

AMERICAN THINKER

A READING of Gay Wilson Allen's *Waldo Emerson* (Viking, 1981, \$25.00) is likely to produce mingled feelings. This man of a century ago (he died in April, 1882) has no counterparts in the present. From reading in Mr. Allen's careful and sufficiently complete biography—the first of Emerson in more than thirty years—one may long to be a part of that brave *old* world which had such people in it—Emerson and his friends. What has happened to that admirable world of decent, ardent, intelligent human beings? Emerson could recognize evil as well as good, but his faith vanquished his fears. He was a reformer who believed only in individual reform—he was jarred from this position to declare himself on a social issue only by the Fugitive Slave Law, which he abhorred—and he must have believed that individual achievement in the formation of character was carried forward into the future, regardless of historical vicissitudes.

He was indeed a Platonist in this. At twenty-seven (in 1830) he wrote in his journal: "The soul is an emanation of the Divinity, a part of the soul of the world, a ray from the source of light. It comes from without into the human body, as into a temporary abode, it goes out of it anew; it wanders in ethereal regions, it returns to visit. . . . it passes into other habitations, for the soul is immortal." With this view of the human being, he thought the issues of government of little moment, holding that the true antidote of political abuse is "the influence of private character, the growth of the individual." That this strength and quality was not dissipated by death seemed clear to him.

He wrote in "Nominalist and Realist":

It is the secret of the world that all things subsist and do not die, but only retire a little from sight and afterwards return again. . . . Nothing is dead; men feign themselves dead. . . . Jesus is not dead; he is very well alive; nor John, nor Mahomet, nor

Aristotle; at times we believe we have seen them all, and could easily tell the names under which they go.

When, in 1844, Carlyle reproached him for being "a *Soliloquizer* on the eternal mountain-tops," Emerson replied that "though I hear substantially the same criticism made by my countrymen, I do not know what it means. If I can at any time express the law and the ideal right, that should satisfy me without measuring the divergence from it of the last act of Congress.'

Today, without Emerson's sustaining faith, men of good intentions write about little else, as though the wisdom of the mountain-tops has nothing to do with our troubles here below. Emerson believed that the quality of men would determine the quality of their government, but we seem to believe, along with the communists, that it is the other way around. It is true enough that government afflicts our lives in countless ways, so that concern with national politics infects every level of serious publication. This makes us more and more dependent on people often difficult to respect, strengthening the illusion that we can have no progress or freedom without the power of government for an ally.

With this obsession Emerson would have nothing to do. In "Politics" he wrote somewhat light-heartedly:

This is the history of governments,—one man does something which is to bind another. A man who cannot be acquainted with me, taxes me; looking from afar at me, ordains that a part of my labor shall go to this or that whimsical end, not as I but as he happens to fancy. Behold the consequence. Of all debts, men are least willing to pay the taxes. What a satire is this on government! Everywhere they think they get their money's worth, except for these.

Hence, the less government we have, the better,—the fewer laws, and the less confided power. . . . We think our civilization near its meridian, but we are yet only at the cock-crowing and the morning

star. In our barbarous society the influence of character is in its infancy.

How shall we get less government? Only by relying on it less. Only the unneeded and neglected power can be made to disarm. In the beginning our wealth—the store of our devotion to liberty and independence—was willingly deposited in the coffers of government in Philadelphia, and then in Washington. It seems true enough that government which has its strength from the idealism and vision of the people will be an ideal government—just as, in Thoreau's words, "a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation *with* a conscience"—but the capital of human ideals held in trust by our government has been spent long since, leaving us deeply in debt, and on every count.

In what, then, shall we put our trust? If the political depository is no longer trustworthy, where shall we look for the continuity of the good we accumulate? The government is a symbol of collective achievement, but what if collectivist achievements tend to reach their climax in political tyranny?

Can we go back in history a hundred years and join Emerson with his faith in character as the only enduring place of safe-keeping for our gains?

Two currents of thought affect this wondering. For close to four hundred years—since the time of Galileo—we have increasingly based our sense of reality on the external world. Our productive reliance on the sciences has made us confident of our capacities to erect physical structures, to secrete power in machines, to subject the planet to economic bondage, mining her apparently unending resources for our own extravagant needs. These exploits have given us our definition of knowledge—the accounting of what we have been able to do. But there was a parallel development of which we have hardly become aware. In *The Human Condition* Hannah Arendt describes it in terms of the way we think:

The rise of the natural sciences is credited with a demonstrable, ever-quickenening increase in human

knowledge and power; shortly before the modern age European mankind knew less than Archimedes in the third century B.C., while the first fifty years of our century have witnessed more important discoveries than all the centuries of recorded history together. Yet the same phenomenon is blamed with equal right for the hardly less demonstrable increase in human despair or the specifically modern nihilism which has spread to ever larger sections of the population, their most significant aspect perhaps being that they no longer spare the scientists themselves, whose well-founded optimism could still, in the nineteenth century, stand up against the equally justifiable pessimism of thinkers and poets. The modern astrophysical world view, which began with Galileo, and its challenge to the senses to reveal reality, have left us a universe of whose qualities we know no more than the way they affect our measuring instruments, and—in the words of Eddington—"the former have as much resemblance to the latter as a telephone number has to a subscriber." Instead of objective qualities, in other words, we find instruments, and instead of nature or the universe—in the words of Heisenberg—man encounters only himself.

But we know practically nothing about ourselves! We are not Emersons. We lack his high-born confidence in the immortality of the soul. We have become, through our impressive mechanical achievements, a race of middleclass Fausts. Nor are those little machines which are supposed to tell us how we can take charge of our own organs—tell them what to do—a sufficient device to endow us with spiritual self-confidence. Meanwhile our political machine is running down. Its unmanageable bigness, along with the bad habits born of the imperatives of bigness, is wearing it out. The emergency assignment we are given from nature—if nature includes the psychophysical changes affecting our lives—is to begin writing our histories and making our predictions in individual human terms, to place no faith in collectives, which for us means states. Suppose our place of existence had no armies and navies, no banks, no *nations*: what would be important enough to write in our diaries? In what would we invest our hopes? And the real events of our lives—what would *they* be?

How, we might ask, does one go to school to Emerson?

By reading him, of course, yet there is a prior discovery that needs to be made. What tribe did he belong to? Are there metaphysical communities, if not races, of which our outward appearance—our color, our eyes, our noses and lips—is but distracting disguise? Emerson was, as they say, a nature-lover, yet he knew that nature is a vast deceiver, although this did not diminish his love because he also knew that the overcoming of deception is essential to our growing up. Maturity is becoming undeceived.

But what sort of man was Emerson? Mr. Allen has this paragraph in his Preface:

Countless readers of Emerson's essays and poems have been stimulated to set higher goals for themselves and to believe in their own ability to achieve them. This teaching has often been debased by interpreting the goals to be material, making Emerson's "self-reliance" and "better mousetrap" bywords for Rotarians, but his own life shows that was not his meaning. It was, to use the terms of Plato and Aristotle, "the good life." What is the *good life*? Emerson's biography gives the answer, partly in his own experiences, but more fully in his writings. "The good life," like "the central man," is never fully attainable, but Emerson came closer than most men—or most authors. For that reason John Dewey said that "when democracy has articulated itself, it will have no difficulty in finding it already proposed in Emerson."

According to Emerson, it seems clear, the human is a being with the heritage of two worlds—the world of necessity and the world of choice. To be an Emerson, one must recognize the world of necessity and by knowing it know what the choices are. Which comes first? Emerson would say Choice. Being a Neoplatonist, he believed that spirit, needing matter for its form, forges the world of material necessity, and then becomes the prisoner of its laws, forgetting, in the process, the reality of its spiritual being. Emerson's life was a recovery of the sense of self, his writing the cipher he evolved for recording his day-to-day salvaging. This is

how he should be read—as the thought of a man who anticipated the processes of awakening that would be experienced by others generations after his time.

It is as though he had adopted—or been born with—a subjective cosmology which continually informed his reflections and gave him surety of thought. "Man," he declared, "is the dwarf of himself." This was his version of "original sin," which he rejected in its Christian recension. It was the fall of spirit into matter, setting the task of reclamation. "Is it not true that spirit in us is dwarfed by clay? that once Man was permeated & dissolved by Spirit?"

How was Emerson able to feel this so securely and declare it with such confidence? He took, one could say, what Erich Fromm later called the therapeutic "jump" (in his epoch-making paper, "Man Is Not a Thing"), although it seems fair to say that Emerson, unlike so many of us, understood this from birth. The only way to grasp Emerson is to try to think like him. He conceived himself and all humans to be, first, spirit and soul, born of the Over-Soul—the Soul of the World—with a mission, a function to perform: to use his consciousness "to deliver the thought of his heart from the universe to the universe: to do an office which nature could not forgo."

Each man, when he begins to think, becomes an avatar to the world. In "Circles" Emerson wrote:

Beware when the great God lets loose a thinker on this planet. Then all things are at risk. It is as when a conflagration has broken out in a great city, and no man knows what is safe, or where it will end. There is not a piece of science but its flank may be turned tomorrow; there is not any literary reputation, not the so-called eternal names of fame, that may not be revised and condemned. The very hopes of man, the thoughts of his heart, the religion of nations, the manners and morals of mankind, are all at the mercy of a new generalization. Generalization is always a new influx of the divinity into the mind. Hence the thrill that attends it.

He proceeds, then, to his own convention-shaking generalizations:

One man's justice is another's injustice, one man's beauty, another's ugliness; one man's wisdom, another's folly; as one beholds the same objects from a higher point. One man thinks justice consists in paying debts, and has no measure in his abhorrence of another who is very remiss in this duty, and makes the creditor wait tediously. But that second man has his own way of looking at things, asks himself which debt I must pay first, the debt to the rich or the debt to the poor? the debt of money, or the debt of thought to mankind, of genius to nature? . . . If a man should dedicate himself to the payment of notes, would not this be injustice? Does he owe no debt but money? And are all claims on him to be postponed to a landlord's or a banker's?

There is no virtue which is final; all are initial. The virtues of society are vices of the saint. The terror of reform is the discovery that we must cast away our virtues, or what we have always esteemed such, into the same pit that consumed our grosser vices. . . . It is the highest power of divine moments that they abolish our contritions also.

Imagine a moral code issuing from this calculus—the thing is impossible! Imagine a society ordered according to this sliding scale—a culture that lives well without any concern with self-esteem! Emerson is like the Socratic philosopher who, at the end of the ninth book of the Republic, declares that wherever he happens to be born, he will live only in the city of the philosophic dream. And as for the ills of society, he knows no other remedy.

But by what right do we prescribe as models men of such genius? Hannah Arendt may see that the bottom has fallen out of our earthly philosophies—that the world we did so much with and felt so secure in has been our own transient invention—no more real than a telephone number, although much more elaborately listed; she knows this, and explains it, but what does her insight matter to the billions of the earth? It matters, whether the billions know it or not, because the talented humans who create the shapes of our common life, who construct the prevailing faiths and credos, and who tremble when they fade—

they are affected by the thinking that goes on at "the height of the times." Throughout her works, however veiled and briefly stated, Hannah Arendt is saying that we have come to the end of the line. She is saying that there must be a new beginning, and she is right.

Where then, shall we seek for models? Shall we compute the "average man" and follow *him*? The world cries out for some philosophical invention that will reveal to us the questions we have not asked, and hint at answers woven in a dialectic that touches our experience. Emerson's words touch us in so many ways that inference suggests he knows what he is talking about. How he knows is another matter, and may be left to another time. Learning how we know what we know always comes after the fact.

That we have had such a man in America—an American through and through, and yet much more—is enough for us to take him seriously. And to take him seriously is to begin to think of ourselves as Emerson thought of himself, and of Nature. Of a lecture called "The Method of Nature," Mr. Allen says:

His main theme was: "In the divine order, intellect is primary; nature, secondary; it is the memory of the mind. That which existed in intellect as pure law, has now taken body as Nature." He recommends studying "the mind in nature, because we cannot steadily gaze on it in mind"—the first *mind* meaning the Divine Mind, or the Soul emanating through the physical world of nature. When he speaks of "the natural history of the soul," therefore, his paradox must be interpreted Neoplatonically. He does not want, he says, to present man as an abstraction, "an air-fed, unimpassioned, impossible ghost. . . . And yet one who conceives the true order of nature, and beholds the visible as proceeding from the invisible, cannot state his thought without seeming to those who study the physical laws to do them some injustice." This was Emerson's dilemma, to find language to show how much he valued the man of flesh and blood while insisting on his complete dependence on spirit.

It is no use asking for diagrams and a spiritual anatomy of Emerson's man. He practices another science—one in which the elementary sketch is

made with the currents of intention in consciousness, no material for blackboard instructions. The preliminary steps are like learning to swim—you get in the water and start paddling around. We have our earthly parents and are grateful to them, but our heredity as humans is of the stars. Some such awareness is given us in the very astral stuff of thinking. Emerson would have us stop suppressing its suggestions. We have worked with physical reality alone long enough. It is time to take transcendental reality into account, to make it the foundation of our feeling about the self. What does it matter that we shall obviously be in the kindergarten stage for a long time? Our maturity as manipulators gives us no special standing as souls.

For encouragement examine Emerson's pantheon. He is not a man but a whole community—a community of thinkers none of whom can be called to the dock for doing any harm. Is it not time to consult philosophers who do no harm? Is not that the highest recommendation possible in our time? Their thought is a flow of harmonious current in the world of mind. It is a flow that seeks conscious embodiment in human beings, but this is found only in those who, having worn out the old assumptions about themselves and the world, are ready to take the therapeutic leap. They are ready to leave behind the luggage—the *impedimenta*—of the past. For them, when they say "I," the word will begin to have hierarchical resonances which shrink the ego but enlarge and dignify the self. The knowledge and "know-how" of this "I" require no notebooks or encyclopedias, no entries on microfilm.

No other author has been able to "naturalize" the spirit so well as Emerson. His affinities people the universe of meaning. He writes of those he admires and learned from in the past as of a company of spiritual kin. It is a world intersecting with ours, announcing itself to potential listeners. Emerson was one of its voices; his friend, Walt

Whitman, another who declared, speaking for them all:

That we all labor together, transmitting the same charge and succession;

We few, equals, indifferent of lands, indifferent of times;

We, enclosers of all continents, all castes—allowers of all theologies,

Compassionaters, perceivers, rapport of men,

We walk silent among disputes and assertions, but reject not the disputers, nor anything that is asserted;

We hear the bawling and din—we are reach'd by divisions jealousies, recriminations on every side,

They close peremptorily upon us, to surround us, my comrade,

Yet we walk upheld, free, the whole earth over, journeying up and down, till we make our ineffaceable mark upon time and the diverse eras,

Till we saturate time and eras, that the men and women of races, ages to come, may prove brethren and lovers as we are.

REVIEW

UTOPIA GONE WRONG

THE new quarterly, *democracy*, "A Journal of Political Renewal and Radical Change," serves general understanding of the present world, as an organ of self-consciousness which uses ordinary language. The editorials by Sheldon Wolin are always worth reading—we have quoted them here once or twice. The book reviews are review essays with perspective and depth. The contributors are diverse in background—Ivan Illich and Wilson Carey McWilliams are two. One has the impression that these writers are in close touch with the gradually changing human attitudes of the present.

For example, in the January issue of *democracy*, Mary Kaldor ends a discussion of the dilemmas of Europeans concerning the threat of nuclear war by saying:

The protest movements in Europe in the 1970s arose out of a sense of frustration over the exclusion of the individual from politics, and of helplessness in the face of big business and big government; the desire was to gain control over the social and economic environment, a desire represented on a more fundamental level by the disarmament movement. The demand for disarmament is a demand for control over life itself. Disarmament can only finally be achieved through the transformation of our political institutions so that it is never again possible for a small group of politicians or bureaucrats to conspire to develop or produce nuclear weapons.

Clarity of this sort is seldom obtained from expressions of establishment politics, however sagacious. Yet the writer might have gone on to point out the far-reaching implications of the phrase, "transformation of our political institutions," which would naturally involve a prior transformation of human attitudes and values. This need for re-creation of our thinking is something that we are only now beginning to understand, leading to wonder about the obscure subjectivity of such changes. Easier to understand, however, is the fact that people in

small communities—people who derive their ideas about "rights" from responsibilities already assumed and being fulfilled—seem better able to make this change than anyone else. The various "independence" movements around the world, now making their influence felt, seeking self-defined identity, are gradually moving from what we think of as (power) "politics" to concern with the polls. The increasingly evident folly of war is leading to consideration of the necessity of non-violence with all that it implies. The processes of community life, of regional social units, of economics based on ecological awareness, of sustainable agriculture, of cooperative instead of competitive arrangements are interactions which, taken together, make an environment requiring and naturally hospitable to peace. They also make for justice, and the realization that without justice there can be no peace.

Quotation in a review of Edward S. Herman's *Corporate Control, Corporate Power* (Cambridge University Press, 1981) adds another dimension to the picture of the status quo. The reviewer, Joel Rogers, provides this passage from Herman's book:

We may be approaching full circle in the West, from the distant era when decentralized economic power was strategic to the emergence of personal freedom . . . to the present stage of evolution where economic freedom has produced an environment dominated by vast, impersonal organizations that pride themselves on their rootlessness (the "international" corporations) and that respond only to material incentives. These corporations have helped create enormous wealth, but in the process they have broken down traditional community links and brought forth new problems whose solutions require protective and control mechanisms—private and governmental, local, national, and international—that do not now exist. Governments have grown large and potent along with large firms, but they continually lose the power of initiative in a world of increasingly rapid change, international mobility of resources, and internal political conflict and stalemates. As both governments and large firms continue to expand, a qualitative change in social relationships, in the distribution of power, and in the capacity of societies to respond to crises is taking

place. The hope for the future must be that a series of survivable small shocks or minor cataclysms will occur, leading to the emergence of new ideologies, values and institutional arrangements that will strengthen the powers of small groups and nations to protect themselves and to cope with the lack of international authority. The autonomy and power of the business system, the weakness of government, and the resultant immobility of the whole are such, however, that a bleaker forecast is plausible.

To which the reviewer adds, "Indeed it is."

Suggested, here, is that the penalties of bigness—unwieldiness, loss of control through the development of incomprehensible complexity, and the increasing failure of the "watchdog", theory of correcting lawlessness, plus the rampant anti-social tendencies born of the system itself—will open up multiple opportunities for innovation and change. But if those opportunities are not seized, if there are not self-initiated social formations based on other principles, ready to flow into the vacuums created by the breakdown of big institutions, then a desperate and ruthless totalitarianism is likely to result.

One noticeable symptom of the general decline of the present economic system is the falling off of industrial productivity. The reviewer, Joel Rogers, says that "innumerable plans for the 'revitalization' of this country's productive capacity are now making the rounds," pointing out that these designs are "generally antidemocratic," and adding:

But their more elemental failing is a universal silence on the most basic facts of American public life—that it is dominated by business to a degree unrivaled by any other advanced industrial state, that no mass political structure exists that can compel giant firms, that unless its holdings are seized, capital can move, divest, and strike, that any true movement of democratic renewal proceeds in the face of an almost incalculably great and hostile private power. In addition to clearing away the debris left by decades of misguided discussion of corporate governance and control, Herman demonstrates again the daily application of these simple truths of the American political system. Drastically constraining the possibilities of democratic action, they furnish nonetheless its necessary agenda.

This is the discovery that overtakes individuals who start out with some simple and urgently needed program for the improvement of life, as in the case of Frances Moore Lappé, who first wrote *Diet for a Small Planet*, and then, after studying the problems of world food supply, came to the realization that the commercial exploitation of agriculture by the large firms Herman speaks of is making it impossible for a great many people on earth to get enough to eat. Her book, *Food First* (written with Joseph Collins), was intended to make this clear to her readers, and then she went on to publication of the informative booklet, *What Can We Do?* (available from the Institute for Food and Development Policy, 2588 Mission Street, San Francisco, Calif. 94110, \$2.45). This booklet tells what a number of people are already doing in behalf of the hunger in so many parts of the world. They are armed with ingenuity, deep regard for the needs of others, and a lot of determination. They began by informing themselves, and the importance of this is stressed in the booklet's foreword:

Anyone working for social change embodies, by his or her choice of actions, a statement of what he or she believes is wrong and what could be better. For most of us this analysis is vague. But the more concrete our diagnosis of what is wrong and the clearer our vision of something better, the easier it becomes to make choices of what to do today. A well-thought-out analysis is the only measure by which to judge our choices of action.

In other words, the long-term remedies for what is wrong lie not in ideological programs, given weight through indoctrination, but in the resources of individuals. The standardizing and bureaucratic methods of large organizations are incompatible with individual use of the imagination. That is their Achilles heel in a period of rapid change. The policies of these enormous companies cannot be altered by argument, but only by practical failure, caused partly by the absence of intelligence in their operations and by ingenious resistance in local areas. This is likely to be a slow process, but may be the only one that will work. Meanwhile the strength of the counter-

forces will grow only from full recognition that both nature and the highest human potentiality are on the side of organic and natural change. Such "progress" is made inch by inch, dependent on human awakening and emerging combinations of both moral and practical awareness.

Some of the articles in the January *democracy* deal critically with habits of thinking in the West. They give evidence that at last we are beginning to understand ourselves. Carlos Fuentes uses the resources of literature to this end, saying in one place:

What we call "modernity" is more often than not this process whereby the rising industrial and mercantile classes of Europe gave unto themselves the role of universal protagonists of history. The rest of the world would be Friday [Robinson Crusoe's Friday]—in effect, the cast of thousands in the epic of the white man's burden, and Locke would be as generous as he could when he stated that human understanding is assumed to be in all places the same, although imperfectly developed in children, idiots, and savages. He was inviting children, idiots, and savages to join the march toward happiness in the future proposed, headed, and dished out by the West in an unending progression. . . . [But] Locke's utopia, indeed, was no utopia at all, but a radical anti-utopia, since utopian thought places the value of the community *above* the values of power or the individual as such, including the property values of one or the other.

Literature and literary criticism are modes of self-recognition. They serve this purpose in *democracy* (\$16.00 a year, 43 West 61st St., New York, N.Y. 10023).

COMMENTARY
"CLINICAL MADNESS"

IN a pamphlet, *The Plain Man's Guide to the Bomb* (Menard Press, London, 1982, 90 p.), addressed to the people of Britain—but of interest to everyone else—Oliver Postgate, author of books for children, describes his reaction to a televised discussion of nuclear warfare and British policy:

The discussion was an obscenity because, however well-meaning the participants were, the discussion could only take place if they concealed from themselves what the discussion was really *about*. If they had allowed themselves to see and feel the reality behind the labels they were thinking with, the very words would have stuck in their throats. . . . I can only remember the language . . . in which everything is wrapped and labelled in such a way that they were able to discuss and evaluate nuances of unimaginable horror as they were "Best Buys" in some gruesome consumer magazine.

Any nuclear exchange, this writer points out, is bound to escalate to total war, so that nuclear weapons have no military significance. They will simply destroy the world.

The hard fact is that "military superiority" no longer exists between nuclear powers. Recourse to military action from a position of strength is an option that became extinct with the arrival of nuclear deterrence, but as the coinage of international power politics is the presumption of antagonism, unless one nation is in a position to threaten the other it cannot go on. Thus the myth that nuclear superiority has a strategic value must be maintained at all costs, if necessary in the face of the present dire peril to the whole planet.

No one of the four billion people on earth wants to be burned to death in nuclear conflagration—

And yet . . . among those four thousand million people there are perhaps forty people who have that power. They seem to believe that in order to achieve some political or economic advantage, or to protect it, they may one day be obliged to carry out the threats they were forced to make in the national interest and do just that . . . even though they know there would be no economics, no politics and no human race left to enjoy that advantage if they did do that.

That is, by definition, clinical madness.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves PARENTS VOICES

JOHN HOLT'S *Growing Without Schooling* continues to get richer in content. This is encouraging since it shows that starting the paper a few years ago was a really good idea. The enrichment comes largely from parents who are teaching their children at home. The value of this work goes far beyond the issue of whether children "should" go to school or be taught by their parents. If there is anything that the people of this country need—and is within their power to accomplish—it is reclaiming responsibility for their lives and the raising of their children. It is obvious that many people won't now be able to teach their children at home. But that practical obstacle need not stand in the way of thinking about where primary responsibility lies and about various ways of accepting it.

The point, then, is that the material in *Growing Without Schooling* reports on the magnificent inventiveness, ingenuity, and resourcefulness of a number of parents. They are noticeably alive in their minds, which is the main reason why what they do with their children proves so effective. A lot of education is simply contagion of this quality, and this applies in schools as well as in homes. Any method which spreads this stimulation is unqualifiedly *good*, since it follows no formula, makes no rules, but feeds the imagination. The argument about schools versus home teaching is only the outside shell of the matter of real importance—the responsibility of parents for the quality and freedom of mind of the next generation. Yet the argument remains useful as a way of *focusing* this idea.

It doesn't matter much which issue of *GWS* you pick up; the material rarely becomes dated; although, sometimes, we wish the paper bore a date as well as a number. The one we have at hand is No. 21, which is doubtless several months

old. Here is a brief contribution from a New York state schoolteacher:

Did I say in a previous letter how I "taught" reading to a hundred 11th graders? My first public school job (1958). I spent my paycheck again and again on paperback books. With my last \$9 I bought an ad in the local paper asking for book contributions. I *buried* the kids in books and we all read our way to the door. Easy chairs and reading lamps. I speed-read a book every night before bed in search for more teen-interest books.

The administration was *livid*. I invented a grading system that was additive: no effort could pull down a grade. I taught no "word attack skills," no grammar, no spelling. We wrote plays and journals and many pages about what we were reading. Dire predictions to the contrary, the kids scored higher on the NY State Regents' English Exam than any previous class. . . .

A letter from a Californian:

After much agonizing we decided to remove Sean from school and the situation that made him unhappy. We figured we could stall long enough to get around the law. Well, to our surprise, the school called and said they needed a way to report Sean's removal. The director of Special Education said we could file a Form R-4 from the county. So I sent for the form. It was a Private School Affidavit, and was simple to fill out. The Education Code that allows this was included. An inspection by the County Health and Fire Departments was required and the dates inspected (not passed) were required. The private school must keep records for attendance, records of the course of study, and names and addresses of the faculty with their educational qualifications. And that's all there is to it in California! This form must be filled once a year.

. . . Now, after 13 months of unschooling, Sean is happier, doing his "work," learning about life by living. . . . Together we found a bank that would allow an 11-year-old to co-sign checks and he has been doing his own checking account (math, spelling, numbers, filling out forms, etc.). He got an ID card from the Department of Motor Vehicles which looks like a driver's license and which he needed to cash his checks. You should see the looks of the merchants when he pulls out his check book. More participation in the adult real world. With this and his Social Security Card, Model Aviation Card and bank card, his wallet holds a world for him that he would never have been able to imagine in school.

From a Mississippian:

. . . You wrote that you would like to know more about how I bring my son to work. I am a subcontractor. I clean houses and buildings that are newly built and occasionally hang a little wallpaper. Most of the contractors I work for do not mind my bringing Joshua to work with me; he's not much trouble.

I bring a basket of "goodies"—a book or two, a truck, a toy of his choice, a blanket, a pillow, sandwiches, and juice. Our day goes almost like at home (except no Captain Kangaroo). Joshua follows me around "helping" me clean or just playing but always asking questions. We take a few breaks and at lunch we may read a book or walk around and collect odd lumber; then Josh gets his pillow and blanket and takes his nap. That is the time I do the work that I can't do while he's up and about (like cleaning upstairs windows on a ladder).

I honestly believe he has gained much from these experiences—he sees much more than just his own yard and has learned how to cope with hazards (nails, broken glass open electrical sockets, stairs) and to avoid them without accidents. He has been on the job since he was 2 months old and I have found if I tell him something will hurt him, he leaves it alone. . .

The contributions are often salted with Holt's voice of experience. Here, for example, is something he added to several letters on toy guns and things like that. To one of these correspondents he said:

I think yours is a very legitimate point of view. . . But I've never seen anything to indicate that there was any connection between children playing cops and robbers, or pointing their fingers at someone and saying Bang!, and later violence. I think there is a huge connection between how much violence is done to children by their elders and how much they do later.

Another way of putting it is to say that people who essentially believe in violence as a realistic and indeed desirable way of solving human conflicts are going to pass on a lot of that belief to their children, whether or not they allow their children to play with guns, while people who have the opposite belief, like yourself, will probably pass that along whether or not they allow their children to play with guns. I think it is the belief that is critical, not the gadget.

But I share your convictions about violence and wouldn't for the world try to change them.

John Holt also sells books by mail—the books he thinks are especially good for children, but usually of interest to adults, too. One of these books is *Mrs. Stewart's Piano Lessons—25 Lessons for Beginners* (\$6.75 plus postage). One of the GWS editors says:

Where the other books I had seen made learning music look mysterious, difficult, and dull, these books made it look sensible, exciting, and easy. Not easy in the sense that I can learn what I want to learn in a few weeks or months. I know it will take much time and effort to do that. But easy in the sense that at every point I know what I am doing and why I am doing it. . . these books have thrown such a clear and helpful light on music that I find myself knowing more and more things without ever having sat down to "learn" them. We plan to sell the "Advanced Lessons" also when they become available.

Growing Without Schooling, is at 729 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. 02116.

FRONTIERS

"The Nuclear States Are . . . Dinosaurs"

THE Dutch, who live in a country one tenth the size of California, have become a primary factor in the drive to exile nuclear weapons from Europe. Recently they made a slogan out of an epithet applied to them. An American journalist decided that the Dutch were dangerously infecting the rest of Europe with the germs of peace, and he labeled this spreading "ill" *Hollanditis*. In the *IFOR Report* for January, Jim Forest and Peter Herby tell what happened next. Thousands of Londoners began receiving postcards from their Dutch neighbors, asking, "May I infect you with a disease?" The symptoms of this affliction include: "anxiety in the presence of nuclear weapons, exhaustion with decades of futile negotiations to ban such weapons, distress at the prospect of a nuclear war which would devastate all of Europe, and a massive surge of resistance against such a possibility."

Describing the spread of this beneficent "plague," Forest and Herby say:

Without a doubt, *Hollanditis* is a highly contagious malady of conscience. Millions of Europeans have been stricken and the number of victims is rapidly growing. Sufferers find their lives have been changed as they commit themselves to the elimination of nuclear weapons, starting in their own countries. In the process, they are becoming a powerful political force. . . . *Hollanditis* is not a disease of avoidance and escape but of challenge and engagement. Far from being a terminal illness, it is an outbreak of healing which seeks the mending of relationships and the easing of borders. It rejects preparations for a war which might be the world's last, and certainly would be Europe's last.

Largely provocative of the present European concern and opposition to nuclear armaments was the decision by NATO in 1979 to accept the location of U.S. Cruise and Pershing 2 missiles in Western Europe, beginning in 1983. These weapons, the writers say, attach "a hair trigger" to the machinery of nuclear war.

This is the latest version of the familiar argument that the only way to slow down the arms race is to speed it up. For 35 years this approach has produced only more weaponry and faster, farther reaching, more elusive missiles. What the new weapons really do is raise the tension level, sharply reduce security, and make nuclear war more likely. . .

For Europeans, war is not at all an academic matter. These weapons [Soviet SS-25] are targeted where they live and they have their memories of the savagery of war when weapons were far slower and smaller. As one of the architects of the Dutch disarmament movement, Laurens Hogebrink, says, "It may sound strange, but there has not been a single day in years when I have not thought of the Second World War and realized that what happened is a normal part of human history and will happen again if we don't prevent it."

Europeans increasingly believe that the arms race is out of control and that their only real defense is protest and a policy of calculated steps toward disarmament.

Nowhere has the nuclear disarmament movement been as prolonged, deeply rooted and politically influential as in the Netherlands. The groups responsible are numerous and diverse, with participation ranging from the General in charge of Holland's Army War College to political groups spread from left to right. But the primary source of *Hollanditis* is the Inter-Church Peace Council (known throughout Holland as IKV).

Partly as a result of the work of these groups, half the Dutch people, it is said, oppose all nuclear weapons and two thirds oppose the new NATO weapons. The *IFOR* writers say:

Just prior to the NATO meeting in 1979, the Parliament opposed the Prime Minister in his support of the NATO proposal. When the government sought to placate public opinion by deferring until 1981 the question of whether the new weapons should be based in Holland, public outrage was so intense that the government barely survived a vote of confidence in Parliament. Following the national election in May, a new three-party coalition government was produced which was more critical of nuclear weapons than its predecessors. With opposition to nuclear weapons remaining intense, the government is certain to again put off acceptance of new weapons.

"Of course it is a political fact," comments Laurens Hogebrink of the IKV campaign, "that this

postponement policy can go on forever. One can safely take it as certain that Holland's share of the missiles will never enter the country. But what the Dutch peace movement wants is not a national 'clean hands' policy, with the government agreeing with NATO but making an exception for itself. We want independent Dutch initiatives to stop the whole NATO program. Increasingly, this requires a campaign beyond the Dutch borders." Beginning in 1979, IKV began to internationalize its campaign. The results of the process include the series of massive rallies in European capitals in the fall of 1981—the largest of which was Holland's own: more than 400,000 filling Amsterdam in a protest so festive that one observer called it "a brief encounter between heaven and earth."

A German group calling itself Action Reconciliation organized West German Peace Week and in 1980 this Week was observed in more than 4,000 towns and cities, with the theme, "Making Peace Without Armaments." A German scholar, Dorothee Solle, counters anti-American sentiment by reminding her audiences of "the other America—not the America of the generals but of Henry David Thoreau, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day and Daniel Berrigan."

Sölle anticipates growing recourse in Europe to nonviolent civil disobedience, which may become massive if the new missiles are ever delivered. "These are not entirely rational structures we are trying to influence," she says. "The nuclear states are really dinosaurs. It is ridiculous to expect dinosaurs to go politely to the conference table and make rational decisions. First you have to convince them that there is no future in being a dinosaur. Human life is for humans, and if you are going to be human, you have to give up the idea of absolute power and have everything the way you want it to be. In real life, you have to think about sacrifice."

There is page after page in this IFOR report on the rising spirit of disarmament throughout Europe, in Britain, Scandinavia, Belgium, France, Italy, and also in Romania, Hungary, and East Germany. As the writers say, "European nuclear disarmament is no longer a pipe dream."