

HARDLY WELCOME ALLIES

WE have our lives to live, each one of us composing, from day to day, a biography of sorts, out of intentions that seem worth pursuing. Then, in contrast, there is the course of the times, in which our lives are either tightly or loosely laced, presenting either challenge or invitation, or hazardous obstacle course. "The times" is a vague and ambiguous expression, often combining wide diversities, bringing sudden opportunities to some, to others a gradual contraction of circumstantial surroundings. Yet an epoch or "age" will nonetheless exhibit a common coloring, as for example the famous American "optimism" that extended from revolutionary days to the early decades of the present century. Cultural historians now tell us—if we need telling—that the happy time is over; our wide-open spaces have become crowded areas; our forests are diminishing, our lakes and rivers unclean, our enterprises too big and unwieldy, our resources insufficient. Rufus E. Miles, Jr., briefly summarized the report of current historians in his *Awakening from the American Dream* (Universe Books, 1976):

By the mid-70s, many Americans began to wonder whether the nation, or indeed Western society, knew where it was heading, and more and more of them were beginning to reject the work ethic and deferred gratification, as well as the achievement syndrome. Some of the literature of the early 1970s reflected this gloomy and apocalyptic mood; *The Limits to Growth* and other works conveyed by their very titles the extraordinary degree of apprehension about the future that had seized many articulate members of the intellectual community: *The Doomsday Book* (1970) by Gordon Rattray Taylor, *The Closing Circle* (1971) by Barry Commoner, *The Coming Dark Age* (1973) by Roberto Vacca, *The End of the American Future* (1973) by Peter Schrag, *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect* (1974) by Robert Heilbroner, and *The End of Affluence* (1974) by Paul and Anne Ehrlich.

Actually, there are scores of such books chronicling the course of economic and cultural decline, calling for far-reaching changes in the conduct of both nations and individuals, reciting indisputable facts, quoting reputable authorities, supporting the validity of ominous predictions. This work is valuable and necessary. The goal of these writers is a fundamental change in the world view of the decision-making minority and generating supportive opinion in enough of the majority to alter the patterns of our lives. The issues, we can say, are practical matters: Survival is at stake.

At the same time, another current of thought is emerging—a human phenomenon noted by Hegel. The owl of Minerva, symbol of wisdom, does not rise, he said, until the sun of empire has set. Today, the sun of empire is indeed setting, so rapidly that we seem unable to adjust to its gloomy effects, yet we are now hearing from those who formulate the problem of the age in terms of *meaning* rather than "survival." The books of Hannah Arendt are an example. In the early pages of *The Human Condition*, she draws attention to the fact that the scientific genius of our age, by which we are so immeasurably impressed, has been a major factor in creating the difficulties from which we suffer. She muses:

The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition, and earthly nature, for all we know, may be unique in the universe in providing human beings with a habitat in which they can move and breathe without effort and without artifice. The human artifice of the world separates human existence from all mere animal environment, but life itself is outside this artificial world, and through life man remains related to all other living organisms. For some time now, a great many scientific endeavors have been directed toward making life also "artificial," toward cutting the last tie through which even man belongs among the children of nature. . . .

This future man, whom the scientists tell us they will produce in no more than a hundred years, seems to be possessed by a rebellion against human existence as it has been given, a free gift from nowhere (secularly speaking), which he wishes to exchange, as it were, for something he has made himself. There is no reason to doubt our abilities to accomplish such a change, just as there is no reason to doubt our present ability to destroy all organic life on earth. The question is only whether we wish to use our new scientific and technical knowledge in this direction, and this question cannot be decided by scientific means; it is a political question of the first order and therefore can hardly be left to the decision of professional scientists or professional politicians. . . . The trouble concerns the fact that the "truths" of the modern scientific world view, though they can be demonstrated in mathematical formulas and proved technically, will no longer lend themselves to normal expression in speech and thought. . . . We do not yet know whether this situation is final. But it could be that we, who are earthbound creatures and have begun to act as though we were dwellers of the universe, will forever be unable to understand, that is, to think and speak about the things which nevertheless we are able to do. In this case, it would be as though our brain, which constitutes the physical, material condition of our thoughts, were unable to follow what we do, so that from now on we would indeed need artificial machines to do our thinking and speaking. If it should turn out to be true that knowledge (in the modern sense of know-how) and thought have parted company for good, then we would indeed become the helpless slaves, not so much of our machines as of our know-how, thoughtless creatures at the mercy of every gadget which is technically possible, no matter how murderous it is. . . .

The reason why it may be wise to distrust the political judgment of scientists *qua* scientists is not primarily their lack of "character"—that they did not refuse to develop atomic weapons—or their naivete—that they did not understand that once these weapons were developed they would be the last to be consulted about their use—but precisely the fact that they move in a world where speech has lost its power. And whatever men do or experience can make sense only to the extent that it can be spoken about. There may be truths beyond speech, and they may be of great relevance to man in the singular, that is, to man in so far as he is not a political being, whatever else he may be. Men in the plural, that is, men in so far as they live and move and act in this world, can experience

meaningfulness only because they can talk with and make sense to each other and to themselves.

This is an account of the state of mind in which we find ourselves during these years when so many alarms are going off. We have not been engaged in *thinking*, but using our minds to exploit our know-how, apparently on the assumption that we shall go on forever in this fashion. Those who do think know better, but they are astonishingly few in number. There is no anthropological theory that attempts to explain this.

Hannah Arendt, born in Germany in 1906, obtained a classical education and was saturated with the shaping ideas of the modern mind by close relationships with Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers. With the rise of Hitler, she discovered what it meant to be born a Jew. Thereafter she devoted her thinking to politics—politics in the Greek sense of concern for the *polis*. Education, she declared, must remain strictly conservative, the reason for this being that the older generation, for which she was speaking, will "destroy everything if we try to control the new," so that we, the old, "can dictate how it will look." Her biographer, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (in *Hannah Arendt—For the Love of the World*, Yale University Press 1982), quotes her as saying that "for the sake of what is new and revolutionary in every child, education must be conservative." When, in this country, at the time of the Vietnam war, she was solicited for a donation by a branch of the Student Mobilization Committee, after she learned that the money was to be used to reach high school students, she told the fund-raiser, "I will not give a penny for this purpose, because I disagree with the advisability of mobilizing children in political matters." As she said elsewhere: "To prepare a new generation for a new world can only mean that one wishes to strike from the newcomers' hands their own chances at the new." Her biographer says: "What she hoped for others' children was what she had herself; time for a good education before the *Judenfrage* ("Jewish Question") was personally

posed in her life and before she, as a Jew, had to choose politics." This respect for the independence of mind pervades her writings, giving it moral power and enriching her insight into contemporary history.

Thinking as the pursuit of meaning was the theme of Hannah Arendt's life. Its importance becomes evident to those who read her works. Socrates was her ideal thinker, as becomes clear in her article, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," which appeared in the Fall, 1971 *Social Research*, truly a tract for the times.

Another call for thinking came from the naturalist, Aldo Leopold, who grew up in a very different environment. Yet his cry was fully as urgent. Toward the end of *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford University Press, 1949), he wrote:

For the first time in the history of the human species, two changes are now impending. One is the exhaustion of wilderness in the more habitable portions of the globe. The other is the worldwide hybridization of cultures through modern transport and industrialization. Neither can be prevented and perhaps should not be, but the question arises whether, by some slight amelioration of the impending changes, certain values can be preserved that would otherwise be lost.

To the laborer in the sweat of his labor, the raw stuff on his anvil is an adversary to be conquered. So was wilderness an adversary to the pioneer.

But to the laborer in repose, able for the moment to cast a philosophical eye on his world, that same raw stuff is something to be loved and cherished, because it gives definition and meaning to his life.

Then, a little later, he says:

The shallow-minded modern who has lost his rootage in the land assumes that he has already discovered what is important; it is such who prate of empires, political or economic, that will last a thousand years. It is only the scholar who appreciates that all history consists of successive excursions from a single starting point, to which man returns again and again to organize yet another search for a durable scale of values. It is only the scholar who understands why the raw wilderness gives definition and meaning to the human enterprise.

Hannah Arendt, a contemporary European philosopher, and Aldo Leopold, an American naturalist, reach somewhat the same conclusion in one respect: she speaks of modern man as a slave of our "know-how," the same "shallow-minded modern" who has lost his rootage in the land.

How is this man to be *reached*? How can he be persuaded to *think*?

More than two thousand years ago, Socrates wandered the streets of Athens with this project in mind. He was aggressive about it, although only with the weapons of thought. He asked people embarrassing questions and one of his victims called him a sting-ray or a torpedo fish who numbs by relentless inquiry. Socrates explained that he was only sharing his own perplexity, but the Athenians, upset by his persistence, decided to get rid of him. By asking them to think he was upsetting their lives.

If so persuasive a man as Socrates was unable to get the Athenians to think, what chance have we, today, who certainly have no more talent than he had, to stir our contemporaries into thinking? All he could do, to get thinking going, was to start by embarrassing people, morally and intellectually. For a few, the weapons were adequate, but others, like his opponent, Callicles, were not affected at all. Indeed, Callicles, who was an excellent orator, could probably be elected President if he was born among us today.

Yet there is some hope from the fact that we have allies Socrates lacked. Now there are the embarrassments, not caused by a penetrating mind, but by nature's response to ravage and humiliation. We have ominous clouds of pollution in the air, and increasing acid rain. Thick, heavy books are written to inventory the ills with which man has infected the earth. No year goes by without dozens of thorough reports on human mismanagement of the land, the forests, and the streams and lakes. We have bled the subterranean depths of their oils, removed rare minerals until they become difficult to find—until a book which ought to have been titled *Limits to Dissipation*

was written, yet which hardly affected our calculations.

Once the earth was a singing landscape, now it cries out in anger and despair. Nations which were once lusty youths have become insatiable old men who know nothing of the lean strength they have left behind, who make of their appetites the texts for ethics. The world, in most of its parts, has become a slough of unmanageable acquisitive enterprises, without even a memory of appropriate human life. No one, a despondent teacher remarked recently, now knows who Socrates was. Students have heard his name but not what he did, or why. They, along with their parents, do not know how to think.

Back in 1945, Dwight Macdonald wrote in "The Root Is Man" (later a book of that title) that "our ethical code is no longer *experienced*, but is simply *assumed*," becoming a collection of platitudes.

One does not take any risks for a platitude. Ask a dozen passersby, picked at random, whether they believe it is right to kill helpless people; they will reply of course not (the "of course" is ominous) and will probably denounce the inquirer as a monster for even suggesting there could be two answers to the question. But they will all "go along" with their government in World War III and kill as many helpless enemy people as possible. (While the monstrous questioner may well become a C.O.) Good and Evil can only have reality for us if we do not take them for granted, if they are not regarded as platitudes but as agonizing problems.

Political reformers, both radical and liberal, Macdonald points out, commonly assume that what humans *ought to* want—life rather than death, plenty instead of poverty—is what they really want, and that with these goals established, science will show us the way.

But if the assumption is questioned, it soon becomes clear that it is based on other assumptions: that "Man" means "most people of the time and place we are talking about," and that the "normal" or "natural" as defined in this statistical way is what one *ought to* want. It is understandable that their answers should take a quantitative form, since science deals

only in measurable quantities. But if what most people want is one's criterion of value, then there is no problem involved beyond ascertaining what in fact people *do* want—a question that can indeed be answered by science, but not the one we started out with. For this answer simply raises the original question in different form: why *should* one want what most people want? The very contrary would seem to be the case: those who have taught us what we know about ethics, from Socrates and Christ to Tolstoy, Thoreau, and Gandhi, have usually wanted precisely what most people of their time did *not* want, and have often met violent death for that reason.

Should we not, then, determine by scientific means "what human needs are" and then "construct an ethical system that will give maximum satisfaction to those needs?"

But how is one to tell the "real" or "normal" or "good" human needs from the "perverted" or "bad" ones? As one extends the scope of one's investigation over large masses of people, the variety and mutual exclusiveness of human needs becomes ever more confusing; and as one intensifies one's vision into any single individual—one's self, for example—it becomes more and more difficult to tell which needs are "real and materialist" and which are not. One can only solve this question by constructing a metaphysical and scientifically unverifiable model of "real" or "true" human nature—*i.e.*, what one's heart tells one men *should* be like—and applying this as a standard to the vast mass of contradictory data one's scientific labors have amassed. The only possible *scientific* model of human nature is, as we have seen above, the one arrived at by ascertaining what in fact most people have wanted most of the time. But an ethics based on this would not be an attractive one. Most people in the past and today have been conditioned by exploitive social institutions to want such things as to be fed in return to submission to authority, or to play God in their own family circle, or to despise the weak and honor the strong. If these unpleasant traits are held to be perversions of human nature, then one must ask on what scientific basis this finding is made; it is an odd conception of normality which expresses itself only in a few individuals and cultures throughout mankind's long history.

Here we begin to see the exquisite wisdom in the ancient religions—in the refusal of the Buddhists, for one thing, to allow their subtle metaphysics to be degraded into a political

program of change; and we recognize the moral practicality of the claim of Socrates that he taught *nothing*, but only went about asking questions. His most positive doctrine, which came to a climax in the *Gorgias*, was: "It is better to be wronged than to do wrong," to which he added, that he would rather be in disagreement with multitudes of men than to be out of harmony with himself—with his conscience, his inner sense of what is right and what is wrong. But only those who, with Socrates, believe that the unexamined life is not worth living, are likely to see the truth in his ethical doctrine.

Yet, once we start thinking, it is difficult to escape either of Socrates' claims. Why didn't he go on and outline the way men ought to live, in particularity? Because, as he maintained in the *Meno*, the truth is not something you *tell* people, for the reason that then it would not be their truth, but something imposed from without—a dogma, an element of a future orthodoxy—and the whole course of disturbing questioning would have to be gone through again.

Was Aldo Leopold right in declaring that "only the scholar" is able to understand that all human history is in pursuit of "a durable scale of values"? Socrates, at any rate, was persuaded that every human is endowed with conscience and the latent capacity to think. The truth, he held, is a part or possession of the soul, and the main business of life is to get at it, each one for himself. But except for the Tolstoys and Thoreaus, and their scattered followers, people seem to need the spur of disaster, the provocation of pain. That is why, when comparing ourselves to the people of the time of Socrates, we said that we have some allies he lacked—allies in natural and human events. What do these allies do? Their main function is to upset, call into question, wear away at illusions until they are almost destroyed. As Hannah Arendt put it in the article previously cited, the moral significance of *thinking* "comes out only in those rare moments of history when"—

Things fall part; the centre cannot hold
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.

REVIEW

A DOCTOR WORTH READING

WHAT accounts for the popularity of books by Dr. Lewis Thomas? Almost any reader is bound to like them, starting with *The Lives of a Cell*, which won the National Book Award in 1974. That book was a collection of brief essays he wrote for the *New England Journal of Medicine*, starting in the early 70s. The *Journal* editor was a friend—they had worked together on the wards of Boston City Hospital—and after reading something Thomas had written he persuaded him to contribute regularly to the *Journal*. Well, the doctor's readers liked them so well they wrote in to say so, and when a Viking editor promised to publish them "as is," asking no rewriting, he gave in. We are all grateful for that.

But why is his writing so *good*? It isn't because he is a scientist, but rather because he is an imaginative and sensible man who works in medical science, lacking all feeling of professional grandeur. He is doctor, researcher, and a musing, homespun philosopher, all in one. And humor is a natural endowment. What is humor? A sense of proportion. Well expressed, it brings the reader delight.

When he was five, in the teens of the century, his father, a G.P., began taking Lewis along on house calls. (They lived in Flushing, New York, on Long Island.) There was a big house that his dad went to regularly, but always parked around the corner. His father later explained to him that the patient in the big house was a pillar of the Christian Science Church, and it was tactful for an M.D. not to be in evidence. But Lewis Thomas suggests that if the members of the Church had known anything about the practice of medicine in those days, they wouldn't have minded, because it, too, was mostly faith healing. Expecting his son to be a doctor, which was reasonable and right, Dr. Thomas soon began to prepare the boy's mind for the profession. Being taken along on house calls may have had this reason.

But the general drift of his conversation was intended to make clear to me, early on, the aspect of medicine that troubled him most all through his professional life; there were so many people needing help, and so little that he could do for any of them. It was necessary for him to be available, and to make all these calls at their homes, but I was not to have the idea that he could do anything much to change the course of their illnesses. It was important to my father that I understand this; it was a central feature of the profession, and a doctor should not only be prepared for it but be even more prepared to be honest with himself.

This lesson, in addition to natural attainments, may account for the quality of Dr. Thomas's writing. Medicine is a lot more "scientific" now, and Dr. Thomas's latest book, *The Youngest Science* (Viking Press, 1983, \$14.75), tells why and how. But there has been a price for this impressive progress, based upon thorough techniques of diagnosis and treatment. The human aspect of the doctor-patient relationship is almost gone.

The longest and most personal conversations held with hospital patients when they come to the hospital are discussions of finances and insurance, engaged in by personnel trained in accountancy, whose scientific instruments are the computers. The hospitalized patient feels, for a time, like a working part of an immense, automated apparatus. He is admitted and discharged by batteries of computers, sometimes without even learning the doctors' names.

While cures may be more frequent than they used to be, Dr. Thomas thinks that the "uniquely personal relationship" between doctor and patient needs preserving. "If I were a medical student or an intern, just getting ready to begin, I would be more worried about this aspect of my future than anything else."

On the subject of "research," Dr. Thomas is both serious and light-hearted. He makes fun of it in a way that inclines the reader to respect the determined investigator. He says:

Making guesses at what might lie ahead, when the new facts have arrived, is the workaday business of science, but it is never the precise, surefooted enterprise that it sometimes claims credit for being. . .

It doesn't actually work this way, and if scientists thought it did, nothing would get done; there would be only a mound of bone-shattered scholars being carried off on stretchers.

In real life, research is dependent on the human capacity for making predictions that are wrong, and on the even more human gift for bouncing back to try again. This is the way the work goes. The predictions, especially the really important ones that turn out, from time to time, to be correct, are pure guesses. Error is the mode.

We all know this in our bones, whether engaged in science or in the ordinary business of life. More often than not, our firmest predictions are chancy, based on what we imagine to be probability rather than certainty, and we become used to blundering very early in life. Indeed, the universal experience, mandated in the development of every young child, of stumbling, dropping things, saying the words wrong, spilling oatmeal, and sticking one's thumb in one's eye are part of the preparation for adult living. A successful child is one who has learned so thoroughly about his own fallibility that he can never forget it, all the rest of his life.

Dr. Thomas is the kind of scientist who will never pull rank on you—would to heaven they were all like that! You think of him as a doctor who will level about what he thinks is the matter with you—that is, if you can afford it; he thinks of your welfare more than he does of his professional standing.

An amusing item on "research" is concerned with the award of a Nobel prize to Dr. George Minot for discovering that a diet of liver cures pernicious anemia. Another doctor, George Whipple, found that dogs made anemic by repeated bleeding recovered if fed large quantities of fresh liver. Thomas's point is that luck was mostly involved, and shows this by a somewhat long story. The real kicker comes at the end:

And now the final piece of luck. Looking back at the events, doctors are now generally agreed that Whipple's dogs could have had nothing at all like pernicious anemia. Their anemia was actually due to iron deficiency brought about by repeated hemorrhage, and the response to liver was almost undoubtedly caused by the iron contained in the very large doses of liver used for feeding. It was the

wrong model to use for studying pernicious anemia, and it led straight to a Nobel prize.

One thing that may bother some readers is the long train of "experimental" animals that give their normality, and most of the time their lives, as "sacrifices" to medical research. Mice, rabbits, guinea pigs and dogs, thousands of them—hundreds of thousands, the world around—are made to reveal their reactions to preparations devised by the researchers. When they stay healthy, someone, you could say, has made a lucky guess. How, someone might ask, can a civilized, amiable, and highly intelligent man like Dr. Thomas go on with this research without even a qualm? Well, he does, and even the most tender-hearted of us need to recognize and admit it. But today the whole question of bodily health, healing, and "therapy" is being debated—not among those who represent the best of orthodox medicine, it is true, but among people who are wondering if there must not be a better way of dealing with their ailments than a regime which needs a vast armamentarium of diagnostic machines and the death of countless little animals who have no say in the matter. The term holistic, more in use among the younger men and women in the medical profession, has implications which point in another direction, too. A great many people are now seeing homeopaths, chiropractors, naturopaths, herbalists and acupuncturists. Actually, good doctors are not now as contemptuous of these heterodox practitioners as their fathers and teachers were. Will there, some day, be a renaissance of something like the Ayuric medicine of ancient India, still kept alive by Indian healers? Who knows? In any event, if there should be a great change of this sort, open-minded doctors like Lewis Thomas would be among those to recognize, little by little, its value. He, at any rate, is not exactly satisfied and happy with the way things are in his profession.

It is his human qualities, as much as his medical knowledge and instinct for research, which come through in this book. In one place he tells about the time Hubert Humphrey came to the

Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, where Dr. Thomas has worked for the past ten years. Humphrey came for treatment of a recurrent bladder cancer, of which he finally died. On his floor there were some forty patients, some of whom would get well, some of whom would die.

Humphrey took on the whole floor as his new duty. Between his own trips to X-ray or various other diagnostic units, he made ward rounds. He walked the wards in his bathrobe and slippers, stopping at every bedside for a brief but exhilarating conversation, then ending up in the nurses' station, bringing all the nurses and interns to their feet smiling.

And when Gerald Ford visited him, he made the rounds with Humphrey, "Ford leaning down to be close to a sick patient's voice."

A pleasant statistic recited by Dr. Thomas: "in recent years half of all Memorial patients are free of disease and in restored general health when discharged from treatment." Another report is of the small number of patients who, with metastases spreading around inside of them, are sent home to die, but who "turn up again ten years later free of disease and in good health." No one, Dr. Thomas says, knows why.

One delightful part of the book is about what happened when, once or twice, Dr. Thomas got sick himself, and became a "hospital patient." He learned a good deal from this experience. He found that things done quite casually by doctors to patients can be very uncomfortable, and he thinks it ought to be somehow arranged for young doctors to personally experience how it feels to be really sick. It would make them better doctors.

COMMENTARY CULTURAL GENESIS

THERE are bound to be readers who will object to the first sentence of this week's *Frontiers*, especially those who spent their childhood in certain decaying and somnolent areas of New England, early in the century; or, more recently in, say, Kansas. There has been and is a kind of rural life where thinking hardly seems to go on at all, to say nothing of clear thinking. Arthur Morgan, who spent most of his ninety-seven years working to foster the development of small communities, was well aware of this discouraging aspect of life in small towns, arguing that the intentional communities of the future need not submit to narrow provincialism.

There is a great difference between the inheritors of land and culture, whose lives tend to be dominated by habit and hearsay, and the creators of agriculture and the resulting culture. The present is plainly a time of transition, which means in some degree the establishment of *informed* tradition to take the place of inherited habit. By informed tradition we mean living relations with the land, consciously undertaken, as described by Aldo Leopold in *A Sand County Almanac*, by Wendell Berry in *The Unsettling of America*, and by Wes Jackson in *New Roots for Agriculture*.

It is needful only to inspect the thinking of writers of this sort to support the claim of the sentence in *Frontiers*. To a man, they speak to our condition, in both practical and philosophical terms. On the practical side, there is this by John Todd on the work undertaken by the New Alchemy Institute:

Only with the oil- and gas-based agriculture of the twentieth century has it been possible for a majority to shift to urban living. Since at some future date much of the population will probably have to return to cultivating most of their foods, we decided to research family-level methods of food culture which would be ecologically benign and relatively inexpensive. Small-scale farming could require only

part-time tending and be suitable for siting in such small spaces as suburban backyards. Further, the food-raising ecosystems would have to be designed so they could be tended by people without special training.

See also the pamphlet publications of the Planet Drum Foundation, P.O. 31251, San Francisco, Calif. 94131, for rounded evidence of the synthesis of culture with agriculture.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves ON PEACE AND HONOR

EARLIER this year, some Marine recruiters came to Grinnell College (Iowa) to seek volunteers for their service. They encountered a "silent protest" made by a group of pacifist students. There was criticism of this action, on the ground that the recruiters and possible recruits should not be obliged to talk about enlistment under hostile pressure, and it was also argued that Marines have "little to do with nuclear war." Others said that the protest was only an impractical gesture. A student who had taken part, Laura Jackson, a senior at Grinnell, replied to these criticisms in the campus paper.

After suggesting that "hurt feelings" are not as important as the issue of war or peace, the young woman explained why she took part. "I am," she said, "more worried about the extinction of the northern hemisphere than I am about a world-wide communist totalitarian state."

What I want to explain instead is the causal connection between our puny little demonstration and the process of world disarmament.

When does an ideal become a reality? Hardly ever, except in movies. The Marine recruit protest was the outgrowth of a pacifist ideal. Idealists believe that their ideals have an impact upon the culture. For proof, look at the "American Dream." Many people share it, few achieve it, and it succeeds in reviving up the growth economy. Another example is romantic love, neither a universal nor a changeless concept which shapes male-female relations and the institution of marriage. Pacifism is an ideal with the potential to change cultures, I believe. Demonstrations of the pacifistic ideal such as our protest should have repercussions on the culture at large.

More concrete than these abstract "repercussions," ideals have a way of shaping people's lives and works so that concepts are embodied in material things. The concepts of thrift and hard work stand out in the neat, well-cared-for arrangement of a small family farm. Art, literature, and even science reflects the person doing them, and, as a result, his or her ideals.

Convictions can be incorporated into everyday life—one need not be a high-level "policy-maker" to make a difference. Nuclear disarmament will not occur at the international bargaining table, as many believe, but in a response to a transformation of Western and Soviet cultures. The axiom "Think globally—act locally" gives us the link we need to effect such a transformation.

Curiously—or naturally enough—you don't get much thinking of this sort from either recruiters or recruits. Not even high-level policy-makers show equivalent powers of imagination, although it must be remembered that a former Marine commander, *after* he retired, said some things about the way he had spent his life that should have circulation. Why is it that people who work for the government often begin to make real sense only after they quit or leave office?

Laura Jackson continues:

The Marine recruiter protest was a local action based on a global problem. It was a catalyst for many conversations about the arms race and the nature of protest. It set people on their heads for a moment and made them consider that strange, ungainly concept, pacifism. Perhaps it wasn't the most logical, direct, perfect way to make a point, but who cares? Disarmament is too urgent an issue for us to sit around and wait for just exactly the right symbolism, the right place and moment, to make our point. It's very difficult to be logical, emotive, dramatic, in good taste, relevant and idealistic all at the same time. Those who agree with the motives but disdain the activity are worried about etiquette, the color of the poster and not what's on it.

The responsibility for the nuclear arms race lies in history, national attitudes on both sides about security, the self-serving bureaucracy of the armed forces (yes, including the Marines) and our own unwitting cooperation with the military industrial complex. There's nothing we can do about the history of conflict between the superpowers—that problem is bequeathed to us. But we can get off the path to a do-it-yourself extinction by resisting the forces which heighten conflict. This means seizing every reasonable opportunity to bring an ideal into reality. That is why I sat down.

How to "bring an ideal into reality" is the essential problem of the peace movement. In the

Winter (1982-83) issue of the *Newsletter* of the Resource Center for Nonviolence (P.O. Box 2324, Santa Cruz, Calif. 95063), Deena Hurwitz recalls that young pacifists, when the second world war began for the United States, were confronted "with what Reinhold Niebuhr called the peace movement's greatest dilemma: bridging the gap between the real and the ideal." What did they do?

Despite the overwhelming popularity of WWII, 52,354 men were registered as conscientious objectors (CO's), and an additional 20,000 were either denied such classification, refused to register, or were otherwise exempt, according to the Selective Service System. . . .

Some six thousand men who were denied CO status, refused to register or walked out of the CPS camps [camps established for alternative service by COs], were imprisoned. COs in prison faced the contradiction of having resisted one authority only to be required to submit to another. In several cases, war resisters were successful in their prison strikes, particularly against racial segregation within the prison system. . . .

CO's and resisters of that era made major contributions to the emergence of social-change movements. They were instrumental in the civil rights and Ban-the-Bomb movements; in starting intentional living communities, public radio (KPFA, for instance); alternative schools (the Walden movement); the San Francisco cultural renaissance of the 50s, and much more. . . . For many of these people, refusing to participate in WWII was their first act of overt pacifism. Some have continued to oppose militarism in active ways. For all it was a dynamic moral decision that had a strong impact on the rest of their lives.

Another contributor to the *Newsletter*, Tom Bihn, makes a personal report:

Registration week found me at the Post Office, handing out non-advocacy draft information. In front of the Post Office a lot of people approached me, some hostile, some welcoming my pressure. One old man told me he had volunteered for three wars, and yet what I was doing was the right thing. Another man said he didn't agree with me, but that I should be proud that I had the courage to stand up for what I believed in.

The "last" day for me to register came and went, and I didn't register. I felt proud of what I hadn't done, and at the same time I didn't want to tell anyone for fear of being discovered by the FBI/Selective Service. . . .

My paranoia climaxed when I got a job with a school which required my fingerprints to be sent to a half-dozen agencies in Washington, including the FBI and the Justice Department. . . . I talked in private with a man also working at the school, who himself had burned his draft card in the sixties. He said if the government could intimidate me into not taking the job, then it had succeeded almost as well as if it had intimidated me into registering. I should be proud of what I'd done, and not afraid of the consequences. I took the job, and my fingerprints, along with my name, birthdate, and Social Security number, cleared the agencies in Washington. . . .

Since the summer of 1980 when I first failed to register, my feelings against war have strengthened and a belief in nonviolence has taken root in me. I in no way regret failing to register. But *how* I do not register is as important as *why* I do not register. And I will not register, openly and proudly.

Some reflections by Louis Halle (in *The Ideological Imagination*) make a suitable conclusion to these few (out of many) reports:

A man, I say, is responsible for himself during his span of life. This is so whether he lives in a society that is enjoying a golden age or in a society that has fallen into corruption and barbarism. . . . Socrates did not encompass the salvation of Athenian society, but in saving his own honor he saved the honor of mankind, providing the classic example of a life committed to free inquiry based on the knowledge of one's own ignorance. . . . The saving grace afforded every individual, in whatever circumstances he finds himself, is that his honor as a man depends on himself alone.

FRONTIERS

Seymour and Cobbett

AGRICULTURE, Wendell Berry maintains, is the matrix of culture, which suggests that people who learn how to work the land will find clear thinking natural. Of course, they may or may not use this ability. In our time, however, it seems evident that writers who understand the care of the land also have a natural ability to understand the needs of the human race. This train of thought grew from some browsing in John Seymour's recent book, *The Lore of the Land* (Schocken, 1983, \$14.95). Seymour is a writer and a farmer, good at both. This book is about what he has learned of the care of the land during a lifetime of farming in England. It is charmingly and instructively illustrated by his wife, Sally. He writes on how to make land fertile, how to build fences, ponds, and country roads, and how to deal with common pests. He tells how to test the land for what it needs in the way of soil supplements. There is a long section on trees, which ones to plant, and why.

You don't need to be a prospective farmer to find this material intensely interesting. Seymour begins by saying that long ago the Sahara Desert was once "an enormous stretch of savanna forest," now reduced to sand by humans and their animals. "And who knows," he says, maybe man, "so destructive, may have a change of heart which will make him reafforest the Sahara and turn it into a different kind of climax vegetation, one far more favorable to life on this planet."

Meanwhile man is, at the time of writing, at his peak of destructive inclination and powers, and so-called climax forests all over the world are being ruthlessly destroyed. The shifting sands of the Sahara are advancing over a front of thousands of miles at the appalling rate of thirty miles a year! The vast rain forests of the Amazon Basin will be completely gone, at the present rate of destruction, by the year 2005. This is being achieved, largely by burning—often by dropping napalm bombs from the air. Thus all the carbon locked up in the trees is released into the air as carbon dioxide and already the chemical

make-up of the air we breathe is being altered for the worse. Trees take carbon from the air in the form of carbon dioxide and release the free oxygen that we need to live, and there are becoming dangerously few trees left in the world. The same story—the denudation of the forests—can be told about every country and every continent. Everybody is now aware of the danger but nobody, apparently, can withstand the rapacity of the businessmen who are destroying the world's heritage for quick profits.

A little later he remarks that the vast coniferous forests of northern America and Europe "are being destroyed, chiefly for paper-making pulp, at an enormous rate, and, in spite of attempts by governments in some countries to halt the destruction, it will not be many decades before there are very few of them left."

Paper-making? Do we really need all that paper? Consider the "junk mail" a great many of us get every day—about four or five times the personal letters and necessary business communications. We throw it out, usually without opening the envelopes. What is the cost in trees of all this waste? And of the ink and advanced technology that goes into preparation of the advertising? Of the skills of the writers and artists? About ninety per cent of all this is wasted—produces no result. But this is only "business as usual." Selling by mail is expected to "convert" to inquiries or purchases only a small percentage of those receiving the promotion. The waste is "normal" for our way of distribution. From the agricultural point of view, it is also insane. As John Seymour says:

What all this means is that it is up to the enlightened landowner to plant trees above all else. Richard St. Barbe Baker, the Founder of "Men of the Trees," which is an organization responsible for the planting of millions of trees throughout the world, recommends that every land holding should have at least thirty per cent of its surface planted with trees.

It is a hard thing to ask of landowners that they should plant trees. Often the crop they plant will not come to maturity for a hundred years—sometimes longer. True, there will be a little profit from thinnings, but that will not be for at least twelve years from the date of planting. There are, however, such

things as food-bearing trees, and trees which have other products useful to man besides timber. Also, a surprising number of landowners have a conscience about this. I knew a timber merchant in Shropshire who had planted hundreds of acres of walnut trees right throughout Britain.

Now these trees will only grow well on good land and they only come to maturity—and into profit—after three hundred and fifty years. I asked him why he did it and he answered: "Our ancestors planted walnuts for us—why shouldn't we plant them for our descendants?"

That is a civilized response, a natural reply from a man who works with the land. We shall not be civilized until we learn to think spontaneously in this way. Wendell Berry is right.

Seymour and Berry both recall to mind another writer of English—William Cobbett, a farmer and journalist of a century and half ago. Cobbett believed in the English cottager and wrote for his benefit *Cottage Economy* (1822), now available from the Oxford University Press. In evidence of the clarity of Cobbett's thinking, G.K. Chesterton said:

What distinguishes Cobbett from most rural idealists, such as Ruskin, is that he was a realist as well. Like Ruskin, and long before Ruskin, he denounced the eating up of England by factories and industrial towns. He must have the more credit because he had not, like Ruskin, the advantage of living when the terrible transformation was almost complete; when it was well within sight of its present congestion and collapse. He defied industrialism when it was, if not exactly young and beautiful, at least young and hopeful.

In his introduction to an anthology of Cobbett's writings, *Cobbett's Country Book* (Schocken, 1975), Richard Ingrams says that "Cobbett was prepared to practice what he preached."

His ripest abuse was reserved for those whose conduct was at odds with their stated principles. He hated theorists such as economists, those who, he said, "have a notion that there may be great public good through producing individual misery." Humbug of any kind Cobbett had an eye for. Once he spotted it, his abuse was merciless. He has been accused of

prejudice. But if prejudice is the result of irrational subconscious emotions then Cobbett was not a prejudiced man. His "pet hates" all had their origin in the knowledge that he had himself acquired. His fiercely held convictions were rooted in his own experience.

Almost everything Cobbett wrote, Ingrams says, "is the result of personal trial and error." That, too, is a ground of culture. If we should all refuse to read material that is not so grounded, not only trees but a host of other good and natural things would still be all about.