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WHAT WOULD BE BETTER?

IT is natural to seek relief, on the one hand, from the fevers and horrors of the daily news—the invasions, the shootings, the bombings, the assassinations, the cruelties visited on men and women of obvious good will, but integrity as well; and then, on the other hand, to look for surcease from the more commonplace communications of the time, which almost never rise above the level of signs and slogans. These are both ills of what we have come to call the "mass society," which has developed so many intolerable conditions that often men find no other solution save setting out to kill one another, rational reconciliations seeming wholly out of the question.

Signs and slogans! These are surely symptoms that cry out for diagnosis. The more complicated our lives, the more necessary it seems to give us orders on how to behave. There is not time to instruct us; bunched together in millions, the population cannot be regarded as docile—teachable—but must be ordered around. Less and less can be left to our own humble judgment when so many things can go wrong if we deviate from what is expected of us. Life seems to our governors a flowing cataract of small and large emergencies; they put a dam here, another there, but the flood finds other channels. Read today's political speeches, then turn to the *Federalist Papers* to see what has happened to us. Is there anyone in public life who seriously expects the people to *think?* And we must add, who has been given reason to so expect? Yes, there are cases of both, but not enough to change the moral complexion of our lives.

The world, the country, the city, even the rural regions have become unmanageable places, and it is difficult to say who—not what but who—is to blame. Even if you have a theory of guilt and blame—what then? What do you do in an arena where only signs and slogans are the means of speaking your mind? If you really want to reach the masses you have to become some kind of advertising man and use, even with all your good intentions, some species of pseudo-reason that can be simply expressed. People, it must be confessed, like "certainties" that don't require thinking, but they also like to feel that they have thought. And those who make a profession of talking to the masses know quite well that learning to be attractively plausible is far more important than telling truth. Only those who combine intellectual and moral genius are able to speak truth persuasively to the masses, and even these are heard only in times of great trouble when the habitual trivia of existence are washed away by an access of heroic emotion—we are thinking, for example, of men like Tom Paine and Abraham Lincoln.

So, seeking relief, we turned to the essays of Montaigne, reading them with quiet pleasure; and then, getting curious about him, we looked him up in the eleventh *Britannica,* learning that, according to George Saintsbury, Emerson did the best job of critical handling of Montaigne; and so we read what Emerson had to say about him in "Representative Men." He decided to let Montaigne stand for Skepticism, but curiously, he doesn't even name his subject in the first nine pages of his essay. Instead, we assume, he gave his own reflections under Montaigne's inspiration, and he continues in pretty much this way. He does say this: "Montaigne is the frankest and honestest of all writers." Which may explain the judgment of Saintsbury that Montaigne's *Essays* made "a book which has hardly been second in influence to any of the modern world." Compliments to the modern world have become quite difficult of late, but we can at least say that keeping Montaigne alive and read is to its credit. We plan no disquisition on Montaigne, but may

say in passing, thanks to the *Britannica;* that his father made a hobby of education and did all he could for his son.

We let Emerson's closing words show what he thought Montaigne stood for:

> The lesson of life is practically to generalize; to believe what the years and the centuries have to say against the hours to resist the usurpation of particulars, to penetrate to their catholic sense. Things seem to say one thing, and say the reverse. The appearance is immoral; the result is moral. Things seem to tend downward, to justify despondency, to promote rogues, to defeat the just; and by knaves, as by martyrs, the just cause is carried forward. Although knaves win in every political struggle, although society seems to be delivered over from the hands of one set of criminals into the hands of another set of criminals, as fast as government is changed, and the march of civilization is a train of felonies, yet, general ends are somehow answered. We see, now, events forced on, which seem to retard or retrograde the civility of ages. But the world-spirit is a good swimmer, and storms and waves can not drown him. He snaps his finger at laws: and so, throughout history, heaven seems to affect low and poor means. Through the years and the centuries, through evil agents, through toys and atoms, a great and beneficent tendency irresistibly streams.
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> Let a man learn to look for the permanent in the mutable and fleeting; let him learn to bear the disappearance of things he was wont to reverence, without losing his reverence; let him learn that he is here, not to work, but to be worked on; and that, though abyss open under abyss, and opinion displace opinion, all are at last contained in the Eternal Cause.—
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> "If my bark sink, 'tis to another sea."

We don't know much about sixteenth-century France, except that, like most other centuries, it was a bad time politically, but it was at least a time that allowed a Montaigne to emerge. His favorite book was *Plutarch's Lives,* and Shakespeare had a copy of his *Essays* (putting his name in it). And so, while enjoying relief from the present, we wondered: Could a Montaigne emerge today? Could any young man or woman break through the barrage of "conditioning" that print and the electronic media pour at them, practically all the time? How, in these circumstances, can a young person be encouraged to think—to find out "what the years and centuries have to say against the hours"?

One must *want* to find out, of course, but it might help to make the hours shut up for a time while a generation gains some balance. This, incidentally, was Hannah Arendt's idea in relation to education. "I disagree," she said, "with the advisability of mobilizing children in political matters." This means education which gives more attention to life than to "the times." Montaigne had his political engagements of a sort, but his mind was devoted to life, which is why his writings are still alive.

Is there anyone now around with this view of education, or something like it? We don't have to stretch things too far to answer yes. John Holt is a teacher of children who, in the course of an active life discovered that parents are better (or can be better) than today's schools in teaching the young. He discovered that signs and slogans instead of thinking dominate the schools, some teachers, and many administrators. He discovered that it was no use to try to reform the schools of a mass society. The odds aren't good enough. In his paper, *Growing Without Schooling,* which comes out with fair regularity ($15 for six issues, $24 for twelve—from 729 Boylston St., Boston Mass. 02116), filled with reports from parents (and from a few of the children) who are teaching their young at home, he tells some of the reasons why he is doing what he is doing (this is from issue No. 34):

> Earlier this year I visited for a few days some old friends who are not home schoolers and whose children have always gone to school. Spending some time with their schooled kids made me realize that the combination of school plus "peer group" (an odd way to describe a group of people who have nothing in common with you except being the same age) can do children a kind of harm that I had not previously thought of.
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> My objection to the social life of almost all schools, as *GWS* readers know, is that it is for the

most part mean-spirited, competitive, ruthless, snobbish, conformist, consumerist (you are judged by what you can buy, or your parents buy for you), fickle, heartless, and often cruel. Most children come out of school with far less self-esteem, less sense of their own identity, dignity, and worth, than they had when they went in. I know this was true of me. Most children in school feel like losers and outsiders, and most will do almost anything that will, if only for a short time, give them the feeling of being insiders, truly "One of the Gang." But I had generally felt and said that there might be a few children who were so good at all the things that schools and "peer groups" considered important, so completely winners at the school game, that, socially at least, the school experience might be more positive than negative for them.

He changed his mind about this after spending some time with a girl about to enter high school. She was good at school work, bright, friendly, popular with both boys and girls, . . . but—

What school plus "peer group" had done was to enclose her in a world that was so small and so cut off from every other kind of reality that she might as well have been living in a spaceship. In spite of being very bright, and having very bright parents, she was as nearly as I could tell almost totally ignorant of and uninterested in the world around her. By this I do not mean just that she was not up on the latest newspaper headlines—I tend to agree more and more with Thoreau that most of the "news," even if true, is not worth knowing. What I mean is that she was not interested in anything about the world she lived in except the handful of cute boys and girls who were her companions and perhaps friends, plus perhaps a few stars from the world of popular mass culture—singers, actors and actresses, etc. . . . Friendly and charming though she was, she seemed as truly alienated from adult life, the (to me) fascinating community she lived in, and indeed the whole "Real World" that schools talk about, as the most enraged delinquent punk rocker. And this seems to me a serious loss and deprivation for her, and one that will probably make her own adult life less interesting and more difficult, when one day, as she must, she alights on Earth from her little spaceship.

Well, that's a slice of the life of the younger set in America. How widely it applies to the rest of the country we don't know. But John Holt, a man of wide experience who cares about these things, obviously thinks it's a typical possibility or he wouldn't have written about it at length. At any rate, the environment of a great many of the young of today is more as he describes it than it is like the community of the Greeks, say, in the time of Pericles which inspired Werner Jaeger to write his three-volume *Paideia*—the study of a culture in which *all* of the best men and women assumed responsibility for teaching the young the best of what they knew. In short, good and thoughtful young men and women, if they emerge in our society, will have to do it against the grain of institutional and cultural influences which confine, diminish, and shrivel the best qualities of human character.

Well, what has Holt done about what he thinks? He did a number of things. He wrote a book, *Teach Your Own,* and he started the paper, *Growing Without Schooling.* Briefly, he became a catalyst for the possibilities in other people, parents, to consider more deeply their responsibilities to their children. What could be more *culturally* useful than to awaken a sense of responsibility in a substantial number of the members of the community? Isn't that what just about all the social and political and moral diagnosticians keep saying—that nothing can be much improved without a "change of heart" in people, without a revision or revival or a creation of *values*? Holt is helping parents to take members of the next generation out of the hands of the educational bureaucracy and helping them to construct for their children a more paideia-like environment. It is not too much to say that *thousands* of people have been affected by his work. He doesn't claim that the bureaucracy is made up of "bad people," but that no matter how good they are their hands are tied by political forces which care nothing for the welfare of children, and by the now meaningless habits installed by yesterday's "reforms." He is making a kind of war, not on people, but on the moral lethargy of a population that has indifferently submitted to the rule of signs and slogans.

How is all this working? Well, No. 34 of *Growing Without Schooling* brings to its readers about thirty-five thousand words (in twenty-four 8 1/2" x 11" pages) of spontaneous reports from parents on how it is working. For example, a mother in Pennsylvania writes:

> Last year, at the beginning of summer, I asked my daughters what I thought was a casual question: "What would you like to learn about this summer?" They began answering me right away, without so much as a pause, and this is what we ended up with: Suzanne, 8, wanted to learn about stories, poems, science, math, art, music, books, people, planting, animals, places, food, colors, rocks, babies, cars, eyes, and electricity. Gillian, 6, wanted to learn about seeds, bones, plants, books, evolution, dinosaurs, and experiments. I tend to think that the fact that I asked them in the summer freed them from the boundaries of school subjects. In any case, I was stunned by the fact that they had so many subjects in mind, and that their lists were right there waiting for me to ask the right question. . . .

A California mother writes about home-schooling her 14-year-old daughter:

> When I volunteered in her sixth-grade class room and saw just how terrible the whole school scene was, I decided to teach her at home. . . . I have read extensively about education, since deciding to take her out of school, and feel I could write my own book. (In fact, I plan to.) . . . I finally narrowed her education down to one hour (approx.) each day for each of these subjects—reading, writing, and arithmetic. The reading is from books I consider the most helpful, interesting, etc. I wonder if this is being too dictatorial. Still, I am afraid that if we are not all pushed a little, we will miss some excellent books. I know I would never have read many books if I had not had to for classes in college. The same with writing papers. I believe in allowing her to choose her topics, sometimes, but I do expect her to write. In her reading, she does one chapter a day, and writes a brief summary of it. . . . She is free. She has earned money doing baby-sitting and housecleaning. She trained in a child-care center for two weeks, and in fact she and I are opening a center here.

A parent Holt met on a lecture tour wrote to him later:

> . . . It all goes back about eight years. Our eldest daughter was then in the first grade and very bored. It occurred to us that she was not learning anything at school that she could not learn at home, so we pulled her out. At first I was concerned that she would be wasting her time but I was too busy to be terribly bothered about it and I soon found myself leaving her alone the way my parents had left me alone in the summers. I was amazed to see that she thrived. The next year we tried second grade and pulled her out again. The following year our youngest daughter started kindergarten and the oldest went to third grade. The little one was reading the original version of *Winnie the Pooh* before she entered and when the teacher was still teaching her the alphabet in November, I pulled both girls out and neither ever went back.
>
> These girls have not had lessons of any kind since and they are positively as literate and educated, creative and skillful in many areas as the wonder kids in school. To be sure, our house has always been full of wonderful books and records and tools, but the point is we did not make any kind of learning mandatory unless it really was! For example, I decided years ago that they should help me by doing the laundry and other chores, so I showed them how. It was necessary and certainly part of "real" life. In fact, as time passed, the whole idea of creating situations outside of real life for the purpose of teaching about real life became positively ludicrous.
>
> Even now when people wonder if the girls shouldn't be doing this or that, I always wonder what is so wrong with just letting them live their lives. . . Our girls are not being deprived of necessary experiences and teaching. They both exhibit astonishing common sense, clarity of thinking, sensitivity to each other and all people and life, and an elegant poise which says they truly like themselves. I am always learning from them. They are so fortunate. . . .

One more letter, this one wild and woolly from a family in South Carolina that likes to gypsy around:

> Last summer we ran across *Teach Your Own* and decided to keep our children home this past school year. . . . For several years we have wanted to travel, but we have no funds to travel on. So last summer we decided to experiment and see how much of civilization we could do without and still be happy and fairly comfortable. From June to October we lived in two tents in the mountains of Tennessee. My husband drove 120 miles round trip to work every day. We were just going good on our experiment

> when it was time to start worrying about getting the kids back in school somewhere. Since we were rootless and enjoying the freedom of being able to pull up stakes and move whenever we wanted to, we were overjoyed to reach your book. . . .
>
> Our original plan was to get correspondence courses but we just could not come up with $800 for two children, so we started school out under the trees on a lake with whatever appropriate books we could find at flea markets. . . . We required the children to write one composition a week. We all loved to go to the libraries.
>
> Of course it hasn't been easy or all fun. We have no records for last year's school work. Though I try to maintain a schedule, the demand of younger children and another pregnancy, plus my own lags in discipline and lesson-planning made it a stop-and-start-again experience. . . . All in all, we're very glad we kept them home this past year. They are more family-oriented, and not as much inclined to be led around by the nose by their peer groups.
>
> This past week Jon (13) began working in a paint and body shop with his father, earning $115 a week; he was thrilled to be able to earn some money to help pay for his own clothes and education. . . .

This is a somewhat painful moment—coming to the end of our last page with dozens of equally exciting reports that must go unquoted. What we have put together may sound to some like a panegyric to John Holt—and we do think highly of him—but the point is really the resourcefulness of Americans, of people all over, who are doing their level best working at the roots of whatever civilization we are going to have in the future. What could they do that would be better?

REVIEW
GELTAFTAN

READING books is the duty of reviewers. Occasionally, although not often, the duty becomes a delight. This is the case with Nader Khalili's *Racing Alone* (Harper & Row, 1983, $14.95), an Iranian architect's account of how he learned to solve the "housing problem" of the Iranian poor—the people of 65,000 villages. He solved it in principle, that is, proving that fire would transform vulnerable mud and mudbrick houses—which collapse in heavy rain storms—into dwellings as tough as hollow rock, because they have become hollow rock. Mr. Khalili now teaches at the Southern California Institute of Architecture in Santa Monica, and is showing American Indian students how their adobe homes may be fired with the low-cost techniques he developed in Iran and applied to the two-room houses of a desert village.

Part of the pleasure in reading this adventure story comes from its introduction to the common people of Iran, their kindness, their manners, their human simplicities and complexities. There is practically nothing about the late Shah, a little about his wife or queen, a few pages about the religious Revolution—disturbing to the people but peripheral to the book. These matters are kept in proportion, as they should be in an account of a civilization that is more than twenty-five hundred years old.

Khalili, a man now in his fifties' was educated in Iran and this country (he is a member of the American Institute of Architects) and has practiced here and in Iran. He begins his book by telling how, in the middle of his life, certain dreams lifted him above his profession and gave his remaining years irresistible direction:

> My dreams were of a simple house, built with human hands out of the simple materials of this world: the elements:—Earth, Water, Air, and Fire.
>
> To build a house out of earth, then fire and bake it in place, fuse it like a giant hollow rock.
>
> The house becoming a kiln, or the kiln becoming a house.
>
> Then to glaze this house with fire to the beauty of a ceramic glazed vessel.
>
> I touched my dreams in reality by racing and competing with no one but myself.

The dream of a ceramic house began to take on reality when, riding around the country on a motorcycle, he came across a large kiln once used to bake clay pipes for aqueducts. It had not been fired up for fifty years.

> I need no explanation as to what this was, since I see what it is now; a huge room made of sun-dried adobe and clay mortar, a big kiln of some sort with a vault room. The walls, the roof, the floor—everything is changed to brick. The roof looks like a monolithic 7-m-long and 3-m-wide barrel vault. . . . This is exactly what I have been trying to do. . . . There is only a fold of time between what I am trying to create and what another man has created before I was born.

A local man came by and Khalili asked him why the roof hasn't collapsed, why the walls haven't fallen apart. "Well," said the man, "because the fire has burned and baked it to a single brick. Not even a cannon-ball can break this apart, can't you see?"

The architect mused:

> This is exactly what I am trying to do. This is just the size of one of those villagers' houses I am trying to fire and bake.
>
> The pictures of all the ceramic kilns of Korea, China, Japan, and now Iran come to mind. All these poor people living in these lands with the most sophisticated kiln rooms, stronger than any building they build, without living in them. They live right next to the kiln, in flimsy, dirty, and unstable houses that would fall apart with the first serious rain, a harsh wind, a small flood, or a little tremor; while their strong, long-lived kiln rooms look at them in mocking silence. They keep wasting all that fuel in mindless firing and refiring, baking and rebaking their kilns, all along watching their living quarters collapse while their kilns survive.

The luminous sense of this project was now evident. How should he begin? Where? What

technicians might be of assistance? He should, he knew, begin by firing a house. For various reasons it should be near Tehran, the country's capital. But who would help him plan and carry out the operation? He was not a potter, but a dreaming architect. Finally, he found a man, Ali Aga, sixty-five years old, who had been firing large domes for forty years, who could neither read nor write but who knew as much about fire as any salamander.

Then came the false starts, the minor catastrophes, the discouragements and frustrations. The Shah's wife sent for him, having heard of his dream from a European friend. She listened carefully to what he said, saw the slides of his demonstration models, said she would help. Weeks and months went by. He talked to the administrators of projects, men who were asked by the queen to look into his work—evaluate it. They dodged him, put him off, "referred" him. It all came to nothing. After the last meeting "in the fancy offices of the fancy building," he decided to quit trying that way.

> As I drive back, I realize that my soul has truly fallen to its lowest abyss, and that in this one year I have metamorphosed in the pursuit of an idea that is solid only in my own mind. . . .
>
> I remember all those bureaucrats' faces. A deputy changed to a director, a director juggled to a chairman's position, a chairman moved to a minister's chair, a minister creating and becoming the head of yet another superfluous institution. They all tie themselves with the power sources and are secured forever. . . . Bureaucracy is like quicksand: once you fall into it, the more you move about, the lower you go; and the deeper you get, the closer you are to being choked. I feel that I am choking and want to scream for help.

After the terrible earthquake of 1979 Khalili visited the ancient city of Tabas where destruction and loss of life were worst. He found that only "experts" were in charge of both emergency help and planning for reconstruction. Almost no one was doing what was immediately needed—burying the dead, restoring water supply. Some buildings made of concrete and steel were still standing but an elderly bystander, a former mason driven from his trade by Western building techniques, said: "Look, they killed more people in one minute than ten others did—those two-story iron and cement buildings." The ceilings had collapsed, caused by bad connections and poor welding. A number of clay and adobe domes had not fallen. Khalili explained to the ex-mason:

> I tell him how these domes have stood other quakes around the world. And how they behave in a quake and why they stand so firm. Even though their material is not strong, they stand like a soap bubble stands. . . .
>
> We walk past many houses where gates and rug frames are the only standing elements. As we walk in silence toward the camp, I entertain the wonderful thought of building domes of clay and firing them all in one piece. Putting them on a base of sand and letting them shiver on top of the earth with any size shock. . . .
>
> The myth of the earthquake-proof structures created by the specialists and the government advisors should be uncovered. Sixty-five thousand villages of Iran will wait for 3,000 years if they are hoping to be rebuilt with these technocrats' recipes. . . .

Having named his dream *Geltaftan—gel* meaning clay, and *taftan,* firing—Khalili was ready to do his great experiment, but he needed to find just the right place. It should be a poor village, where, if his trial was successful, "the villagers should say so, not the officials," and where he would "have the backing of the prayers of the innocent children and the old women." He picked Ghaleh Mofid—whose owner (landlord) had run away from the Revolution—only sixteen miles from Tehran, but on an out-of-the-way road. Each house had two rooms in one vault a little over twelve feet high. The front room was close to 12 feet by 12 feet, the back room smaller, used for storage. These rooms would become his kilns for human occupants. All he needed was some sort of "permit" to go ahead, and this the boisterous authority of some young Revolutionaries supplied. The villagers were eager, so he went ahead on one house. He collected Ali Aga, the old firing expert, and the

two made plans. They would put two barrels of kerosene on the roof and place the torch beneath the room in a firepit which had access from the outside. A pipe would carry the fuel to the torch, and they would control the amount of fire with a faucet regulating its flow. On a cold winter day they lit the torch and fired for seventeen hours with only small mishaps After they shut down the torch, Ali Aga, the fireman, called Khalili, pointing to the peep hole. "There, look!"

> And I look. I see one of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen in my life: the dying of a high-fired space. Since the torches are off, there is no fuel and there is no flame, but the room itself is emitting fire. The walls seem to be shooting fireballs at each other. A fired room doesn't die all at once; it plays a lot before its death. The whole room after a while starts glowing in deep red color, then adobe blocks of the walls and the ceiling become amber color, while the mortar lines between them change to pure nugget gold.

After two days the room is cool enough to enter. Everything is hard as rock. Next comes the crowning glory—firing a home-made glaze devised by Ali Aga and applied to the walls and ceiling with farmers' insecticide spray guns. Children, adults, and Khalili scribe their names and inscriptions in the wet glaze. The torch alight, the heat goes to 900 degrees centigrade, and hours later, "Everything is shining and sparkling; everything is changed to crystal."

> The word WATER is shimmering on the wall. It looks as if it is melting. The words EARTH, AIR, and FIRE, too, are shining and emitting light. . . . and the word *Geltaftan* stands out with dark and spangling outlines.

A preliminary anticlimax came early in the first firing when rodents and other unwanted critters fled the room, cheered away by the villagers. Then people brought pots of food to be cooked on the roof, and inside a number of loose adobe bricks were fired along with the house. Some ceremonial incense sanctified the occasion.

Khalili completed his triumph by firing the whole town. The world may lag in taking up his discovery, but that is nothing new. Meanwhile he is teaching others how to use it.

COMMENTARY
YES, YOU CAN

A SHORT article about introducing classical music to children, in the *Parents' Bulletin* of the School in Rose Valley, Moylan, Pennsylvania, finds a natural place here. The writer is Bill Hyatt, one of the parents. He plays the piano, the French horn, and the electric base guitar and has worked in pop bands, touring the Southwest, California, and Florida for ten years.

He begins:

> First we need to clarify: "What is classical music"?
>
> Generally, we are speaking of "serious" as opposed to "folk" or "pop" music. All three have existed side by side in every age. Sometimes they cross over, as when a composer introduces folk themes in a more stylized setting. . . . Instrumentally, we are talking about the strings, winds, brasses and percussion of the symphony orchestra, either in part or whole. Vocally, there is a rich library of opera as well as the song form and solo works. But . . . let's assume we know what we are talking about and think about the music's effect on us and our children.
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> Why? What can you get from experiencing this music?
>
> *It teaches*: To be quiet. You drop what you are thinking about and open your senses to the composition and the players. To be patient. You must wait for the piece to unfold, for the introduction of themes, melodies and their development. To seek inner meaning. Introspection is a large part of being a successful listener. You vibrate sympathetically with the music, not necessarily along the same path, but somewhat parallel to it. To analyze. You use the hearing and sight as input toward making judgments and decision. It stretches the imagination. . . . *Afternoon of a Faun* (Debussy) for example—picture the forest, the many moods of weather and sunlight. I can still hear clearly the flute playing the opening theme as it signals the entrance of a day, the shimmering of light through the mist, the shy run of a faun through a clearing. . . .
>
> How can you experience this music, and expose your children to it? The easiest and best way to introduce your children to classical music is to listen to it yourself. . . . Listen to the music at home and go to hear it where it is performed. You may be surprised to hear your eight-year-old say, "I really love the sound of that French horn. Do you think I can learn to play it?" Answer, Yes, you can.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
EINSTEIN AS TEACHER

FROM time to time books coming in for review seem rich in fundamentals on education, so they are channeled to this Department. One such book is *Einstein and the Poet* (published at $10 in paperback by Branden Press, Inc., Brookline Village, Mass. 02147), by William Hermanns, a German-born sociologist and poet who was privileged to have four long conversations with Albert Einstein—the first in Germany in 1930, attended by the shadow of coming events, the others in the United States. The resulting portrait of Einstein seems faithful to impressions gained elsewhere, and the value of the book is in its lessons of kindness, sagacity, firmness, and practical wisdom that pervade nearly everything the great physicist said. The way he treated the author of this book, who came bustling to see him armed with notebook and lists of questions, some of them tendentious from Einstein's point of view, is instruction in patience to us all.

But why go to Einstein—who was probably the greatest genius of our century—for light on education? After all, most of the rest of us, young and old, are far from being in his class. Well, that may be, but if you consult the real geniuses you often find their thought filled with the strong simplicities that ordinary people easily lose sight of. This is certainly the case with Einstein. There are other reasons, one given by A. H. Maslow in *Farther Reaches of Human Nature:*

> If I ask the question, "Of what are human beings capable?" I put the question to [a] small and selected superior group rather than to the whole of the population. I think that the main reason that hedonistic value theories and ethical theories have failed throughout history has been that the philosophers have locked in pathologically motivated pleasures with healthily motivated pleasures and struck an average of what amounts to indiscriminately sick and healthy, indiscriminately good and bad specimens, good and bad choosers, biologically sound and biologically unsound specimens.
>
> If we want to answer the question how tall can the human species grow, then obviously it is well to pick out the ones who are already tallest and study them. If we want to know how fast a human being can run, then it is no use to average out the speed of a "good sample" of the population; it is far better to collect Olympic gold medal winners and see how well they can do. If we want to know the possibilities for spiritual growth, value growth, or moral development in human beings, then I maintain that we can learn most by studying our most moral, ethical, or saintly people.

That is surely the case for studying Dr. Einstein attentively. Another reason would be that given by Ortega y Gasset in a hardly known book of his which is seldom consulted by educators—*Some Lessons in Metaphysics,* published by Norton in 1969. The material we have in mind is all in the first chapter. He starts out by asking: What is a student? and answering from his own experience as a teacher:

> We find ourselves faced with the fact that the student is a human being, male or female, on whom life imposes the need to study sciences for which he has felt no immediate genuine need. . . . This shows that even in the best of cases—and again, I repeat, saving exceptions—the desire to know, which the good student may feel, is completely heterogeneous and perhaps even antagonistic to the state of mind which led to the creation of a particular order of knowledge. Thus the attitude of the student toward science is the opposite of that which stirred its creator. . . . One needs precisely what one does not have, what is lacking, what is not existent, and the need, the demand, is that much stronger the less one has, the less there is of what is required.

Note that Ortega does not stoop to the cliche, "motivation," but speaks in terms of its actual meaning. Then, going to a student of another sort—truly the exception—he says:

> It is enough to compare the approach of a man who is going to study an already-existing science with the approach of a man who feels a real, sincere, and genuine need for it. The former will tend not to question the content of a science not to criticize it; on the contrary, he will tend to comfort himself by thinking that the content of the science which already

> exists has a defined value, is pure truth. What he seeks is simply to assimilate it as it already is. On the other hand, the man who is needful of a science, he who feels the profound necessity of truth, will approach this bit of ready-made knowledge with caution, full of suspicion and prejudice, submitting it to criticism, even assuming in advance that what the book says is not true. In short, for the very reason that he needs, with such deep anguish, to know, he will think that this knowledge does not exist, and he will manage to unmake what is presented as already made. It is men like this who are constantly correcting, renewing, recreating science.

What is the task of the teacher? He can, of course, induct the student into the conventions of what is already known—the established wisdom—and add one more to the battalions of mediocre minds content to repeat the thought of others. But this, Ortega would say, is the fraudulent aspect of education, reinforcing the layer upon layer of conventional culture. Real teaching, in contrast is inspiring—when one can—in the student the desire to know. *How* does one do this? By having the desire oneself and letting the student feel its exhilaration. A few such successes in a lifetime are sufficient reward for the real teacher. (For confirmation see *Masters—Portraits of Great Teachers,* Basic Books, 1981, edited by Joseph Epstein.)

What then is the point? The point is that Einstein, implicitly or explicitly, answers the questions that may arise from considering the basic propositions of Maslow and Ortega. He answers even questions about the welfare of the rank and file of non-geniuses, which will naturally arise. Choosing at random from Dr. Hermanns' account, there is this passage from his second conversation with Einstein (August, 1943):

> Einstein apparently wasn't offended by my attempt to convert him or my repeated challenges to his theory, because he smiled. "My theory of relativity has nothing to do with theology; it has never caused me to believe more or less in God. Do you imagine that Spinoza's philosophy was influenced by his job cutting diamonds? Man is what he thinks, not what he does. The basis of true thinking is intuition: this is what makes me abhor our present-day school system. They split each science into several categories; yet truth is only attained by a totality of experience. I was never attracted by specialization. I always wanted to know nature creation itself. The mystery of life attracted me. My religion is to use my thinking faculties, as much as I can, to know what seems unknowable. Have you ever stopped to consider that reading books, or gathering facts, has never led to any scientific discovery? Intuition is the prime factor in our achievements. . . .
>
> "No scientific progress is possible if we accept a priori concepts without analyzing them and asking ourselves, on the strength of new experiences, if they are still justified." He had started pacing up and down; I perched on the edge of a chair and wrote furiously. "The world consists of real objects, and there are consistent laws underlying them. If we want to honor God, then let us use our reason and intellect to grasp these laws, which form the basis of a perfect mechanism. The concepts of space and time are many centuries old, but that didn't hinder me from questioning them."

In the third conversation (1948) he said that "the traditional religions worry me."

> "Their long history proves that they have not understood the meaning of the commandment: Thou shalt not kill. If we want to save this world from unimaginable destruction we should concentrate not on the faraway God but on the heart of the individual. We live now in an international anarchy in which a Third World War with nuclear weapons lies before our door. We must make the individual man aware of his conscience so that he understands what it means that only a few will survive the next war."

When Dr. Hermanns reminded him that Sir Bowes-Lyon, brother of the Queen of England, regretted that Einstein had declined offers to stay in England, remarking, "You would have been ennobled," Einstein replied:

> "Tell the Queen's brother, should Einstein come back to earth, he wouldn't mind—no, tell him that he will become a shoemaker." He grabbed my hands and pressed them. "Dr. Hermanns, if you want to do something for me," he said with a faraway look, "tell the world that if I had foreseen Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I would have torn up my formula in 1905. . . ."

FRONTIERS

Words Worth Preserving

A LITTLE less than forty years ago, perhaps in Dwight Macdonald's *Politics,* there was a report of the visit of Max Lerner, an American intellectual, to one of the Nazi concentration camps. The inmates, liberated by the allied victory, were still living there, awaiting opportunity to find their way home. Lerner addressed this audience of emaciated humans, offering a robust denunciation of what the Germans had done to them. At the end of his speech, an English-speaking ex-prisoner stood and said, "But Mr. Lerner, you must remember, we, too, are Germans."

A story like this has various applications. It applies, in a way, to the commencement day address given by the novelist, E. L. Doctorow, last May to the graduating class of Sarah Lawrence College, in which he said:

> We've got to watch ourselves. We are in thrall to our own Bomb.
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> We've got to watch out for the little explosions of nerve and fear in the constrictions of public debate, in the lassitude of our private lives, in the rising levels of irrationality in our group relations, in the tendency of our elected governments to abridge our political liberties, in the pressure we feel not to dissent but to conform, to play it safe, to shut up.
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> Because the time may be approaching when we will have to choose between two coincident reality systems: the historical human reality of feeling, of thought, of multitudinous expression, of life and love and natural death, or the suprahuman statist reality of rigid, ahistorical, censorious and contending political myth structures, which may in our name and from the most barbaric impulses disenfranchise 99 per cent of the world's population from even tragic participation in their fate. . . .
>
> That is what your faculty wanted to say to you. You are in charge of yourselves.

Around the world, in a great many countries, there are young men and women determined to remain in charge of themselves. The *WRI Newsletter* for last June reports on what is happening to some of them. In South Africa, for example—

> Peter Hathorn, a 22-year-old graduate of the University of Cape Town, was sentenced on 22 March to two years imprisonment for refusing to be conscripted into the South African Army. . . . Only a few days after he was sentenced the South African parliament introduced legislation providing for six-year sentences for conscientious objectors taking political or moral stands. . . .
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> About 400 conscientious objectors are serving jail or military detention terms of up to three years for refusing conscription into the apartheid armed forces. . . . There have been so many war resisters that tents have had to be erected alongside the detention barracks. The sentences are lighter in Israel:
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> Twenty-eight Israeli reservists have been court-martialled for their part in the largest manifestation of conscientious objection in Israel's history: refusal to serve in Lebanon.
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> The court-martialled men are among 1500 reservists, including 200 officers up to the rank of lieutenant colonel, who have joined the Yesh Gvul (There is a Limit) movement protesting against the continued Israeli presence in Lebanon. Military courts have passed sentences ranging from 14 to 28 days on the convicted men. Yitzhak Shavit, a 21-year-old kibbutz member, was sentenced to 21 days for refusing assignment to Lebanon. "Unlike others who only expressed their opposition to the war," he said, "we simply refuse to take part in it."

An American woman, Leslie Cole, served 57 days of a 60-day sentence in a military prison for deciding she had made a mistake in joining the Navy. At first she was reduced in rank, put to work in the galley, and told that it would be months before her application for discharge as a conscientious objector would be considered. After a long wait she was told she must wait for five weeks more.

> Several days later, she saw the film *Gandhi,* and the following day she put on civilian clothes and told her superiors she would not put on her uniform or perform her duties again. After serving 28 days in a civilian prison awaiting trial because the Navy did not have facilities for women, she was court-martialled and sentenced to 60 days hard labor, loss of three months pay and a bad conduct discharge. . . . Because she continued to refuse to wear her uniform, she was

> held in solitary confinement with only a sheet to wear and with no reading or writing materials. She was allowed no visitors.

Such reports naturally raise the question: What is the real defense of what we think of as civilization? One answer was provided by Doctorow in his commencement day talk. He said to the students:

> In fact, everything you have learned is a quite volatile composition made up by others just like you and therefore subject to your additions and corrections. What has been going on, really, is the life of your own mind as it has found the words, the ideas, the feelings to illuminate yourself.
>
> And if members of the faculty have seemed to you at various times to possess commanding intellectual presence, and I hope they have, the truth is that they are itinerants like you, having given their lives over to the strange species-grooming that is peculiarly Homo sapient—the modest, exhausted instruction in mind-survival of the generation that will succeed theirs.
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> And everything impractical they've given you—lines of poetry, phrases of music, philosophical propositions, ancient histories, myths, dance steps—is terribly practical; is, in fact, the only means we have to defend the borders of a magnanimous, humanist civilization.
>
> Right now that civilization is under considerable attack. . . .
>
> The presumption of your collegiate life here, the basic presumption, is that every life has a theme. It is a literary idea, the great root discovery of narrative literature—every life has a theme and there is human freedom to find it, to create it, to make it victorious.

E. L. Doctorow's address appeared in the *Nation* for July 2. It is worth preserving.