

SOME ENGLISH MUSINGS

A FEW weeks ago it was suggested here (February 3) that only confusion and folly permit taking part in the argument about the nuclear weapons claimed to be necessary to offset the similar armament of the Soviets. We ought, it was said, to "fill our minds with other themes" that are not anti-human, as any plans for the use of nuclear weapons are bound to be. Another question remains, however, since the threat of nuclear war remains: Are there useful ways to think about that?

The need for such reflection was emphasized by a California Congressman (George Brown) to his constituents in a recent letter, in which he said:

Our friends in Europe, who have dramatized their belief that the nuclear arms race is a madness that should no longer be tolerated, may have similarly started a fundamental debate that is reaching into both the Communist Bloc Nations and the United States. We can hope and work to make this change in international awareness of the futility of nuclear arms a constructive step towards a more just and peaceful world.

There are dozens of accounts, some of them quite lurid—justifiably lurid—of what a nuclear war would be like. We have no end of horror stories, to what effect it is difficult to say. Toward the end of his recent volume, *Cosmos*, Carl Sagan gives the view of a scientist:

Hypnotized by mutual mistrust, almost never concerned for the species or the planet, the nations prepare for death. And because what we are doing is so horrifying, we tend not to think of it much. But what we do not consider we are unlikely to put right.

Every thinking person fears nuclear war, and every technological state plans for it. Everyone knows it is madness and every nation has an excuse. There is a dreary chain of causality: The Germans were working on the bomb at the beginning of World War II, so the Americans had to make one first. If the Americans had one, the Soviets had to have one, and then the British, the French, the Chinese the

Indians, the Pakistanis . . . By the end of the twentieth century many nations had collected nuclear weapons. They were easy to devise. Fissionable material could be stolen from nuclear reactors. Nuclear weapons became almost a home handicraft industry. . . .

By the late twentieth century, two megatons was the energy released in the explosion of a single more or less humdrum thermonuclear bomb: one bomb with the destructive force of the Second World War. But there are tens of thousands of nuclear weapons. By the ninth decade of the twentieth century the strategic missile and bomber forces of the Soviet Union and the United States were aiming warheads at over 15,000 designated targets. No place on the planet was safe. The energy contained in these weapons, genies of death patiently awaiting the rubbing of the lamps, was far more than 10,000 megatons—but with the destruction concentrated efficiently, not over six years but over a few hours, a blockbuster for every family on the planet. A World War II every second for the length of a lazy afternoon.

Sagan tells of the net of widespread death that results from nuclear bombing, and adds what might be termed a "human touch" in the testimony of a child survivor:

The immediate causes of death from nuclear attack are the blast wave, which can flatten heavily reinforced buildings many kilometers away, the firestorm, the gamma rays and the neutrons, which effectively fry the insides of passersby. A school girl who survived the American nuclear attack on Hiroshima, the event that ended the Second World War, wrote this first-hand account:

"Through a darkness like the bottom of hell, I could hear the voices of the other students calling for their mothers. And at the base of the bridge, inside a big cistern that had been dug out there, was a mother weeping, holding above her head a naked baby that was burned bright red all over Its body. And another mother was crying and sobbing as she gave her burned breast to her baby. In the cistern the students stood with only their heads above the water, and their two hands, which they clasped as they imploringly

cried and screamed, calling for their parents. But every single person who passed was wounded, all of them, and there was no one, there was no one to turn to for help. And the singed hair on the heads of people was frizzled and whitish and covered with dust. They did not appear to be human, not creatures of this world."

This description is mild compared to some others, yet here the combined horrors of sudden and wasting death can be sufficiently felt. But not, it seems, by the planners of nuclear war, and in view of the destruction of which the nuclear powers are now capable, the Hiroshima explosion was only an atomic firecracker. Carl Sagan says:

In a full nuclear exchange, in the paroxysm of thermonuclear war, the equivalent of a million Hiroshima bombs would be dropped all over the world. At the Hiroshima rate of some hundred thousand people killed per equivalent thirteen-kiloton weapon, this would be enough to kill a hundred billion people.

This would be far more than "everyone on earth," and the after-effects; as Sagan shows, are enough to make those who survive wish they had been killed, too. It takes a page of his book to list them; and then, he says, "there would be other agonies":

the loss of loved ones; the legions of the burned, the blind and the mutilated; disease, plague, long-lived radioactive poisons in the air and water; the threat of tumors and stillbirths and malformed children; the absence of medical care; the hopeless sense of a civilization destroyed for nothing; the knowledge that we could have prevented it and did not.

Who, then, needed to be persuaded of what, to prevent the bombing of the Japanese cities, and to stop the subsequent nuclear tests that already have harmed so many (according to Ernest Sternglass, radiation physicist)? And what sort of logic, if any, might put an end to the present nuclear arms race?

Judging from the determination of the nuclear powers to meet each enemy threat with a greater one, these questions are too big. They are rhetorical, and so would be the answers. We need a world in which no one would even consider

destruction and slaughter on the scale of nuclear mass murder, and we have no idea how to get it. Spreading fear is not the way to get it. Fear is the reason we have those weapons now, and are preparing to use them.

That we now have the power to make and use nuclear weapons is due to fear—the fear of decent and exceptional men who had the ability to invent and make the first atomic bomb, and then were unable to stop it from being used. They were the atomic scientists.

A little over a year ago, in a musing article in the British *New Statesman* (Dec. 19/26, 1980), the editor, Bruce Page, concluded that the scientists who developed their knowledge of nuclear fission into a device of unparalleled destructive power were spurred in this dread enterprise because they feared that the Nazis might perfect the bomb first. Mr. Page maintains that this was a tragic mistake; the Nazis *couldn't* do it, he says, because of their intellectual and moral flaws. Their creative capacity as human beings had left them. He reached this conclusion after a long session with Otto Robert Frisch, a key German physicist in recognizing how the bomb could be made.

Frisch was the nephew of Lise Meitner, the brilliant and intuitive scientist who worked with Otto Hahn, but who, by reason of her ancestry, had to leave Germany for Stockholm in 1938. Frisch was then in Copenhagen, saved from the Nazi tyranny by Niels Bohr, along with other Jewish and dissident scientists, and he went to Stockholm to see if he could help his aunt get settled. She showed him a letter from Hahn saying that he had split a uranium atom. So Frisch, a mathematical prodigy, and his aunt, with her intuitive daring in physics, began to work things out. Meanwhile Bohr had published a letter in the *American Physical Review* to the effect that fission was not likely to be possible with uranium 238 (it contained only traces of U-235), and this, from so universally respected a physicist, was relieving, Bruce Page says, to the scientists who understood the danger. Frisch, however, decided

that if you could refine U-238 into U-235, only a few pounds of the material would be enough to make the bomb. Then in England, Frisch and a young Berlin scientist, Rudolf Peirels, wrote the *Frisch-Peirels Memorandum* which, Page says, "in three pages of typescript showed that nuclear warfare was not an impractical dream, but a highly practical reality." British scientists then began the pursuit of military nuclear energy and eventually joined the Manhattan Project. "The material resources which produced the 1945 bombs were almost entirely American, but the critical difference which the British team made is that they had already asked—and answered—the right theoretical questions." This is the point on which the *New Statesman* editor founds his thinking about the discovery of the physical secret of the bomb. He says:

What kind of people could ask such questions? Not fools or cowards, we may be sure, not chilly apparatchiks. They were men whose creativity had been raised to a high pitch by the moral and emotional pressures of contemporary politics, and by a conviction that they were defending humanity against barbarism. They were sure their own side was right, and they feared that the wrong might be powerful.

They *feared* that the Nazis would sooner or later make the bomb. This, Page says, was their great mistake:

It was the political wickedness of the Nazis which caused their scientific and technical incompetence. Or: Only a terrorist will use weapons indiscriminately, and pure terrorists cannot muster the moral and emotional resources required for free creativity. This does not mean that wicked regimes aren't dangerous, and aren't capable of destructive effort: only that their power on the ground may be less than it appears, as the Yugoslavs demonstrated to Stalin.

Page points out that not one of the creative physicists who remained in Germany under Hitler's rule became active Nazis. The Western scientists who worked on the bomb, he says, "were in 'error' about the Germans."

Nobody in Germany approached anywhere near the intuitive insights of the *Frisch-Peirels Memorandum*, and it has emerged since that this was part of a quite general failure. The Nazi regime was incapable of harnessing science to its military ends.

This may surprise people whose knowledge of contemporary technological history is not detailed. What about ballistic missiles, jet engines, transonic aerodynamics? Weren't whole sections of Western and Soviet aerospace industries built up after the war, upon knowledge and talent seized from fallen Germany? . . .

The Nazis, of course, managed to make some use of science and technology, or they would have made no showing at all in such a conflict. . . One must think of the Nazis like science-fiction ape-men, taking over the powers of a spectacularly superior culture, and seizing into their hands weapons whose power they appreciated, but principles they grasped not at all. . . . Their leader, Hitler, was described by Simone Weil as being distinctive because he was "a man of pure force": the accent being on *pure*, unmixed. . . . Hitler had a crude, deterministic view of the physical universe, and—for all his spiritualistic blether—saw no gap between it and the human world. Questions of good and evil, of love, honour, faith and aspiration seemed to him to have no bearing upon the course of the planets, or upon the course of life. Certainly there are many people who think this some of the time, with varying degrees of exclusiveness. Hitler believed it all of the time, entirely without remission. His achievement—rivalled, doubtless, by Stalin's—was to wrap around this void a simulacrum of humanity. Of course, the trick was but barely achieved, and the effects were hardly stable.

Mr. Page finds one passage in the *Frisch-Peirels Memorandum* of particular interest:

Owing to the spread of radioactive substances with the wind [its writers said], the bomb could probably not be used without killing large numbers of civilians, and this may make it unsuitable as a weapon for use by this country [England]. (Use as a depth charge near a naval base suggests itself, but even there it is likely that it would cause great loss of civilian life by flooding and by the radioactive radiations) . . . If one works on the assumption that Germany is or will be, in possession of this weapon . . . the most effective reply would be a counter-threat with a similar bomb. Therefore it seems to us important to start production as soon as possible, even if it is not intended to use the bomb as a means of attack.

Musing on the humane temper evident here, the *New Statesman* editor wryly recalls that the British were the first to undertake area-bombing aimed specifically at the civilian population in Germany, saying,

. . . it may be worth asking, if the possibility of Hamburg and of Dresden had been perceptible in 1940, whether the division between the children of light and the children of darkness would have been so perfectly discernible.

Could Frisch and Peirels have written as they did had they known they were addressing a government which was capable of deliberate mass attack upon civilians? Although unanswerable, the question may still be useful.

The fundamental error, according to Page—an error Robert Oppenheimer would call "sin"—was to over-estimate an oppressive enemy, "ascribing to him virtue which he did not possess."

That error brought the Hiroshima bomb into being, and brought about its use: today, the same error lives on in the fantastic and still-grown profusion of Western nuclear "devices" and delivery-systems for them.

Concluding his argument, Bruce Page says:

There is no world in which totalitarianism could harness those energies of Niels Bohr. . . One may put this Simone Weil's way, and say simply that Hitler was wrong: that the world is not, finally, a world of pure force. Or one may borrow from Christian theology (and one need not borrow the Church's other trappings) to say that the greatest danger in the world is not evil, but good in error.

It was a particular error in the Forties to assume too much of the governments of the "children of light," and to think that a weapon whose only real usefulness lies in civilian slaughter would be "unsuitable for use by this country." Yet the loss is not complete if a correct lesson is drawn from it: that nobody, in this modern world, dare trust any state, or any government, completely. If patriotism says we must, then patriotism becomes a lethal ailment. Allegiance, however deep-felt, must always remain conditional.

At times, Bruce Page's analysis grows almost metaphysical. A cautious agnostic, he seems to be wondering what kind of a universe we live in, and whether its causal arrangements have an

underlying moral quality in which the movers and shakers of Western civilization have lost their faith. He is trying to understand why "the most terrible invention in human history" was the creation of people possessed of admirable qualities in somewhat greater measure than average mankind. On the showing of the evidence he assembles, the scientists who made the bomb had intellectual honesty, humility, were capable of self-sacrifice, and were (believe it or not) personally nonviolent. "Anyone who has met enough first-class natural scientists, and has had enough experience to compare them with businessmen, cops, priests, or army officers, is aware that they represent, collectively, the human personality in one of its least unattractive forms."

So why, he asks, did the best come to produce the worst? He answers:

Anguish at the capacities of an evil enemy conjoined with an almost total faith in the justice of the Allied cause. "Surely never before," said one of the Manhattan Project team, "were the lines drawn so clearly between the children of light and the children of darkness." No indeed, though it might be more correct to say that not for many centuries had so many people believed in the possibility of ultimate victory for the children of darkness.

What then is the duty of men of mind—especially of those who, knowing something of truth, recognize that uncertainty increases with understanding, and whose grasp of the good is necessarily matched by recognition of the possibilities of evil? He finds the answer in a poem written by Kipling toward the end of his life:

If thought can reach to Heaven,
On Heaven let it dwell.
For fear thy thought be given
Like power to reach to Hell.

The duty is *silence*.

Should you discover hell, keep the news to yourself. Should you be correct, the news benefits nobody else, whatever relief you gain from spreading it. And you may, indeed, be mistaken.

In short, this is a universe in which we have a part in making our portion of it into either heaven or hell. In certain crucial degrees, Bruce Page

says, "the human mind is capable of inventing the universe in which it dwells." The real world, then, is the world of consciousness, and the nuclear scientists, confronted by a Hitler, proved men of little faith.

We must not, Page says, allow our fear of evil to overcome our confidence in the superior power of good. We must not allow the ruthlessness of evil action to frighten us into accepting the means that evil does not hesitate to use. "That, in part, is what the Nazis did to us.

Far more than statesmen and military planners, poets and novelists understand these matters, Page suggests.

During the anxious 1930s, the idea of the Bomb appeared in literature, years before Otto Hahn split an atom of uranium. Eric Ambler's novel, *The Dark Frontier*, written in 1934, dealt with "the political consequences of nuclear weaponry."

There was another such anticipation in literature. Sixty-three years before, in his utopian romance of an advanced subterranean civilization, Bulwer-Lytton gave an account of the "all-permeating fluid" called "Vril" which the people of *The Coming Race* (1871) could command. "It can destroy like the flash of lightning; yet differently applied, it can replenish or invigorate life, heal, and preserve." But only persons of a certain moral development could control this power. Their underground world was carved out of rock by the Vril, which also supplied their light. The author continues:

But the effects of the alleged discovery of the means to direct the more terrific force of vril were chiefly remarkable in their influence on social polity. As these effects became familiarly known and skillfully administered, war between the Vril-discoverers ceased, for they brought the art of destruction to such perfection as to annul all superiority in numbers, discipline, or military skill. The fire lodged in the hollow of a rod directed by the hand of a child could shatter the strongest fortress, or cleave its burning way from the van to the rear of an embattled host. If army met army, and both had

command of this agency, it could be put to the annihilation of both. The age of war was therefore gone, but with the cessation of war other effects bearing upon the social state soon became apparent. Man was so completely at the mercy of man, each whom he encountered being able, if so willing, to slay him on the instant, that all notions of government by force gradually vanished from political systems and forms of law. It is only by force that vast communities, dispersed through great distances of space, can be kept together; but now there was no longer either the necessity of self-preservation or the pride of aggrandizement to make one state desire to preponderate in population over another.

The Vril-discoverers thus, in the course of a few generations, peacefully split into communities of moderate size.

This was the course that rational beings might be expected to take, given the sole alternative of Mutually Assured Destruction. Are we, slowly but surely, moving in that direction? Or shall we have to await a more powerful persuasion than sanity and common sense?

REVIEW

THE AILING ARTS

THIRTY-FIVE years ago—in the 1946-47 number of Dorothy Norman's *Twice a Year*—the late Harold Clurman, then and for many years after probably the best drama critic in the United States, declared that the theatre was "sick unto death." The trouble, he said, was in "the sources and objectives of theatrical production."

With us the theatre is a business. There may be nothing wrong with business but—I am ready to shout it from the housetops—it is not the business of theatre to be a business! You can argue, protest, you can analyze or point to historical evidence (Shakespeare was box office, wasn't he?; Shaw is a rich man, isn't he?), but I repeat with as little humility, apology or qualification as possible: for the theatre to function as a truly humanizing agent or even, if you will, as an honest project of entertainment, it cannot primarily be a business. . . .

There is a very simple reason why the theatre is not and cannot be a business. The reason is: that it is an art. . . . This goes for the writing of novels, the painting of pictures the making of music, but the theatre is the place where the opposite temptations are most readily at hand, and where the hard path appears to lead most rapidly to a kind of nonexistence.

Reviewers, Clurman said, are at fault in that they "write as if their supreme joy resided in the heralding of a hit." Whether or not the play "is what it purports to be" doesn't seem to matter to them, since, if it is likely to make money, "it is really serving the purpose which apparently everybody agrees it should serve." The applause of critics "is the echo of the coin as it falls in the till." The audience, alas, goes along. "The audience," Clurman remarked, "has been corrupted, of course, by the ambient hysteria of the inflationary psychology which includes the theatre—its producers, backers, and philosophers."

Clurman went on writing reviews until he died—reviews that reflected his taste, intelligence, and integrity. He was able to do this because,

now and then, and "against the grain," good things happen in the theatre. But to make its way against the tide of money-making trash, a serious play must be very good. A species of heroism seems to be required of an artist to maintain his integrity in our society. This is quite a burden to place on the aspiring young.

And now, according to the January *Saturday Review*, a similar verdict on publishing has been rendered in *Books: The Culture and Commerce of Publishing* (Basic Books), by Lewis Coser, Charles Kadushin, and Walter W. Powell. Independent publishers, as recent studies have shown, are being swallowed up by conglomerates, some of them publishing conglomerates. Interestingly, the emphasis on the bottom line comes as much from the editors as from the accountant-guided corporate owners. The *SR* reviewer, Robert R. Harris, says in summary:

The effects of big business's entry into publishing are most evident not in the actions of corporate boards but in the attitude of a new generation of book editors who are deeply concerned with sales. . . . It is the editors' sense of the marketplace rather than the directives of far-removed corporate officials that is bad news for many so-called midlevel books (books of quality aimed at audiences of modest size) .

The enormous bookstore chains, it is said, are now beginning to dominate the book market and are in a position to dictate what should be published. They talk only of "best-sellers," not "good books." "The chains buy books by genre, and computers keep track of what's selling. What isn't is pulled from the shelves; if certain kinds of books are not moving, orders are cut."

Self-publishing seems to be part of the future for serious writers who are not quite Tolstoy or Dostoevskis. Happily, there are useful manuals on this subject, encouraging to authors who have what it takes. Why, after all, try to "do business" with institutions that seem intent on strangling, on commercial principle, works which are serious but not likely to be popular?

We are happy to devote our remaining space to something written by Harold Goddard in 1916.

JEFFERSON'S BIRTHDAY

THESE are days when there is a demand for the patriotic American. But what *is* a patriotic American? Surely no one can be better entitled to answer that question than the author of the Declaration of Independence. "The principles of Jefferson," said Abraham Lincoln, "are the definitions and axioms of free society. . . ."

Thomas Jefferson was born on April 13. Why would this not be a good day, then, to set a Jeffersonian test for the various politicians and others who have been modest enough to pass themselves in the great American examination with a grade of 100%? It would be salutary to discover how well their pretensions to the purest brand of Americanism stand up under the gospel according to Jefferson. For example:

I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of men.

I am for freedom of the press, and against all violations of the constitution to silence by force and not by reason the complaints or criticisms, just or unjust, of our citizens against the conduct of their agents.

Let us reflect that having banished from our land that religious intolerance under which mankind so long bled and suffered, we have gained little if we countenance a political intolerance as despotic, as wicked, and capable of as bitter and bloody persecutions. . . . If there be any among us who wish to dissolve this union, or to change its republican form, let them stand, undisturbed, as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it.

What a stupendous, what an incomprehensible machine is man! who can endure toil, famine, stripes, imprisonment, and death itself, in vindication of his own liberty, and, the next moment, be deaf to all those motives whose power supported him through his trial, and inflict on his fellow men a bondage, one hour of which is fraught with more misery than ages of that which he rose in rebellion to oppose.

There are rights which it is useless to surrender to the government, and which governments have yet always been found to invade. [Among these] are the rights of thinking and publishing our thoughts by writing.

The legislative powers of government reach actions only and not opinions.

This institution [The University of Virginia] will be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind. For here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it.

The will of the people is the only legitimate foundation of any government, and to protect its free expression should be our first object.

The mass of the citizens is the safest depository of their own rights.

The imprisonment of a person under the protection of the laws. . . . on his failure to obey the simple *order* . . . to depart out of the United States. . . . is contrary to the Constitution, one amendment of which has provided that "no person shall be deprived of liberty without due process of law"; . . . and another that "in all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right of public trial, by an impartial jury, to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation, to be confronted with the witnesses against him, to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the assistance of counsel for his defence."

Subject opinion to coercion: whom will you make your inquisitors? Fallible men, governed by bad passions, by private as well as public reasons. And why subject it to coercion? To produce uniformity? But is uniformity of opinion desirable? No more than of face and stature.

And so we might continue for pages, ending with that sentence from the Declaration of Independence which every American already knows by heart: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, That all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men." . . . But why add more to the evidence? The dilemma is inescapable: either Thomas Jefferson was not an American, or else the 100%

patriot of today is not. Take your choice. "Soberly, it is now no child's play to save the principles of Jefferson from total overthrow in this nation." So wrote Abraham Lincoln, and the rest of his tribute to Jefferson is equally applicable to our day:

The principles of Jefferson are the definitions and axioms of free society. And yet they are denied, and evaded, with no small show of success. One dashing calls them "glittering generalities"; another bluntly calls them "self-evident lies" and others insidiously argue that they apply only to "superior races." These expressions, differing in form, are identical in object and effect—the supplanting the principles of free government, and restoring those of classification, caste, and legitimacy. . . . They are the vanguard, the miners and sappers of returning despotism. We must repulse them or they will subjugate us. . . . Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and, under a just God, cannot long retain it. All honor to Jefferson—to the man who, in the concrete pressure of a struggle for national independence by a single people, had the coolness, forecast, and capacity to introduce into a merely revolutionary document an abstract truth ["that all men are created equal"], applicable to all men and all times, and so embalm it there, that today and in all coming days, it shall be a rebuke and stumbling-block to the very harbingers of reappearing tyranny and oppression.

HAROLD C. GODDARD

COMMENTARY

A POLITICAL STRUGGLE

FOR useful current comment on Thomas Jefferson's declaration that in America we have "banished from our land that religious intolerance under which mankind so long bled and suffered" (see page 3), one might turn to an interview (in the Unitarian *Universalist World* for Feb. 2) with Dr. Stephen Jay Gould, a professor of geology at Harvard University. The subject is the present controversy over the fundamentalist claim that scientific education in the public schools should be "balanced" by courses in "Creation Science." Prof. Gould's statements as a spokesman for science have welcome breadth. Here we quote his reply to the question of whether scientists should debate with creationists at all:

The main point is that struggle is a political one, it's not an intellectual one. There isn't a single new creationist argument I've ever seen that in any way was unknown to William Jennings Bryan in the twenties. Debate is the only forum in which they are any good. Debate is not an art form to find the truth; debate is an art form to win in a public presentation. The main reason the creationists seek these debates is plain and simply that they are looking for support for the equal time argument, and if professional evolutionists debate them all over the country in major universities, then it increases the appearance of respectability. Some of my colleagues think they can strap on their armor and slay the creationist dragon by debating them. That's not the issue. It's not an intellectual issue. It's a political struggle, and you don't play the enemy's game.

Dr. Gould's own view is reflected in his answer to the question: "Are there ways in which the theory of evolution might be false?"

A theory is a set of ideas that helps us to interpret and explain the facts that exist quite independent of that theory. I think that what's not in doubt is the fact of evolution, which is merely the fact of genealogical connection and descent with modification, as Darwin called it. But as to its mechanism there is really a lot we don't know. I think there is very little doubt his theory of natural selection works. The question is how pervasive is it as a mechanism. . . . There is observational evidence for [natural selection, but] it could be false that it's as strong a determinant of evolution events as we think.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves TWO PIONEERS

THERE is more than filial piety to honoring one's ancestors. It is a way—perhaps the best way—of understanding history. But as various critics have pointed out, celebration of the status quo is the main content of most history books used as texts in the schools. And as still other critics have made plain, changing these texts for better ones is practically a lost cause. The reform is a task that parents and concerned individuals will have to undertake. The young need balanced help to realize that practically any status quo needs revision or replacement, so that the understanding of history should be based on the vision of practical reformers—far-seeing individuals who have recognized what is wrong with the status quo long before this awareness seeps into the consciousness of enough people to take action for change.

We have as examples two "ancestors" of an outlook that is now spreading in the United States. One is Ralph Borsodi, decentralist and homesteader (and critical economist) who began setting down his ideas and describing his personal practice in the 1920s. In a paper honoring Borsodi as a pioneer ("Ralph Borsodi, America's Anti-Industrial Isaiah"), Henry C. Winthrop, sociologist at the University of South Florida, Tampa, reports on Borsodi's prophetic insight:

Borsodi was ahead of his time—ahead of Toynbee, Joad, and Karen Horney. Along with Ortega y Gasset, he clearly asserted that mass man—lacking vision to ask what the gift of life is for—demands every type of creature comfort which modern industrialism can provide. Borsodi saw, too, that massman demanded creature comforts as rights and privileges, little understanding or respecting the ingenuity of the advanced technology and the complex economy that make his comfort possible.

In the pages of *MANAS* we have often given attention to Borsodi's *Flight from the City* (1929), in which he tells how, although a commuter to his

job in New York, he was able to build a home and garden and family subsistence economy a few miles out in the country. The book is exciting, even inspiring, and stirred a number of people to "go and do likewise." Prof. Winthrop was especially moved by another of Borsodi's books, *This Ugly Civilization*, published at about the same time. Winthrop calls it "America's first critique of modern industrialism." Borsodi was a man who looked at his times and saw the kind of a society we were making and what it would do to the people who accepted its pattern of life as "a good thing." Winthrop's summary is apt:

Borsodi completely believed that a human's character—his very person—is shaped from the work one does—from the activity performed to sustain one's life; from seizing one's opportunity and shouldering one's responsibility for survival. Borsodi gloried in the integrated, full human process of living on the land, where the person—the worker—chooses his work, designs his product (whether garden, field, house, tool); chooses his tools and his materials; and *executes* his own purposes. What better way to integrate one's mind, muscle, feelings, will?

A full reading of *This Ugly Civilization* captures the logic, the persistence and the passion with which Borsodi raised questions about modern industrialization. He precisely analyzed the factory itself, the factory product, the factory machine and the factory worker. From the human angle all scored negatively. With care, too, Borsodi described the human use of the machine on the modern homestead, and in small-scale, decentralized settings. For the Borsodis and many another persuaded family, the modern homestead offers a realistic alternative to a less good part in monopolized centralization. In daily-choosing, the homesteader has opportunity for liberty and personal growth. A hundred times a day, homesteaders choose purposes, tools, materials, designs, actions. Whole natural food from organic soil supports good health. Creative activities replace monotonous, repetitive work. . . .

Borsodi first wrote when Post-WWI was shrouded in optimism and amorality. The typical American did not care what were, or would be, the consequences of the industrial culture that he was whopping for so vociferously. But, to Borsodi's credit, he dealt with these important matters in this early period. . . . Few words equal the eloquence with which Ralph Borsodi ended *This Ugly Civilization*,

depicting the religious, cultural, economic, political, and psychological barriers to a good society.

Borsodi should be read not only for his early diagnosis of America's ills. He should be read for his dramatic showing of what one man can do against the grain of the times, although *with* the natural tides of a good life. Vision and ingenuity, then, were the secret of his success. That there have been, are, and ought to be more of such individuals is a communication we owe to the young.

Another pioneer and ancestor of present understanding is Paul B. Sears, author of *Deserts on the March* (1935), written because of the dust storms of the early '30s, but covering much more than this disastrous offense against certain laws of nature. There is now a revised edition of *Deserts on the March*, with new material by the author (University of Oklahoma Press, 1980. \$12.50). Here we draw on a review by Aaron J. Sharp (a graduate student of Sears) appearing in *Land Report* (Land Institute, Route 3, Salina, Kans. 67401) for the Fall of 1980. The reviewer says:

The historical background is given for the philosophy which permitted the early settlers in America to decimate the native Indians and begin the misuse and waste of natural resources. Most of the early immigrants had little, if any, farming experience, moreover, there were "unlimited resources" (land, forest, wildlife) beyond, when an area became depleted.

It is time for the coming generations to be made aware of this darker side of American history. We had some great men to launch the beginning of our country, but the dense materialism of European civilization came with the settlers. Wholly lacking was a sense of collaboration with nature. It follows that the young of our time must be helped to realize that before them lies a vast task of restoration. Since the schools are by no means part of the vanguard of necessary change, parents and individual teachers need to get the message across. Aaron Sharp continues:

Increasing populations and deteriorating resources in eastern U.S. stimulated a migration of

"settlers" west into the prairies and plains. Sooner or later they broke the sod in order to temporarily increase their income, and the erosion of soil, particularly in the plains, began. The damage was augmented by subsequent mechanization of agriculture, again to further increase immediate profits. Then came the dry years and the beginning of a modern "desert on the march."

Solitary voices (Franklin, Marsh, Theodore Roosevelt, et al.) of caution were heard before this century, concerning the misuse and waste of natural resources. Only in the last forty years, as Sears emphasizes, have many of our citizens become slowly and dimly aware of the severe problems of rapidly diminishing residues of finite natural resources. The great expenditure and waste of resources during World War II, plus an awareness that our population would not stabilize by 1960, awakened more, but still too few, of our citizens to the seriousness of these problems.

The closing paragraphs by the reviewer are addressed, in effect, to the parents of the coming generation:

The underlying philosophy of immediate gain or "profits today" regardless of the future has been our undoing. Much of our research, which is so necessary for long-term use, has been limited to seeking ways of rapidly exploiting natural resources. Long-term planning is of relatively recent origin, and often is fought by "developers" and politicians.

The fact that there is some planning today, and that the number of conservation organizations is increasing, as are their memberships, gives some hope for the future, but the pace is too slow. The best hope lies in the rapid dissemination of facts about our natural resources and a philosophy that they should be used in such a way that we do not disinherit future generations. We should be educating our citizens concerning these matters at all levels, from the national politician to the first grader.

This book is so important that it should be in all libraries that are accessible to the public and students of all ages. Actually, it would be a valuable addition to any library. Moreover, a paperback edition should be printed for use in classes which promote conservation, environmental understanding, and a philosophy of wise resource-use which guarantees the welfare of future generations.

One hopes that at least some schools, along with parents and teachers, will respond to this appeal.

FRONTIERS

The Facts Are In

FIRST come the pioneers—the Thoreaus, the George Perkins Marshes, the John Muirs, and the Rachel Carsons and the Amory Lovins. Then come the scores of critics who have seen and are elaborating on the points the pioneers were making. Finally come the consolidators, the generalizers who establish a platform made of the insights of the pioneers and the elaborations of the critics. They are able to do this because the facts are no longer in doubt.

In the present we are very close to the platform stage, which means that more and more people are declaring themselves. Writers in the Winter 1981 *CoEvolution Quarterly* (edited by Stephanie Mills), devoted to Bioregionalism, supply evidence of this. One of the contributors, Peter Berg, describes the separatist and regionalist movements around the world. These people are not just demanding their "rights." They mainly want their responsibilities back, realizing, no doubt, that rights are created by fulfilled responsibilities—as Mazzini and Simone Weil both maintained. Regional independence movements are astir and growing in Catalonia, Brittany, Cornwall, Wales, and other parts of Europe. Reporting this sort of "current history" reveals the common ground of informed and sensible people around the world, people whose efforts can do nothing but grow. Nature and time (and Right) are on their side.

Stephanie Mills, identified as "some new kind of activist journalist" who works for "an ecologically and civilly coherent world," gives a reason for moderate optimism on the part of people of her persuasion. She says:

Bioregionalism depends on harmony rather than dominance or defense, cooperation with nature and social self-management rather than centrist control. Nation-states are increasingly on the defensive, increasingly control-oriented and prone to excess. The center will not hold, though. Inflation will make the bureaucratic, police, and military glue required to

bind things as artificial as nation-states together prohibitively expensive.

This binding takes a lot of transportation and communication and tends to be energy-intensive, as most endeavors which require the maintenance of simplified systems usually are. Simplification is violent, and violence is increasingly insupportable. On the other hand, culture, history, and topophilia [love of place] can center and hold smaller, more diverse and particular societies.

In a few paragraphs Peter Berg summarizes some of the things that have gone wrong in our centralized, industrializing, and war-making world:

There's been a spectacular assortment of unthinkable outcomes in the last few years, just when, ironically, our awareness of the implications of environmental tampering has been at its greatest. Community poisoning at Love Canal, the near meltdown at Three Mile Island, genetic damage still unfolding from Agent Orange, the recent conclusion that increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere from burning fossil fuels will eventually warm temperatures to alter climate planetwide: what will happen next? "In 25 years all the remaining tropical forests will have been destroyed, the chemical composition of both the air and the oceans will have been drastically altered, naturally pure water will have practically ceased to exist and a good part of the arable soil will have blown or eroded away," predicts Edward Goldsmith of *The Ecologist*. Permanent damage to DNA? Wiping out micro-organisms that are the starting link of essential food chains? More horrible than the stretched themes of horror films is the fact that probabilities like these are commonly held to be more or less certain. . . .

We have to cross over from economics to ecologies and we have to do it soon. The huge scale of biospheric depredations required by the Late Industrial is vastly beyond anything that's been gotten away with so far. At one time, single valleys with prime top soil were sacrificed for hydropower reservoirs, single hills demolished for coal, or single forests stripped for timber. Now nothing less than entire regions are consumed. "Environmental impact" is a pitifully inadequate description of deforesting the Amazon basin, leveling the Black Hills, and diverting the Sacramento River to Southern California. These projects are some that are underway or slated as necessary "solutions," and their effects will be as disastrous as the Aswan Dam, which

ruined soil it was supposed to irrigate and ended fishing off the Egyptian coast. Gaping holes in the biosphere like these can't be justified as acceptable losses: the battle is ultimately against us. If the stakes for preserving the industrial model of society threaten continued life on this planet, we have to raise the stakes for our participation and demand a way of life that can retrieve the future.

Peter Berg writes as though the evidence were really in on these matters. Well, if you review in various publications what he has been writing about, you find that the evidence *is* in and the time has come to shape the platform for change. In fact, history seems to be running ahead of us, in the revolts of regionalists around the world. Speaking of this trend, Berg says:

A movement that possesses a hopeful vision for transforming society has to include both implicit recognition of the importance of natural systems and opposition to Global Monoculture, and one more thing: appreciation of unique regions for themselves. There's no effective way to fashion regard for the entire planetary biosphere without attention to the distinct regions that make it up. For our heads to be everywhere our feet have to be some place. A movement that can displace Late Industrial hitting-and-running has to have a bio-regional base, a home place.

To be overcome is the influence of "a homogenized directory of standards for everything from diet and clothes to transportation and architecture."

Global monoculture dictates English lawns in the desert, business suits in Indonesia, orange juice in Siberia, and hamburgers in New Delhi. It overwhelms local culture and "raises" them regardless of the effects on cultural coherency or capacities of local natural systems. Extended to the construction of whole new cities and habits of millions of people, Global Monoculture requires manipulation of natural resources on a scale that virtually forbids putting the continuity of the biosphere at the center of social or political considerations.

What must we do?

The shape of a transformed society isn't difficult to imagine: responsive to the biosphere through use of alternative energy, appropriate technology, and sustainable agriculture; small political units defined

by natural borders rather than straight lines; filling in the qualities of mutual aid, direct democracy, and opportunities for personal creativity that are nearly absent now. The problem is recognizing how and where this is currently happening on a level that includes all the varied segments of a whole society from construction workers to scientists, and believing it can happen wherever you are.