

STAYING WITH THE LAND

As soon as histories are properly told there is no more need of romances.

—WALT WHITMAN

IN a history of Crawford, Colorado, that I am helping to write, co-author Mamie Ferrier calls Crawford "a sort of cowtown." That is the sort of writing that my English teachers always frowned on—"vague, imprecise." But they were going by the book, while history must try to go by life; and the vagueness of the statement is perfect and appropriate for the place.

Crawford is a sort of cowtown: all the land in the mountain valley around Crawford—the valley of the Smith Fork of the Gunnison River in Western Colorado—is rangeland; and most of the people on that land today are engaged to some extent in cattle-raising, many of them for the third generation. Spring and fall, cattle are driven through the town streets on their way to and from the summer pasture in the high country bounding the valley to the north and east. Beyond the town, hayfields dominate in this valley bottom, and continue in diminishing number up into rolling hills and finger mesas until the uniform gray-green of sage-and-cedar country is no longer broken by the brilliant patchy green of irrigated farmland. Where the sage and cedar begin to give way to spruce and aspen, the land begins to rise with more purpose, into the Elk Mountains where the mountain forest is interspersed with the natural and logger-made breaks of high meadow. From valley to highland, this is the quintessential Rocky Mountain ranch country. And it is beautiful.

From where I live in Crawford, on the hillside the town is built on, I can look out over those fields, contoured into the landscape by the irrigation ditches that bound them. The beauty of the picture out the window of course has a lot to do with such traditional Western fixtures as

Mendicant Ridge and Castle Peak on the near edge of Black Mesa, an old lump of fire-rock dominating the horizon. When dusted by the first fall snows, Mendicant Ridge hangs ghostly in the sky, more like the sky's unfinished idea of a mountain than anything of the earth.

But what I've decided I like best about the view is the way man and his works also seem natural in the landscape: neither dominating it as in the Midwestern farm belt or the urban regions, nor just squatting on it as we do in so much of the West, but truly living in it, even enhancing it.

Some of the high country here was grazed too heavily late in the nineteenth century; but the practice started late and was caught early by the Forest Service: today the summer range is stabilized and even improving in some places to the point where allotments are being cautiously increased. And the fields—they look as though they might have been here forever, and could be here for a forever to come. From a strictly ecological perspective, there is no reason why they shouldn't be here, for at least the rest of the geological age. They are dry land by nature, but the snow will continue to fall on the mountains above so long as the mountains are there to cool and condense the moist air rolling in off the ocean; the snow will continue to turn to water so long as the sun is there to melt it; and the water will continue to run down to the valley, there to be led out onto the land—so long as there are people to do the work.

But there's the problem: how long people might be able to afford to do the work; for this landscape, so lovely and healthful in so many ways, is an economic disaster area. A much-debated topic in the bars of the Boardwalk and Silver Dollar Restaurants is how much longer Crawford is likely to be any sort of a cowtown at

all; for 1981 was a very bad year for Rocky Mountain ranchers, even worse than 1980, which had been bad enough and a little worse than 1979. And now 1982 isn't promising to be any better.

Cattle prices last year dropped to around 65-70 cents a pound for feeder calves—steers of around 500 pounds which are bought by feedlots. This is about two thirds of what prices were two or three years ago; and after parity adjustments were figured in, 1981 prices proved to be the lowest since 1934. This sent something of a chill through the whole cattle industry, because 1934 was only one step up from rock bottom: 1933 had been the year of "agricultural adjustment," when the only "market" for calves had been Roosevelt's men, coming around with a roll of \$5.00 bills and a pistol, to adjust production.

At 1981 prices, nobody makes any money to speak of raising cattle; but nobody loses it quite so liberally as the rancher in the mountains. More than 90% of the beef produced in America is raised outside the Rocky Mountain region—primarily in the Midwest, South and Southwest—with production costs ranging between 60 and 80 cents a pound. But for the fraction of the cattle crop that comes from the Rocky Mountains, the production costs are never less than a dollar. And most mountain ranchers around here agree that, with inflation and interest rates in the double digits, their costs are more like a dollar and a quarter a pound and up.

This rather spectacular jump in production costs, from 80 cents and below to \$1.25 and up, is not a reflection on the mountain rancher's ability, but possibly on his sanity; because, due to the inherent nature of the mountain environment, he has to work about twice as hard to produce beef at costs higher by half than his plains competitors.

His biggest problem is the predictable intensity and duration of the Rocky Mountain winter. Throughout the major cattle-raising regions, the cattle can eat grass year round, with the occasional exception precipitated by a bad

winter storm, when some hay must be put out for them.

But above 6000 feet, the fields in that Rocky Mountain landscape are snow-covered most of the winter—usually from around Thanksgiving into March around Crawford, but from as early as Halloween to as late as mid-May in higher mountain valleys. For that period of time, the mountain rancher must almost literally handfeed his stock. He has to grow, irrigate, harvest, and stack two tons of hay per animal; and then every morning through the snow time, he has to go out and spread hay around a packed track in a field where his herd marks off the mean time of the year eating their way around a long plodding loop.

That in itself is enough to separate the mountain rancher from the ordinary cowboy: too much work that makes a person get down off his horse. But the real problem is the quantity and cost of the equipment required for hay production. Tractor, tiller, wetbacks and wives for irrigating, fertilizer and spreader, swather or mower, some kind of stacker or baler—whether the rancher-farmer buys his own equipment or has the work done "custom" by someone else who owns it, it is a huge additional cost.

Where the equipment is concerned, the irregular and piecy nature of mountain geography also conspires against the rancher. That beautiful landscape, with the small rolling fields nestled here and there among the cedars and pinons—wherever the ground is level enough for irrigation—shows another side to the rancher trying to farm it with machinery designed for physical and economic efficiency on flat land stretching from here to the edge of the earth.

Similar problems arise out of the geography of the summer grazing lands up in the high country; the good graze is lush, but it is also scattered due to the forest, it is as uneven in quality as the terrain is uneven, and it is relatively fragile and slow to grow due to the altitude. As a result, it takes a lot of mountain land to graze not very many cattle. And grazing allotments on

public lands are limited by law to the rancher's winter feeding capacity—by the amount of hay he can produce on his own land.

The upshot of this—the "bottom line," as economically oriented people like to say—is an economic unit that is marginal at best: in a game which the experts and analysts say can only be won by very large and very efficient outfits, factors of terrain, biology and climate have conspired to create a mountain ranch that is small, spread-out, and difficult to adapt to the mechanized style of modern "agro-industry." Above 6000 feet, where mountain terrain and climate shape the business, a century of trial and error, buying and selling and trading, and other processes of social evolution has resulted in two basic sizes of mountain ranches. A "big" outfit in the Rockies is 400 to a thousand cow-'n-calf units, with two or three full-time hands—or as is commonly the case, two families in some kind of partnership. Only in a few places in the Rockies—mostly the big "parks" between mountain ranges—are there cattle companies with herds in excess of a thousand units, so common in cattle country in the "lowlands."

But the most typical Rocky Mountain ranch is a "family spread" running 200 cow-'n-calf units or less: that being about what one man can run with steady help from his wife and kids, occasional help from neighbors and friends (as when it's time to brand or move cattle), and some part-time or seasonal help with irrigating and haying.

There is something of a paradox associated with these family ranches. They are clearly the most marginal units in the whole cattle industry, and always have been: historically, mountain ranchers have operated in the black only three or four years out of a decade in good times, and when you ask them about their "return on investment," they will most likely laugh. Yet they have proved to be the most stable unit—the *only* stable unit—in the mountain economy: in every valley in the Rockies, most of the surnames in the ranching community go back three to five

generations. This paradox—stability in the face of chronic marginality—has become more than just a puzzlement to many people who have more grandiose schemes for the mountain economy today; it is becoming a source of irritation and frustration, because those ranchers own or otherwise control about three fourths of the land and water in the mountain region. In the Colorado River Basin, for example, which includes all our best oil shale deposits, a large part of our coal resources, a lot of the land best suited for year-round fruit and vegetable production, and three of the biggest and fastest-growing areas in the Sunbelt, a good third of the limited water available is owned and used by ranchers in the mountains of Colorado and Utah. "Probably never in history," grumps Philip Fradkin, author of *A River No More*, "has so much money been spent, so many waterworks constructed, so many political battles fought, and so many lawsuits filed to succor a rather sluggish four-legged beast." In an age when, as Schumacher says, "economic performance, economic expansion and so forth have become the abiding interests, if not the obsession, of all modern societies," a handful of ranchers are tying up valuable and necessary resources in a marginal so-called business that even the President can barely afford as a hobby. But the bastards can't even be *driven* out of business!

With prices at 65 cents a pound on a product that costs \$1.25 to produce, it is no surprise that foreclosures are way up this year in the Rockies, that hardly a month goes by without its flyers on the Crawford bulletin board about sheriff's sales and farm auctions in the region. But the mysterious paradox deepens when you look around and realize that most of the mountain ranchers are back at it again: out there in the cold predawn every morning through the winter for feeding; out in the calving barn day and night all March, helping the new crop of liabilities into being; out in the fields converting diesel fuel to cattle fuel; up riding the high country (there's

work and there's "work") to see how many of the cows have found the larkspur. . .

It was not easy for any of them to get back out there this year. Some sold a piece of their land—"just the most worthless forty," of course, but obviously this is no long-term solution (except to the extent that it eventually eliminates the problem). Others, who were still able to, went a little deeper in debt—or a lot deeper.

But most of them are surviving by doing what they and their ancestors have been doing to get through hard times for three generations now: doing something else on the side. And the ones who are probably in the best position to continue defying the laws of economics and losing money at ranching are the ones who have been doing something else on the side right along. Ranching, after all, is only a part-time occupation that requires no more than eight or ten hours a day most of the time, and that leaves a lot of time for other occupation.

There are many options and combinations here. Bob Hauiesen works full-time for the phone company and farms at night—tractors have lights, just like cars. Other ranches have a member of the family in the nearby North Fork coal mines. But home-grown businesses which let the rancher work out his own schedule around the normal and special needs of the cattle are the preferred option. So Glenn Clark ranches and runs a real estate business. Tom McCloud has an insurance business in addition to the ranch he and his father run; then in the fall when the cattle are down on fenced pasture and need little attention, they run a hunting lodge up on Black Mesa. Luce Pipher ranches and runs a small sawmill and does excavating and hauls gravel and puts hunters up in the fall—"I don't think I can stand to get too much more diversified," says Pipher.

But if that explains how some of the ranchers in the Rockies are still getting by after the Disaster of '81, it hardly says *why* they continue to bother. Ask them why, and they will express vague economic hopes: "Prices can't get any worse."

But it is clear that they aren't going to get *that* much better; it is, in fact, impossible to imagine how their prices might rise enough or their costs drop enough to give them a breakeven figure in the near future; and they concede this. And their answer then, to why they stay with it, usually becomes something like Charles Klaseen's answer.

Klaseen is a third-generation rancher who has one of the larger herds in the Crawford area—around 800 head—and he was trying to cover his losses last winter by feeding another 500 head of cattle for some "tax shelter ranchers." Why does he keep on? The question more or less came up during a meeting of the Crawford Chamber of Commerce one night in January, with Klaseen presiding.

He was tired, because January was cold and harsh last winter and he was doing a lot of doctoring as well as feeding, with that many cattle concentrated. But he rose to the occasion; and his answer had philosophical overtones, the considered reply of a man who has tried to evaluate his chosen work within the context of the prevailing values of society, in order to see how he fit into the larger picture of his times. . . . "I must be crazy," he said.

According to all the laws and models and structures by which we have been trying to organize our world, that should be about it: the Rocky Mountain rancher is guilty of chronic and persistent uneconomic behavior; he admits he is crazy; he is still ranching, still controlling all that land and water because his whole life has been a preparation for hard times, but the screws are tightening.

Two things, however, make me want to take a deeper look at ranching in the Rockies. One is the general state of nearly everything everywhere else in America. If the rest of the nation were showing any signs of economic health and stability, I might be willing to write off Crawford and its ranch economy. But the way things are everywhere else, anything that has a history of

stability in the face of chronic marginality is worth at least a good look.

And the second thing is that landscape, which, for a change from the rest of the American landscape, conveys at least an illusion of sanity; and I've come around to believing that a person ought to always take a second look at a good illusion, in case it might have an underlying reality.

"The rancher has lost control of his product," says Charles Klaseen. Klaseen's ranch is southwest of Crawford, across the Smith Fork and out on a large lie of land called Fruitland Mesa. Fruitland Mesa produces no fruit today; like the rest of the Crawford country, it is all ranch land. Why Fruitland Mesa is a ranch land mesa is an interesting story, and important to any effort to understand ranching in the Rockies.

From the lower end of Fruitland Mesa, you find yourself overlooking a large valley adjacent to the Crawford country on the north: this is the valley of the North Fork of the Gunnison River, and for most economic and social purposes, it and the Crawford country are regarded as one unit.

Once you begin to know what you are looking at, as you look out over that valley, you can begin to read the history of Rocky Mountain ranching in this single landscape. Not its history in an Anglo-European sense—a string of events hung out on the clothes-line of time—but its history in a more Mediterranean or Mexican sense, like a wet wash of effects spread out on the rocks and bushes of eternity.

The primary colors of history in the valley are green and brown, tinged with the bluing of distance and just a splash of white, far up the valley: the white spot is the storage silos for Westmorland Coal's "Orchard Mine." Coal has always been part of the life of the valley; but today it is the largest part of the North Fork economy, and will probably continue to be for some time. At night, the sodium vapor lights at Westmoreland's portal, up on the uninhabited hills north of the river, are visible from almost

everywhere in the North Fork, hanging like a separate constellation in the dark space between the stars above and the scattered valley lights below.

But it is the green and brown history spread out below that relate to the rancher. The brown lands in the North Fork Valley are "the 'dobes"—a large expanse of sagebrush and cheatgrass sprinkled over plain dry dirt. The 'dobes (pronounced "doe-bees," from the Spanish "adobe") start at the edge of the natural desert to the west of the North Fork—the upper reaches of the Colorado Plateau desert—and reach long fingers up through the North Fork all the way to the edge of the Elk Mountains; but the 'dobes are not natural desert.

Early arrivals in the valley in the early 1880s were amazed at the grass that grew where the brown lands are now. "Bluestem that brushed your stirrups," they said. Not a prairie sea of grass, because of the surrounding mountains, but a large lovely lake of grass.

But right behind those early arrivals—or with them, some of them—came the cattle and sheep. Thousands of cattle and sheep—the good old days of the open range! Out on the prairies west and east of the Rockies, those good old days lasted about twenty years. It was closer to a decade in the North Fork; then the beautiful blue-green lake of thigh-high grass was gone. Ninety years later it still hasn't come back, and range experts say it might not ever, until the sea again rolls into the Great Basin and all the mountains are washed down into it.

This is a familiar enough story, the story of the cattle barons and the overgrazing of so much of the West; and I'm not going to go over the whole thing again—except to raise a question: given the general nature of the American economy, haven't we maybe been too harsh on those "cattle barons"? Granted, they were terrible stewards of the land; but that is a farmerly judgment, and our mistake has been to think of the open-range cattlemen as agricultural

entrepreneurs. They weren't; they were miners, just doing what miners have always done and continue to do—converting the resources of the world into the wealth of nations, with a little on the side for themselves. The only real difference between what the range-miners did here a hundred years ago and what the coal companies are doing here today is that the coal will not run out so quickly as the grass did—and when it is gone, the absence will not be so noticeable.

Driving through the 'dobes, sometimes I think of something Andrew Carnegie said once in a lecture:

Now, what is wealth? How is it created and distributed? There are not far from us immense beds of coal which have lain for millions of years useless, and therefore valueless. Through some experiment, or perhaps accident, it was discovered that black stone would burn and give forth heat. . . Immediately every bed of coal became valuable because useful, or capable of being made so, and here a new article, worth hundreds, yes, thousands of millions was added to the wealth of the community.

To visit the wealth drawn out of the grasslands here, it's true, North Fork people really need to go to the other end of the railroad—to Kansas City, Denver, or Chicago, where most of the native bluestem of the West was converted into slaughterhouses and jobs, satellite industries, mansions and art collections, libraries and museums and parks. That is, for the largest part, what we call the "wealth of America": the gross cumulative product of three centuries of resource-mining—precious metals, basemetals, mountains of iron, oceans of grass, a millennial growth of big trees, vast aquifers of water and domes of oil . . . and now today, we are witnessing the conversion of agriculture to food-mining, through using overworked land as a flat pan for the spreading-on of mined agrochemicals.

But driving through the 'dobes, the brown lands that are left when the natural wealth of the land has been converted to those "hundreds, yes, thousands of millions," a question reaches up out of the back seat and tentatively but persistently

taps me on the shoulder: what happens when the last ton of coal, the last barrel of oil, the last lovely lake of grass has been "added to the wealth of the community"? Will we then boil the paste out of the bindings of the books in Andrew Carnegie's magnificent libraries for nourishment, and burn the paper for light?

It will never happen, we are reassured, while simultaneously being chided for a lack of faith. Nevertheless the question persists, and leads me to want to take a closer look at those places where we have managed to keep the land relatively green.

GEORGE SIBLEY

(To be concluded)

REVIEW

STILL ACCURATE DIAGNOSIS

REVIEWERS, in common with other human beings, suffer fatigues, an occupational affliction growing out of the opacity of much ordinary prose. Accordingly, having picked off the shelf a book which had attention in the first year of *MANAS*, we now share with our readers the pleasure its clarity induced. Richard Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequences* (University of Chicago Press, 1948, paperback in 1959) begins with a paragraph the invitation of which could not be resisted. The writer knows exactly what he intends to do and tells the reader with unexampled simplicity:

This is another book about the dissolution of the West. I attempt two things not commonly found in the growing literature of this subject. First, I present an account of that decline based not on analogy but on deduction. It is here the assumption that the world is intelligible and that man is free and that these consequences we are now expiating are the product not of biological or other necessity but of unintelligent choice. Second, I go so far as to propound, if not a whole solution, at least the beginning of one, in the belief that man should not follow a scientific analysis with a plea of moral impotence.

This being the book's content, it is evident that its value has not in the least diminished during the passage of some thirty years. Deductive reason has a timeless quality, however much it may be applied to timely matters. The matters may change, but the reasoning stands, since similar matters are easily found. In the case of Mr. Weaver's critique, however, they seem to have changed very little. He says on his second page:

Surely we are justified in saying of our time: If you seek the monument to our folly, look about you. In our own day we have seen cities obliterated and ancient faiths stricken. We may well ask, in the words of Matthew, whether we are not faced with "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world." We have for many years moved with a brash confidence that man had

achieved a position of independence which rendered the ancient restraints needless. Now, in the first half of the twentieth century, at the height of modern progress, we behold unprecedented outbreaks of hatred and violence; we have seen whole nations desolated by war and turned into penal camps by their conquerors; we find half of mankind looking upon the other half as criminal. Everywhere occur symptoms of mass psychosis. Most portentous of all, there appear diverging bases of value, so that our single planetary globe is mocked by worlds of different understanding. These signs of disintegration arouse fear, and fear leads to desperate unilateral efforts toward survival, which only forward the process.

Like Macbeth, Western man made an evil decision, which has become the efficient and final cause of other evil decisions. Have we forgotten our encounter with the witches on the heath? It occurred in the late fourteenth century, and what the witches said to the protagonist of this drama was that man could realize himself more fully if he would only abandon his belief in the existence of transcendentals. The powers of darkness were working subtly, as always, and they couched this proposition in the seemingly innocent form of an attack upon universals. The defeat of logical realism in the great medieval debate was the crucial event in the history of Western culture; and from this flowed those acts which issue now in modern decadence.

William of Occam was the champion of an outlook which resulted in doing away with mind as an ordering principle: there are no universal ideas. What we suppose to be transcendent principles of which the natural world is an imperfect reflection, as Plato held, are not the rules or laws of both manifest and unmanifest nature, but only afterthoughts we apply to the "real facts" of life—mere classifying conveniences of empirical inquiry. Materialism as a "philosophy" which gave no explanations, but catalogued the uses of "facts," eventually followed.

In the seventeenth century physical discovery paved the way for the incorporation of the sciences, although it was not until the nineteenth that these began to challenge the very continuance of the ancient intellectual disciplines. And in this period the change gained momentum, aided by two developments of overwhelming influence. The first was a patent increase in man's dominion over nature

which dazzled all but the most thoughtful; and the second was the growing mandate for popular education. The latter might have proved a good in itself, but it was wrecked on equalitarian democracy's unsolvable problem of authority: none was in a position to say what the hungering multitudes were to be fed. Finally, in an abject surrender to the situation, in an abdication of the authority of knowledge, came the elective system. This was followed by a carnival of specialism, professionalism, and vocationalism, often fostered and protected by strange bureaucratic devices, so that on the honored name of university there traded a weird congeries of interests, not a few of which were anti-intellectual even in their pretensions. Institutions of learning did not check but rather contributed to the decline by losing interest in *Homo sapiens* to develop *Homo faber*.

The value of Weaver's book lies in the lucid psychological history it provides for those who, struggling back to some sort of transcendentalism, will find many of their feelings confirmed, their criticisms validated. There was little to suggest this revival of philosophical thinking when Weaver was writing. Yet he discerned a few signs even then, naming as writers of foresight Silone and Saint-Exupéry, and, oddly enough, Hemingway. He says:

They will carry the gift for reflection into experience of intense physical distress, and they will emerge with a more genuine contempt for materialist explanations than has been seen for centuries. When Saint-Exupéry, for example, declares that "the physical drama itself cannot touch us until someone points out its spiritual sense," he makes an affirmation of tragedy and significance.

There seems a sense in which the proposals of the closing chapters of *Ideas Have Consequences*—for restoration of the dignity and necessity of Logos, the power of the mind, and of the ancient meaning of Piety—are finding advocates who speak in many tongues, which means a slow but authentic progress. What does Weaver intend by Piety? He says:

Piety is a discipline of the will through respect. It admits the right to exist of things larger than the ego, of things different from the ego. And, before we can bring harmony back into a world where now

everything seems to meet "in mere oppugnancy," we shall have to regard with the spirit of piety three things: nature, our neighbors—and the past.

If Weaver's book has a weakness, it is his failure to explain why the world fell so easily prey to the deceits of "modernism." Materialism did not bring the wonderful freedom it promised, but turned out to be only another enslavement. Why, given the religious longings and hopes of so many humans, was materialism so enthusiastically preferred? Is the long-recorded cussedness of people a sufficient explanation?

Weaver's view may be contained in the following:

The Greeks identified god with mind, and it will be found that every attack upon religion, or upon characteristic ideas inherited from religion, when its assumptions are laid bare, turns out to be an attack upon mind. Moral certitude gives the prior assurance of right sentiment. Intellectual clarity gives clarity to practice. There is some ultimate identification of goodness and truth, so that he who ignores or loses faith in the former can by no possible means save the latter.

For centuries now opportunism has encroached upon essential right until certitude has all but vanished. We are looking for a place where an essential stand may be made for the logos against modern barbarism.

Religion as *Nous* or mind, however, is very different from the human associations which have gone by that name. The barbarism born of the corruptions of religion may be the most difficult to overcome.

COMMENTARY
DISCIPLINE IN SUBJECTIVE INQUIRY

IT seems of some importance to take note of the striking difference in temper between the work of Richard Luxton (see *Frontiers*) and such sensation-seeking reports as von Danekin's *Chariots of the Gods*. William Irwin Thompson made this distinction in *At the Edge of History*, in speaking of Mexican antiquities, but for the most part scholars draw back from any sort of "subjective" resources to avoid blemishing their professional standing by giving evidence of a "mystical" approach. A peculiar value, therefore, attaches to the inquiries of both Thompson and Luxton, who make it plain that open-mindedness is as important as tough-mindedness, and that a researcher respectful of psychic capacities and traditions and possessed of a corresponding discipline may find out things which the "empiricists" don't even suspect.

As for aid to archeological research from dreaming, it has happened before. The following is based on the report of H. V. Hilprecht, professor of Assyriology at the University of Pennsylvania (taken from *The Dream World* by R.L. Mégroz, Dutton, 1939):

Hilprecht went with an archaeological expedition from Pennsylvania to explore the ruins of Babylon. Two inscribed fragments of agate puzzled him. Their significance and the meaning of the characters inscribed on them remained a mystery. He sent home separate drawings of them, and then in a dream he saw a priest of pre-Christian Nippur who led him to the treasure chamber of the ancient temple, the ruins of which Hilprecht had been excavating. On the floor of the treasure chamber the dreamer saw scraps of agate and of lapis lazuli. The priest told him that the two fragments he was puzzled about should be joined together, and explained the use they had been put to, all of which was confirmed. This kind of creative energy in dreams is beyond the scepticism of the most orthodox critic, and there is no need to exemplify it further. In such experiences as Hilprecht's dream, however, there seems to be a curious anticipation of what is to happen in time, the detailed and unexpected fulfilment of an event seen only in the dream.

Richard Weaver's book, *Ideas Have Consequences*, quoted in Review, provides illustration of another kind of scholarly discipline which needs reviving—the discipline of metaphysical thinking. The world of thought and inward experience is not amorphous in itself. Its obscurities and uncertainties result from the careless habits of inquirers who suppose that there is nothing to be learned from either feelings or abstract ideas. A great irony lies in this disdain, since what wisdom the human race has acquired has come almost exclusively from thinkers attentive to these inward ranges of experience and reasoning.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

THE ISSUE OF "SUCCESS"

SINCE Fred M. Hechinger, who writes on education for the *New York Times*, usually has something good to say, we read whatever turns up under his name. At present we have a review of his in *This World* for last June 27, giving attention to a revised edition of Denker and Bhaerman's *No Particular Place To Go: The Making of a Free High School* (Simon & Schuster), which came out in 1972, and had attention in MANAS for May 17 of that year. It has now been republished with "an afterword" which, Hechinger says, "may be more important than the book itself." Judging from what he quotes, we agree. Looking back on themselves (and some others who were doing similar things), the authors say:

Schools cannot teach responsibility unless they practice it. . . . We assumed that if given the freedom to design the school, students would necessarily act responsibly. It didn't work that way. As role models, we were little better than the wishy-washy school administrators and teachers we had been so quick to criticize. . . . Unwilling to embrace roles, we acted with confusion and inconsistency. . . . In our eyes, kids were always right, parents always wrong.

Hechinger comments:

Denker and Bhaerman describe the endless talk and the assumption that "communication meant agreement—unless we agreed we weren't communicating." These schools claimed to believe in human unity but fell apart "because they were unable to resolve differences."

There is useful self-analysis in a passage by Denker, quoted and summarized by Hechinger:

"Our vicarious identification with adolescence, our fascination with youth culture, mirrored our lack of confidence in our own skills and experience."

He recalls that one student of an alternative school commented: "All the teachers we hired have the same kind of personality. They like Chinese cooking, they all know urban problems, they're all into art and photography and pottery and things like that' and things like ecology and Cuba."

Uncertain that they had any worthwhile skills to pass on, and generally hostile to the demands for competence, the teachers competed instead for the students' approval. Ironically, disadvantaged students, with whom the reformers claimed empathy and for whom they sought to change the system, wanted no part of the experiment: They were looking for solid credentials and the promise that their schooling would have the credibility that would lead them to success.

What does this afterword to educational rebellion aim to tell a new generation of students and teachers? "It is essential," the authors say, "that schools in the '80s have a clear idea of what responsibility is. Responsibility has nothing to do with guilt or blame. Rather it involves doing something simply because it needs to be done."

They call for teachers who know that "love is not permissiveness," who admit it when they are wrong, but are also "willing to stand firm in the face of adolescent testing and confusion."

In recent years, alternative schools have again sprung up all over the country—but alternatives with a difference. They are not part of any "counter culture" but are, in fact, the centerpiece of the public school system's search for an antidote to rigidity and uniformity. They are built around special programs, in the arts or sciences or languages or mathematics; they may feature different pedagogical approaches, progressive or traditional; but they avoid their predecessors' main pitfall. They are not run by adolescent grownups for teen-age adolescents. . . . Today, alternative schools are . . . looking instead for paths to better teaching and more satisfying learning, leading in turn to greater competence—a notion their radical predecessors seemed to consider a dirty word.

Teachers, too, it seems, grow up. Fortunately, Denker and Bhaerman feel able to explore the immaturities from which so many suffered when they undertook to launch an alternative school. One point, however, deserves more attention. The disadvantaged students, Hechinger says, wanted "solid credentials" and a path to "success." At about the time (in the early 70s) when Denker and Bhaerman were struggling with their school, Larry Cole, director of the Lower East Side Action Project (LEAP) in New York, described to Paul Goodman the discrimination against Puerto Rican students in the

city schools. Some of them wanted to become draftsmen and architects, but their school advisers told them to study auto repair. This, Cole said, was "anti-education" and destructive of the hopes of Puerto Rican youth. They, too, wanted "solid credentials" and ways to professional success. But Goodman interjected: Should Puerto Rican youth—or any youth at all—*want* to be a professional in an artificial society like ours? Larry Cole said the students deserved a choice, to which Goodman replied that the question of what is really worth doing first needed attention. "We have," he said, "a lot of kids here who have the same kind of garbage in their minds that any kid in Yale or Harvard has. They seem to think the same things are worth while. They have the same ambitions, want to climb up the same way, and who needs it?"

What does one say to that? Something might be said along the lines of the need of most people to enjoy a little of conventional "success" before they opt for the lonely path of independence and rejection of conventional goals. The comment of Robert Jay Wolff on an art student who wanted to be a successful cartoonist illustrates how a perceptive teacher might deal with such problems. In one of his essays in *Art and Learning* (Grossman), he wrote:

It is obvious that there is no way on earth by which you could possibly change this boy's mind. Actually, there is no need to destroy his conviction. It would not even be desirable, for he may very well turn out to be an excellent cartoonist. But it is possible to divert his efforts into a wider range of sensory and aesthetic experience by accepting and using the very fixation that you are trying to free him from. Show him Alexander Calder's masterful and witty wire images. Tell the boy that is cartooning, too. . . .

This would be a beginning, and a pretty rough beginning it is on the teacher. It's hard work and it takes sensitive thinking and insight. There's only one alternative: let him develop in the image that the world of Super Suds and words spelled backwards sets up in him. True, he will be living in this world and he will be earning his livelihood there. It is also true that we should do all in our power to prepare him

for this task. However, in carrying out this obligation we should never lose sight of the fact that if we prepare him for a job, and nothing else, it is always possible that he will end his days with a job and nothing else. It is our duty above all to see that this does not happen.

FRONTIERS

"What Are They Saying about Us?"

TEMPORARILY in Redonda prison (by bureaucratic mistake) in Merida, capital of the Mexican state of Yucatan, Richard Luxton, a native of Lima, Peru, who had come to Yucatan to study and decipher the hieroglyphics of ancient Mayan sacred texts, encountered within the prison where there were no guards, an old Indian, a Mayan, with "eyes so bright and penetrating that his glance was hard to meet and hold." He was don Miguel, who, like other Yucatecans, spoke Mayan as casually as Spanish. Luxton tells of his talks, over nine days, with the old Mayan in *The Mystery of the Mayan Hieroglyphs* (Harper & Row 1982, \$7.95). Noticing the two books on the ancient Mayans that Luxton carried, don Miguel asked: "Do they allow you to keep the books?" The books became the focus of their conversations.

Don Miguel pointed to a page in Sylvanus Morley's *The Ancient Maya* and asked: "What are they saying about us here?" He wanted to know how the archaeologists could understand secrets recorded so long ago. Luxton tried to explain:

"These archaeologists can understand something of how. . . the way the *abuelos* [Ancient Ones] explored the mystery of time . . . the calendar that the Mayas used before the coming of the Spanish." . . . "They say that you knew exactly the movement of the sun, the moon, the stars and the planets. The *abuelos*, they say, could predict eclipses. But this is only a little of what is written in these characters. We do not know very much, only the mathematics and count of your old calendar."

They talked some more, and Luxton explained that scholars studying Mayan writing were like children learning the alphabet, beginning with A, B, C. "We have," he said, "learnt only a little in all these generations here."

Don Miguel commented:

"The *abuelos* said that one of you who speaks English would come to understand their writing. This was to be one sign of the return of the old Mayan

power. So they say," explained don Miguel in a completely matter of fact tone. "They said that it would be read there, before the year 2000.

This showed why the old Mayan was interested in the young Peruvian. "He wanted to see how far we had progressed in the last four hundred years." Luxton asked him:

"But if the *abuelos* could see the future like this, don Miguel, how was it that they disappeared so suddenly? They lost their power just as their wisdom was at its peak." I expected don Miguel to be stumped by this question about the collapse of the Classic Maya.

He was not stumped at all:

"Their gods told them to do that, to hide what they knew and to disappear," don Miguel answered without hesitation.

"The gods distanced themselves at that time so the lords had to go in search of them. That was how it was . . . so they say."

He looked to see what my reaction was going to be. Many Mayanists have tried to explain the sudden end of certain Mayan customs in the ninth century AD, such as the carving and erecting of tall stone stelae, and the occupation and construction of large centres of learning like Tikal and Palenque. They speculate in terms of soil exhaustion, overpopulation and political upheaval. I had yet to see an explanation in terms of Mayan gods (and thus their writing) telling the Indians deliberately to cease such practices. I explained our speculations to don Miguel. He looked dumbfounded and exasperated at our rudimentary imagination and shrugged, confident in his Mayan interpretation.

Luxton decided for himself that the mystery of the sudden Mayan decline "could only be unravelled and resolved by the meanings hidden within the signs." He asked the old Mayan: "Do you think that I could learn to understand the *Costumbre* [traditions] of the Mayas? Do you think that an outsider can come to understand the vision of the *abuelos*?" Pointing to the hieroglyphs in Morley's book, don Miguel said:

"You see here, these are not words as you write them. Here you see a face, an eye, a hand, a foot. These are *figuras*—people. You must learn from the Mayas. In their eyes, in their movements of hand and

foot, you can learn our *costumbre*. If you only listen to words you will miss much." . . .

"Do not forget what you have heard here. Do not forget us," don Miguel said, finality in his voice. After a while he added, "The *abuelos* say that the *figuras* are like gods—they speak to you in your dreams. They come and explain things to you. When you wake up you know these explanations. Then you remember them. "How did I learn these things?" you ask yourself. "No one showed them to me." That is how it is, don Ricardo. That is when you begin, that is when you learn to see. . . ."

His papers finally found to be in order, his credentials confirmed, Luxton was released from the prison. He went on with his researches into Mayan writing with the help of another Indian whose name, Pablo Balam, is given as co-author of the book.

In it there is much of interest, although no startling revelations about the content of Mayan writing. More important than this is the spirit of inquiry brought by Richard Luxton to the undertaking. He is no blind believer in the romantic claims of living psychics, but fortunately the Indians who helped him in his researches were not of this sort. He is a cautious but open-minded man, willing to consider that living Mayan tradition has a substratum of truth, and he does not reject the idea that we may find keys to the past in dream. An openness to such ways of learning is gradually becoming characteristic of the thoughtful writers of our time a temper which may at last restore continuity to cultural history.