainment, holiday, sports, vacation, hobby, retirement. Use of these words is a declaration of the poverty of our life's work. I'm not suggesting that rest is not necessary or that change of pace and activity is not stimulating, relaxing, and productive—for they are. What I object to is the idea that it is a natural human need to have hobbies, take vacations, and retire. If we are doing work that we believe in, that we enjoy, that engages us fully, we do not need any of the former. We can get the rest we need or a change of pace by shifting to another facet of our work, or by visiting friends who have similar interests. I'm suggesting that those who need to get away from their work by vacations and retirement have not had the joy of finding the right job. I discovered long ago that the fun that I received out of playing tennis with a friend could be had by cutting wood together—without the feeling of engaging in a decadent leisure-class sport in which the object is to burn up as much energy as possible. Many people are finding that they get the satisfaction they once got from sport or vacation by raising their own food, doing their own mechanical work or building their own home or furniture—learning that productive leisure is more satisfying than non-productive leisure.

It is good to build into our lives some work that tires physically, making us sleep well—work that is hard enough to make us welcome the help of others. We need work in which we appreciate the contribution of our fellows. (The trail here leads 1½ miles from the roadhead to the house. It can be kept up by one person but with other things demanding attention it often gets only a lick and a promise instead of a good day's cutting and trimming. It is always a delight to meet someone who appreciates the work necessary to keep a trail open in the Maine woods and is willing to lend a hand. Spending a couple of hours together clearing trail is a pleasant, relaxing catalyst to communication.)

I look ahead to a time when young people will demand work to do. It will not be a matter of laws and regulations saying who can and who cannot work. It will be a time of recognition by all that productive, creative work is a birthright. I see a time when all will recognize our need to feel useful and needed by the society around us—knowing that only through work, lovingly done, will come the growth and belongingness that are a part of mature adulthood.

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REVIEW
A SOCRATIC INQUIRY

IN 1944 the British scholar who was eminent for his knowledge of military affairs, Liddell Hart, published *Why Don't We Learn from History?,* rich in reflections. It is a small book which moves from a few but sufficient supporting facts to far-reaching conclusions, largely philosophical, amounting to judgments based on moral psychology. About a third of the book is devoted to examining what he calls "The Fallacy of Moral Compulsion." His meaning is this: You can stop people from doing bad things by using force and coercion, but you can't make them do good things. This is an evident fact of human behavior, manifest from history, yet it has not been admitted. Hart wants to know why. He uses the history of recent centuries to show that nothing good results in the long term from threat of punishment and coercion:

> We learn from history that the compulsory principle always breaks down in practice. It is practicable to *prevent* men doing something; moreover, that principle of restraint, or regulation, is essentially justifiable in so far as its application is needed to check interference with others' freedom. But it is not, in reality, possible to *make* men do something without risking more than is gained from the compelled effort. The method may appear practicable, because it often works when applied to those who are merely hesitant. When applied to those who are definitely unwilling it fails, however, because it generates friction and fosters subtle forms of evasion that spoil the effect which is sought. The test of whether a principle works is to be found in the product.

This becomes, for Hart, a full-dress argument against conscription for war. Needless to say, Liddell Hart never became a political decision-maker for Britain. He was the kind of expert who knew so much that his advice was sought (he was consultant to the British Cabinet for a time), but hardly the man to whom "policy" could be entrusted! He had indeed learned from history and the things he had to say about war-making could be heard only by those who were similarly ready to learn. These seem always to be very few.

Why?

One answer—but less than half an answer—would be that humans seem able to be inventive and skillful in devising the means to prosecute a devastating war, but by no means able to make the war, however victorious, serve the purpose claimed for it. War, in short, cannot be made into a constructive project. It leaves us worse off than we were before the fighting began. This is what history teaches, and what nations ignore.

But one must be careful. What about the American Revolution? Very nearly all of us would have wanted to fight in that war. One can't help but admire the Quaker, Thomas Paine, who did so much to get it going—admire him more, at any rate, than the Quakers who refused to take part. An argument could be made—has been made—that we would have got our freedom eventually without having to fight, and it's probably true. But would the generation of the Founding Fathers have put up with that? They couldn't build a great new country here with the British owning it and hanging around, doing stupid things.

Yet there *are* two sides to the question, no doubt of that. Everett Dean Martin's *Farewell to Revolution* (Norton, 1935) is a persuasive book, but he, after all, presents lessons from history—history that hadn't yet been made in 1776; we know a lot more now about what can't be done with war. Martin's closing paragraph embodies much of what a few have learned from history since the early days of our Republic. Yet he might as well have used Liddell Hart's title of nine years later, as his opening sentence here shows:

> Everywhere people propose solutions for the problems of the world who act and speak as if such men as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Erasmus, Milton, Locke, Voltaire, Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill had never existed! I wonder what men thought a century ago when they said that the school house was to be the foundation of our free institutions? Did they mean merely an education which would improve the individual's opportunities in a competitive struggle for money? Did they mean a patriotic propaganda which would make the population the half grown up victims of crowd appeal? Did they mean schooling which would lead to mere socialization without understanding or habits of reflection? Or did they mean to encourage reasonableness among the people and so see to it that

there would be a sensitive and critical public opinion? Liberty is a cultural achievement; it cannot be preserved by a populace which is moved by passion and sentiment and has no knowledge of the principles upon which life in any free society must always be based. We have too long undervalued intelligence in this country, except that of the narrow expert. All history shows that a free people must be a thinking people, and must prize wisdom, as much as military peoples prize the glory of war. Yes, as much even as our democracy in the past has reverenced business success. Education preserves and enhances liberty, not only by acquainting people with facts, but most of all by putting the mind in immediate contact with the great free master minds of all ages. Then something happens, something of excellence and human understanding, something liberating, is caught up out of the ashes of the past, which crosses the dead centuries and lives to enrich and light the present. Revolutions have their passing hour and are gone. They come like dreams of horror, they pass and leave but exhaustion and sad awakening. But the stream of wisdom coursing through the centuries flows steadily on. Lost for a time it reappears richer and deeper than before. It has brought with it such freedom and civilization as man has yet known. It is the life of reason which will yet create the republic of the free.

If we turn to a recent book by Barbara Tuchman, *The March of Folly* (Knopf, 1984), on the same subject as Liddell Hart's *Why Don't We Learn from History?* we find the focus to be on states rather than people—on the blindness and stupidity of governments, a subject which gives the writer ample scope, "From Troy to Vietnam." Her main target is the government of the United States during the years of our involvement in Indochina, starting in 1945. Her question, however, is the same as Hart's:

> Mankind, it seems, makes a poorer performance of government than of almost any other human activity. In this sphere, wisdom, which may be defined as the exercise of judgment acting on experience, common sense and available information, is less operative and more frustrated than it should be. Why do holders of high office so often act contrary to the way reason points and enlightened self-interest suggests? Why does intelligent mental process seem so not to function?

Only in her first chapter does Mrs. Tuchman give attention to that rare phenomenon—*good* government—and it seems much more than accident that in every case the rulers were men and women of both intelligence and strong characters, from Solon to George Washington. One passage deserves repeating:

> The product of the new nation, George Washington, was a leader who shines among the best. While Jefferson was more learned, more cultivated, a more extraordinary mind, an unsurpassed intelligence, a truly universal man, Washington had a character of rock and a kind of nobility that exerted natural dominion over others, together with the inner strength and perseverance that enabled him to prevail over a flood of obstacles. He made possible both the physical victory of American independence and the survival of the fractious and tottering young republic in its beginning years.
>
> Around him in extraordinary fertility, political talent bloomed as if touched by some tropical sun. For all their flaws and quarrels, the Founding Fathers have rightfully been called by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., "the most remarkable generation of public men in the history of the United States or perhaps of any other nation." It is worth noting the qualities this historian ascribes to them: they were fearless, high-principled, deeply versed in ancient and modern political thought, astute and pragmatic, unafraid of experiment, and—this is significant—"convinced of man's power to improve his condition through the use of intelligence." That was the mark of the Age of Reason that formed them, and although the 18th century had a tendency to regard men as more rational than in fact they were, it evoked the best in government from these men.

The contrast with the leadership of this country during the Vietnam years is striking and depressing. "It would be invaluable," Mrs. Tuchman remarks, "if we could know what produced this burst of talent from a base of only two and a half million inhabitants." It would indeed. In passing we may note that such questions are really the same as the Socratic inquiry pursued in Athens some twenty-five hundred years ago. Reading the right books may help, yet is far from answering the question. The value of Mrs. Tuchman's volume is that it displays without hope of contradiction the folly of American policy in Indochina. Moreover, ordinary readers can *understand* her. She is a good writer rather than an academic. The facts are all there, precisely told, setting again and again the question: Why don't we learn from history? Or: Why is our age so barren of the intelligence and the integrity needed to avoid such terrible mistakes?

COMMENTARY
EVIDENCE OF CHANGE

THIS may be a good place to mention briefly a book that is likely to be too much for most reviewers to give ah adequate account of—Freeman Dyson's *Weapons and Hope.* (Harper & Row, $17.95.) What is difficult about the book is the writer's extraordinary ability to get inside the minds of other people, to think as they think, and then contrast what they think and say with the opinions and convictions of others who think quite differently. This makes for a very tolerant book, and a very searching inquiry. Most impressive is the writer's breadth of understanding. Most interesting, perhaps, are the bits of autobiography which are included throughout his pages.

This material about himself, his family, his relatives, and the course of his personal life lends conviction to everything Dyson says. The reader begins to feel that he somehow knows the writer, and trusts a man like that. Every brand of opinion, if at all influential, gets appropriate attention. There is penetrating insight into the character of J Robert Oppenheimer, including his complex psychology and motivations. In a chapter on Pacifism Dyson gets into the subject by recalling the remark of a Russian sailor when a visitor said he should "come and see us in America." The sailor just laughed and replied: "That's impossible. We are warriors." Dyson muses to himself: "Is there no other way? Is there no other tradition for our young men to follow than the tradition of warriors marching to battle to defend the honor of their tribe?" Dyson finds that such a tradition exists, that of the Quakers, of Tolstoy, and Gandhi, to whose program of non-violence he devotes a number of pages. Could such a program be adopted by the United States? It is difficult to imagine, he says, yet adds that "history teaches us that many things which were once unimaginable nevertheless came to pass." Freeman Dyson's book deserves careful reading.

A hundred years ago, Mohandas Gandhi was a fifteen-year-old boy in India, completely unknown to the world. Today no serious book about the problems of war and peace can ignore Gandhi's work, achievement, and his dream. Changes in attitude *are* going on.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

HOME SCHOOLERS

MOVEMENTS worth looking into are the ones which draw their energy and inspiration from individual resourcefulness and imagination. The various and diverse self-help groups around the country make good illustrations. Self-reliance *requires* the development of the fundamental qualities that, taken in their total, make a good society. External leadership is limited in value, and when depended upon has a weakening effect. Good leaders know this instinctively as well as from experience, becoming resource persons instead of exhorters and flag-wavers. The Gandhian workers for village reconstruction in India found this out long ago. Self-reliance is the heart of the matter in developing the infrastructure of productive, healthful community. Projects which depend upon self-reliance provoke the best in human nature to action; they are the only way out of conditions of passive suffering and personal inadequacy, but they take time, often a long time. Eventually they work because they rely on the most important defining characteristic of human beings—the power to make choices.

This principle is continually illustrated in a self-help sort of movement now going on in the United States—the home schooling movement, in which parents, disgusted with the effect of public (and often private) schooling on their children, teach their own. John Holt's *Growing Without Schooling* (729 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. 02116, $15 for six issues) is the publication of record for this movement, and is filled with two kinds of reports—what the parents are doing with their children, and the progress being made in dealing with the compulsory education laws in the various states. Public policy varies a great deal, but little by little home-schooling parents are re-educating the educational bureaucracy. Holt and his associate, Donna Richoux, as editors of *Growing Without Schooling,* keep their readers posted on changes in this direction, reporting on court decisions and the victories and defeats of home schoolers. Already there seem to be several local home-schooling journals in which Holt finds things useful to quote.

For example, in a recent issue of *Western Pennsylvania Homeschoolers* a writer tells about magazine articles and TV programs on home schooling:

> We're now seeing several districts that are cooperating with more than one family, and a number of families are now in their second and third years of official homeschooling with district approval. Many have mentioned to me that securing continual approval has been a very easy matter, often completed through a simple written request.
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> . . . Negotiating during the summer months, if you are taking a child out of school, seems to bring the happiest results. School people often seem to feel *very* threatened and very possessive of your child if you try to remove him or her in mid-term.

The writer goes on to speak of a Pennsylvania Department of Education official who handles inquiries about home schooling, noting that he is a subscriber to *Growing Without Schooling.* He supplies questioning parents with copies of agreements between school districts and homeschooling parents. In other states the situation is less favorable—in Alabama, for example. There parents who take their children out of school are brought into court. This is frightening to others. But a member of Alabama Citizens for Home Education wrote to *GWS* to say that Alabama homeschoolers are getting together for mutual support. He also says:

> How are people home-schooling in this state? For the most part they are *hiding.* A few have become "satellite schools," but many are simply afraid to take their children out of school. One family in our group was about to be arrested and so moved out of the county to avoid going to jail, and Sharon (a mother who was brought to court) has been told that her children could be taken away from her. Sharon and Ed considered moving or becoming a satellite school, but felt someone had to challenge our state laws, and through their courageous efforts many home-schoolers are coming out of hiding. . . .

Children are sometimes very different from each other, needing understanding instead of "discipline." Home-teaching parents are free to make the

allowances which are required, and which could be impossible in a large classroom. A Tennessee parent writes:

> My son (6) does not like to learn from his mistakes, because he can't stand to *make* mistakes. He prefers to hang back and study something for a long time—then he just *does* it. With his toilet learning, for example, he refused adamantly to try, insisting (in near-terror sometimes) on continuing to wear a diaper. So I tried not to pressure him and just waited . . . and waited . . . and waited. Finally one day he requested to wear underwear, and that was it. Without a backward glance he was out of diapers, and he's never even had an accident. (As a long-time bed-wetter myself, I continue to be amazed at that.)
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> Now that he is not in school, I feel pressured for him to be at least at the same level as his age-mates. . . . Well, I've learned by now about the way he learns, and I see him hanging about the periphery of reading, and I know that he probably *can* read a little; but I also know that he's not going to do it until he's good and ready. So, again, I wait.
>
> Just last night he drew a picture and added cartoon "balloons" in which he printed "Yo, He-Man" and "Ha ha ha ha ha!" I thought he must have copied the words from something (he has enjoyed copying captions from comic books), but he had written it completely on his own. I down-played my reaction because that's the way we have to be with him. Too much praise or enthusiasm somehow puts too much pressure on him, and he backs away from anything that elicits that kind of response. So I just sort of accepted his accomplishment, and he went on. . . . When he does actually sit down and read, I'll try to be just as matter-of-fact about it. . . .
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> I hate to think what would happen to him in a school. . . . He would probably be labeled "learning disabled" or worse. . . .

Holt's comment on the letters that come in are always valuable. To a parent who wrote at length in defense of "teaching" (responding to an article advocating less of it), he replied:

> What I say about teaching is, don't teach them unless asked. Doing things for their own sake where children can see them, is not the same as doing things you otherwise would not do *so that* the children can see you doing them. I admit the line between is not always clear, but I can usually tell the difference between natural talk and "teaching" talk.

An Ohio home-schooling mother—with five children, ages 5, 6, 9, 10, and 15—declared that there was too much stress on "reading," telling about how her young were all becoming ornithologists by bird-walking with her, remarking that reading may distract from attention to the real world. She concluded:

> I will never keep any of them from reading when they want to, of course, but I really think parents can make reading *too* important just by being *too* thrilled when their child recognizes a letter for the first time. I've been rather thrilled that my nine and ten year-olds have taken a late interest in this abstraction. They take in so much sensorially. No matter how many times the Great Blue Heron flies over the house, they will watch and watch until he is completely out of sight. This is in contrast to the "gifted" readers who will give a quick glance and an uninterested "Yeah" when the great bird is pointed out to them in flight.
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> I am not an anti-intellectual (I read to all five of mine every night from 1 to 2 hours from all kinds of literature) but I'm just wondering if reading a little later might not be *better* than reading so early.

Holt said approvingly:

> Your point about reading reminded me of something I read years ago in an essay by the great British essayist William Hazlitt. He wrote an article about reading which could be turned, almost word for word, into what a lot of people (including me) are saying about TV. . . .
>
> Briefly, Hazlitt's point was yours, that people will substitute reading about things for looking at things. I love reading and read a great deal (I hate to think how much), but I never allow myself to forget that someone, somewhere, has to see or do. something directly before it can be written about. I still learn a lot more by looking and listening and thinking about what I see and hear, than I do by reading.

FRONTIERS

Land Isn't Yesterday

IN moving north and leaving carefully mowed lawn butting carefully mowed lawn, I opted for space that was free from judgments based on outward appearances. I found that I couldn't shake the judgments, that they were mine, not somebody else's. And that the land, between manicured lawns and values that fit, was as full of wrong turns and pot holes as the yellow brick road.

One of my earliest assumptions as a child growing up in a suburb of New York City was that land was for people and houses. Lawns and gardens were like clothes, to be worn with or without flair. Land was also for buildings, roads and factories; for tennis courts, ski slopes and baseball diamonds. Farmers had farms, and that was their choice. Farms were pretty, and farmers, like cowboys and Indians, were still around as a reminder of yesterday.

When I moved to Shaftsbury, Vermont, my attitude didn't change much. I learned a little about the unwillingness of scenic Arlington to face up to poverty in its midst, poverty not visible on the maple and elm lined roads that stretch from Shaftsbury to Arlington, but all too visible on the roads that go nowhere up in the hills. But if poverty began to register, the problems of farmers didn't. Mostly I just drove by beautiful fields on my way to work in Arlington and took the farmers that kept those fields beautiful for granted. So Vermont had farms?

When I moved north to Calais, Vermont, my stereotypes ran into each other, the stereotypes of my family and I being one way and farmers being another. My oldest daughter married a farmer.

I watched her, heard her, and gradually, since denying the realities of farming would have meant denying my own daughter and what she was experiencing and feeling, I changed.

Land became something different from a base on which to put things. Farming became work, harder than most. And farmers and their land were in danger, I discovered. I was taught not to call people names or to blame, so it has taken me a while to name names and blame International Harvester, Sperry-New Holland and John Deere for pushing machines that contribute to the destruction of the very land they are designed to draw food from, or to blame Safeway Market for bringing into their Grand Junction, Colorado, stores Washington State peaches—as a loss leader—one week before peach harvest in that rich, peach-growing Grand Valley of the Colorado River; or to blame the political constituency which in 1983-84 supports penalizing ($.50 per hundredweight) eastern dairy farmers for the overproduction of milk by western agribusiness (the Northeast, I would cite defensively, uses all the milk it produces!).

A few years back there was a farm ruckus in Washington, D.C. I talked with farmers who were there, farmers who were portrayed by the media as villains: they tore apart The Mall with their tractors and inconvenienced thousands of commuters attempting to race home to their well-manicured lawns (my snideness somewhat off the mark, because traffic jams bring no joy to anyone). "Willful disruption," said local radio stations. "Deliberate property damage," said AP and UPI. "Self-defeating tactics," said liberal commentators, in their best sadder but wiser tones.

I talked to two farm families. They were eating their lunch in the new East Wing of The National Gallery and stood out because of their clothes, and because of the buttons they were wearing: "Farmers For Fair Prices," "Farmers For Parity," and "If You Eat, You're Part Of The Problem." Judging them by their clothes, buttons and behavior it was hard to believe they were the careless protesters that the media claimed they were.

"My wife works in town. I need her on the farm." The farmer looked at his wife as he spoke. She didn't smile, just stared at me. Wondering, I suppose, if I'd hear, if I was listening.

The other man in the grouping spoke: "I rent my equipment out, so it's not always there when I need it. . . . But what can you do?"

"We don't want more than what's fair," one of the women spoke.

Determined to be objective and casting a suspicious eye on their good intentions, I asked them about the mess on The Mall and about resentment that D.C. commuters felt towards them. Their answer confirmed my political babe-in-the-woods status.

"Haven't you seen the busses?" they chorused calmly, though they'd have been justified in dealing with me sarcastically or in walking away.

It would have been hard not to see the busses, lined up as they were front to tail and touching each other, completely encircling The Mall, completely encircling the farmers and their equipment.

"So that's why bus service has been so rotten," I commented; light bulbs always slow to go off in my head.

"And when we asked the police for a Parade Permit to drive our tractors by the White House, they gave it to us alright," he laughed without smiling, "for rush hour."

My youngest daughter and I went on our way (typical tourists in the capital city for school vacation), continued walking up and down and around the magnificent gallery which is a tribute to the architectural ingenuity of the human being, and felt angry. Angry at the political ingenuity of the human being.

In *The Gift of Good Land* (North Point Press, 19g1), Wendell Berry writes:

> To use knowledge and tools in a particular place with good long-term results is not heroic. It is not a grand action visible for a long distance or a long time. It is a small action but more complex and difficult, more skillful and responsible, more whole and enduring, than most grand actions.

Day after day I've watched my daughter and son-in-law work impossible hours, perform repair tricks with nothing less (nor more) than creativity, climb up roofs, pull, throw and handle seventy-five pound bales (thanks to the necessity of hay preservative in the quixotic weather conditions of the Northeast), sometimes several hundred a day. Must be they're big and strong. Strong, yes. Big, hardly; 140 pounds and 97 pounds are not what I'd call big.

What they've accomplished in the last few years with only a barn and cows to their name, plus leased land on which they graze an average of forty milkers and bale hay for the milkers plus thirty heifers, appears to have been done with mirrors. But the mirrors are not mysterious. The mirrors reflect back close to half a million dollars invested, plus sixteen years by the one and eight years by the other of full-time work. The kicker, however, is that their financial prospects for 1984, thanks to being asked to pay the price for western overproduction, look gloomy. $4,000 net for two people working full-time and then some. Maybe their problem is just poor management of their debt load? Or how about lazinesss?

For them that's the part that hurts—not the work, but people thinking such things. Sure, they both smoke too much, their nervous energy always high, the push to succeed taking its toll, but lazy or careless about anything else that has to do farming? It's not apparent.

Sometimes their discouragement is profound, and they fight back by speaking to farm conferences, as far afield as Nebraska. But lately they've been doing less of that, convinced that more speeches, becoming more politicalized isn't the answer. Keeping on is, and it's a full-time business. Keeping on because they love the land, and because what they're doing makes sense to them.

> I feel such pride in our herd of cows and calves, knowing them and their mothers before them, having nurtured them from birth on up. They are a crowd that any dairy farmer could be proud of in their production, reproduction, conformation and personalities. Each one so different, 19,600 lbs. per cow, our head average for 1983, with 3.60% butter fat. Pretty phenomenal for the "mutts" we raise and for a home-grown hay-fed bunch. I cling to the good news that we may qualify again for the Quality Awards for 1983: our averages half of what they were last year and twice as good! Perhaps, again, first in the region; perhaps, even first in the Co-op. (Letter from Robin Fitch/1984.)

Supposedly they're the American ideal, young, attractive, and hard-working, a couple who nurture the land and the animals that produce food from that land. But they don't feel ideal.

"Why don't you get out of farming?" well-meaning neighbors, and even some family members, advise. Paradoxically, though, it's these same folk who, when they become stuck in winter snow or spring mud, assume that of course Ced will pull them out; and who, when summer comes, assume that Ced and Robin will provide them with mulching hay and manure—free of charge, of course. Ced and Robin, the community resource; Ced and Robin, the fools for staying in farming.

If Cedric and Robin's motivation to nurture the land is an anachronism, what then is the appropriate label for corporate agribusiness, bullish as it is on the commodity market and bearish as it is on the value of the commodities themselves?

I've been a little slow waking up to what land is all about, but hopefully my slowness can be justified by a waving of the excuse, better late than never. Unless it's just too late, not a clever aside, but a hard core possibility.

Mystic, Connecticut JANE MEIKLEJOHN