

## THE MATTER OF TASTE

TASTE is that faculty by which we are drawn to live a certain kind of life. Other human qualities may be equally important, but nothing, it seems clear, is more important. Taste is at once the joy of the educator or teacher but may also be the iron barrier to the achievement he longs for. Taste seems almost wholly idiosyncratic, an endowment so deeply rooted that the education of taste is an almost impossible project. While weak minds can be prevailed upon to imitate good taste, making rebellious souls embrace vulgarity as a species of honesty, the actual development of taste calls for Socratic genius in the teacher, and he fails more often than he succeeds, even as Socrates did.

What can we—parents and teachers—do about this? Faced with the mystery of the formation of character, we have only one resort, to turn to literature and biography for examples of men and women endowed with exquisite taste, even though such studies are unlikely to excite the interest of the majority of students. So we do what we can, hoping for the best.

In his book of essays, *The Opposing Self* (Viking Press, 1955), Lionel Trilling considers "The Poet as Hero: Keats in his Letters," saying:

He could, as we have seen, rate poetry inferior to action he could also rate it inferior to philosophy. In the passage already referred to [in a letter], in which he talks about how the charm of energy may be thought to redeem error he says, "This is the very thing in which consists poetry, and if so it is not so fine a thing as philosophy—For the same reason that an eagle is not so fine a thing as a truth." He then goes on to say that he now understands from experience the force of Milton's line, "how charming is divine Philosophy." To Keats ideas were what Milton said they were, "musical as Apollo's lute," and he conceived that in heaven, where the potentiality of all things is realized the nightingale will sing "not as a senseless tranced thing" but will utter philosophic truth.

Next Trilling recalls Keats's refusal "to be fixed in a final judgment," speaking of "that faculty of the mind to which Keats gave the name of "Negative Capability." In December of 1817, Keats wrote to his brother, relating what he said to his friend Dilke.

The disquisition touched on "various subjects" which are not specified, and Keats says that as it proceeded "several things dovetailed in my mind and at once it struck me what quality went to make a man of Achievement, especially in literature. . . . I mean *Negative Capability*, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." . . . Shakespeare is Keats's example of a mind content with half-knowledge, "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts." And in point of fact it is a particular and very large human problem, nothing less than the problem of evil.

Evidently we have given to "taste" a large and inclusive meaning, suggesting that wisdom in accommodating oneself to the human conditions is a matter of taste. For Keats, human life was plainly tragic, full, as Trilling says, of miseries "in either a simple or a highly civilized state." Yet he is contemptuous of those who call the world a vale of tears.

"Call the world if you please 'The vale of Soul-making!' . . . I say '*Soul making*'—Soul as distinguished from an Intelligence—There may be intelligences or sparks of divinity in millions—but they are not Souls till they acquire identities till each one is personally itself."

In this letter to his brother in America Keats presents a precise metaphysical understanding of the human condition. Trilling says:

There follows a remarkable flight into a sort of transcendental psychology in the effort to suggest how intelligences become souls, and then: "Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a Soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a

thousand different ways." And the heart is "the teat from which the Mind or intelligence sucks its identity."

He writes with an animus against Christian doctrine, but what he is giving, he says, is a sketch of *salvation*. And for the purpose of his argument he assumes immortality, he assumes a deity who makes beings in an infinite variety of identities, each identity being a "spark" of God's "essence" he assumes that the soul may return to God enhanced by its acquisition of identity. This assumed, "I began by seeing how man was formed by circumstances—and what are circumstances?—but touchstones of his heart?—and what are touchstones? but provings of his heart? and what are provings of his heart but fortifiers or alterers of his nature? and what is his altered nature but his Soul?—and what was his Soul before it came into the world and had these provings and alterations and perfectionings?—An intelligence—without Identity—and how is this Identity to be made through the medium of the heart? And how is the heart to become this Medium but in a world of Circumstances?"

Musing, at the end of this essay, Trilling speaks of those who will maintain that "Keats's heroic vision of the tragic life and the tragic salvation will not serve us now." But Trilling does not agree.

They will tell us that we must, in our time, confront circumstances which are so terrible that the soul, far from being defined and developed by them, can only be destroyed by them. This may be so, and if it is so it makes the reason that Keats is not less but more relevant to our situation. As we see him in his letters he has for us a massive importance—he has, as we say, a historical importance. He stands as the last image of health at the very moment when the sickness of Europe began to be apparent—he with his intense naturalism that took so passionate an account of the mystery of man's nature, reckoning as boldly with pleasure as with pain, giving so generous a credence to growth, development, and possibility; he with his pride that so modestly, so warmly and delightedly, responded to the idea of community. The spiritual and moral health of which he seems the image we cannot now attain without wishing it, and clearly imagining it. "The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream—he awoke and found it truth."

What stands in the way of our accepting Keats's metaphysical analysis? Nothing, really,

save our devitalized and mechanistically pessimistic outlook. But Keats, some will say, was a genius. Why is that an objection? Are geniuses people who we learn about, as a category of humans, but not to learn from? We have used him as an example of a man of great taste, who shaped his life according to rather wonderful inclinations, which defined and expressed his taste. Trilling, then, finds him a hero, which seems exactly right.

Well, there will be those who remark that not everyone—perhaps not many at all—are in these days inclined to read even the great poets. That may be true, but we are discussing the possibility of education in taste, and the texts that might serve in this way are a natural part of our inheritance of literature. One ought to read Keats and other poets for the enrichment it provides to the human capacity to feel, to respond to vision and insight, which is certainly at the root of the development of taste.

We go now to another man for possible instruction—one who, if you read his books and diaries, seems a man of exemplary taste. He is Harlan Hubbard, born in 1900, whose *Journals 1929-1944*, was published last year by the University of Kentucky Press. Reading these entries gradually acquaints one with the feelings about life and work which reveal the grain of good taste. The first entry in this book was in 1929, in which he wrote:

Now I must break forth from my old self, cast away old traditions, unbind my eyes, so that I may have a broader vision of truth; so that I may come to this river [the Ohio], as I do today, and not find it cluttered with emotions and thoughts of former days, or its shores lined with drift of cities. I must see the elements as they are, earth, water, sun. I am animal, foraging about, as much a part of the earth as the bird singing overhead. Even in city streets and buildings, I am still on the frontier.

Hubbard was—is—a painter, mostly of landscapes. As a youth, when he and his mother had moved from Kentucky to New York, he attended the National Academy of Design. He

was then eighteen. A year later they returned to Kentucky, settling in Fort Thomas, a rural suburb of Cincinnati. There he went to work for a local contractor, learning masonry and carpentry. He built a home for his mother and himself in Fort Thomas, where they lived until his mother's death in 1943. Something of the quality of the man is found in a summer entry in 1933:

If we could only be enough awake to live up to the minute, to appreciate fully the present. Sometimes I faintly see this day as I will regard it in the future. Then I will wonder why I did not enjoy it more, and take advantage of its opportunities. But by that time, I will forget this grief and the obstacles I now see ahead. Most of them will vanish before I get there.

I walked down the railroad to Coal Haven. It is a hot, sultry morning, the sun burning through the hazy sky. This section hand is a heroic figure. Summer and winter, in heat and cold, snow and rain, he works steadily and without complaint, enduring as much as Ulysses ever did. How brown and tough he is! How much skill he has put into the handling of a shovel! What thoughts does he have, dim and sad? They are revealed in his weak and hopeless laughter. Yet he must spend happy hours in the cool evening, on his porch overlooking the river, with his young children. . . .

A month later he wrote:

It was a very hot, close morning. I stopped at W's on the way home and set Mrs. W's clock to running. How pleased she was to hear it again and to think of its cheery striking during the long night. I thought that if I was ever alone, without friends or resources, I would start out afoot, with a small kit of tools, perhaps pliers, screwdrivers, little hammer, file and knife, an assortment of nails, tacks, wire, oil can, glue, whetstone. I would go through country, towns and cities doing little chores that householders seem never able to accomplish, free a door that stuck, fix a lock or clock, sharpen knives and scissors, replace broken sash cords, mend the gate, maybe lay some stone or fix the fence, hoe the garden or trim the trees. I am qualified by experience. I have a disarming personality. What different people I would meet, what strange dwellings I would enter. I would care not for the passing of the season, for distance or time. I would laugh at rough treatment or rebuffs, for I would be on solid ground. I would have many experiences and who knows what undreamed-of

haven I would reach. This morning along the highway I saw two men painting a name on a mailbox. I could carry a little can of paint. By experience I could add to my stock until no one could say that I could do nothing for them. But here we are. Yet it is an idea not to be forgotten.

The Depression which began in 1929 had no effect on his life. He liked and made friends with the director of the PWA program in Northern Kentucky, and agreed to paint a mural for the Covington Library Auditorium. The assignment was that the subject of the mural had to be "people," which disappointed Hubbard, who wanted to paint a steamboat mural. The size was large, six feet by twenty-eight, and he painted on sheets of masonite. "I have never heard a good word about the mural," he wrote, "and it would have relieved my mind of much agony if the building had collapsed into rubble." But looking at the old painting a long time later, it "was not as bad as I had feared. Fifty years had given it a new rhythm and a glow of life I had not felt before."

On January 4, 1935, he wrote: "This is my birthday. I am 35 years old. I feel that I am still developing and am sure that my best work is ahead, and my experiences will be deeper and more interesting."

These were his musings half a year later:

I try to determine what makes me work so steadily, on the same line, trying again and again with no marked success, no outside pressure to keep me going. There are probably many reasons. I am naturally industrious and not lazy, and as this is my work I put in my time faithfully. The strong inertia and lack of initiative keep me working in the same field, with little experiment or criticism. And I still delude myself with the idea that I am an artist whose work is worth great effort. I am sure it has a firm foundation—a love of nature, out-of-doors, farms and all that is close to earth. I believe I am sincere when I say that here God speaks to me. The beauty of the earth is Christ himself. I do not know how many people have separated the earth from the world, but it is now a commonplace idea with me, though when it first came it was a revelation. To have no truck with the world, to still love people, and lay down my life for them, to express these feelings on canvas with a hope that it will lead others out of the world—here

are forces that can produce greater results than my lifetime of work. I see before me the river slowly flowing past, quiet almost unnoticed, but I feel its power. What can stop it?

In December, 1935, he wrote:

What kind of "art" do I produce? Does it belong to any style or school, or carry on tradition? Long ago I gave up thinking about this and tried merely to put down what I saw. The result would have to be realistic, and in spite of trying to make something distorted, abstract, or simplified to elemental forms, I was not satisfied unless the picture was real—in the thin air, with true surfaces construction and proportion. At the same time I could see an inward design, two dimensional and abstract, in mass and color and line springing up, even though I did not consciously put it there. It has been my aim to foster this design and make it as simple and strong as I could, yet never letting it interfere with the objective. At the same time I would never put into a picture the least object or line or color to portray the objective without making it part of the whole design.

A cardinal aspect of good taste is its independence. Independence does not make judgment right or good, but keeps it from being mere imitation. In 1941 Hubbard wrote:

The rest of you go about your work in the world, much in the spirit of a domestic animal, performing what is expected of you and receiving your reward. I come alone to this task of painting. No one wants the pictures or understands or encourages their production. I feel so strongly that I must sever completely all possible connection with this world, and live on the outside fringe, a rebel. Instead, I get more involved with people and their affairs. What will happen? Nothing, perhaps, or will there be a violent disturbance and a clean breaking off? But I can't be concerned with the future. I have made no compromises in painting. There I am free, and stand on the earth. The other does not matter. Have no fear of what they can do to the body.

These are attitudes which lead directly to the formation of good taste. Hubbard wrote early in 1942:

Today I have seen clearly what I have felt a long time—that I would have no part in this war; not as a soldier, not as a civilian doing war work behind the lines. If necessary I would offer to help with the sick or wounded, or if labor was short, lend a hand at

farming, civilian transportation or building, or the like. This is the only course I could take with honor. I should be ashamed to fight in this war, even in the American ranks beside my friends. I have no faith in the cause. I think enemies, if there are any, could have been met differently. I have no part in the system anyway, no desire for this standard of living. Against what I thought wrong and false, I have long been conducting a one-man revolution, faint and under cover but growing stronger, and sooner or later it will be revealed. It may as well be now. My case should be presented and stood for, even if by such a small minority. It is a strain of Americanism almost lost. It is the hope of the future.

The genuine artist—and Hubbard is one of these—has an extraordinary advantage over his fellows. He has established for himself a goal or end beyond all personal interest. He knows the partial truth declared by Keats, that beauty is truth, a part of the truth, and that truth is always beautiful. There is more to know—known by the Buddhas and the Christs—but the artist has made a large stride in the right direction. The stride is nothing verbal, is beyond intellectual calculations; it takes him into his own beinghood as a human, a human with work to do. In Harlan Hubbard's journals one has contact with a mind which has made this stride and will be unable to turn back. He has left the world of common opinion behind, and has accepted and paid the price the world exacts for his desertion. As he says, the hope of the future, for a future for the world, lies in making this transaction. And the lives of such individuals—of John Keats, Simone Weil, and a handful of others—show that it is good. These people have left behind them bouquets of understanding in the records of their decisions, in the pains endured and triumphed over, in the visions held throughout, undiminished, the storm of life. Taste, in the meaning we have given it, sums up the quality of this life.

## *REVIEW*

### THE OBSCURE LESSON OF JOB

A BOOK that will continue to excite the wonder and curiosity of the reader, but will do little to explain its mystery, is *The Book of Job*, given a new poetic translation and an introduction by Stephen Mitchell. The publisher is North Point Press, the price \$12.50. The author begins by pointing out that while the Jews were the source of our Bible, the hero of the Book of Job was a gentile who lived in the land of Uz. Mitchell also says that the writer of Job may have been a gentile too, remarking:

The language of *Job* is so idiosyncratic and contains so many "Arabisms" and "Aramaisms" that some scholars have postulated a lost original text, of which the Hebrew text is a translation. This was also the opinion of Abraham Ibn Ezra, the great medieval rabbinic commentator.

In any event it is very old, since, as Mitchell says, scholars have dated the poem "anywhere between 800 and 300 B.C.," adding that there are Sumerian versions of the legend dating from 2000 B.C. By others it has been identified as an Arabian allegory of initiation and of purification, and pre-Mosaic.

Job was a wealthy man who had a clear conscience. No sense of past guilt stained his memory. He had sons and daughters over whom he watched to keep them from sin. The story we have in the Bible really begins in Heaven. As Mitchell tells it:

One year, on the day when the angels come to testify before the Lord, the Accusing Angel came too.

The Lord said to the Accuser, "Where have you come from?"

The Accuser answered, "From walking here and there on the earth, and looking around."

The Lord said, "Did you notice my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him: a man of perfect integrity, who fears God and avoids evil."

The Accuser said, "Doesn't Job have a good reason for being so good? Haven't you put a hedge around him—himself and his whole family and everything he has? You bless whatever he does, and the land is teeming with his cattle. But just reach out

and strike everything he has, and I bet he'll curse you to your face."

The Lord said, "All right: everything he has is in your power. Just don't lay a hand on him."

Then the Accuser left.

That, you could say, is the plot of the Book of Job. Next the Accuser or Satan or the Antagonist goes to work, making unbearable trouble for Job. His riches are destroyed by enemies and by disaster, his sons and daughters killed.

Then Job stood up. He tore his robe. He shaved his head. He lay down with his face in the dust. He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken; may the name of the Lord be blessed."

In the next meeting of the Lord with his angels, the Lord asked the Accusing Angel:

"Did you notice my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him: a man of perfect integrity, who fears God and avoids evil. He is holding on to his innocence, even after you made me torment him for no reason."

The Accuser said, "So what? A man will give up everything he has, to save his own skin. But just reach out and strike his flesh and bones, and I bet he'll curse you to your face.'"

The Lord said, "All right: he is in your power. Just don't kill him."

Then the Accuser left.

He covered Job with boils, from his scalp to the soles of his feet. Job took a piece of broken pottery to scratch himself with, and sat down in the dust.

His wife said to him, "How long will you go on clinging to your innocence? Curse God and die."

Job said, "Foolish woman, have you lost your mind? We have accepted good fortune from God; surely we can accept bad fortune too."

Then three of Job's friends, having heard of the multiple calamities he had suffered, came to comfort him. They could hardly recognize him. They wept and tore their clothing, then sat with him for seven days, not saying a word, "for they saw how great his suffering was." The time came for Job when he cried out, cursing the day he was born.

Why couldn't I have died  
 as they pulled me out of the dark?  
 Why were there knees to hold me,  
 breasts to keep me alive?  
 If only I had strangled or drowned  
 on my way to the bitter light.

. . .

For God has hidden my way  
 and put hedges across my path.  
 I sit and gnaw on my grief;  
 my groans pour out like water.  
 My worst fears have happened;  
 my nightmares have come to life.  
 Silence and peace have abandoned me,  
 and anguish camps in my heart.

Now his three friends moralize at him, repeating the conventional wisdom. But Job does not respond to their appeals, stoutly maintaining his innocence and the injustice of his troubles. Then the friends become aggressive, suggesting that Job suffers from guilt, no matter what he says. Yet there is dignity and honesty in everything Job declares, even in his bitter complaints. He is driven to despair:

I have taken the pit as my home  
 and made my bed in the dark.  
 I have called the grave my father;  
 the worm my mother, my sister.  
 And where now is my home?  
 My piety—who will see it?  
 It will follow me to the grave  
 and lie in the dust beside me.

There is a kind of excellence in Mitchell's verse, but it would be well for the reader to turn to the King James version of the Bible and read also the language of Job there. There is great majesty in it, and also beauty. In order to grasp the enormity of Job's pain, one needs to saturate himself with this language—feel the depth of its emotion. In his introduction Mitchell says of Job:

His attitude shifts constantly, and can veer to its direct opposite in the space of a few verses, the stream of consciousness all at once a torrent. He wants to die, he wants to prove that he is innocent; he wants to shake his fist at God for leaving the world in such a wretched shambles. God is his enemy, God has made a terrible mistake, God has forgotten him; or doesn't care; God will surely defend him, against God. His question, the harrowing question of someone who has only heard of God, is "Why me?" There is no answer

because it is the wrong question. He will have to struggle with it until he is exhausted, like a child crying itself to sleep.

In these speeches it is obvious that Job is a different character from the patient hero of the legend. He is no longer primarily a rich man bereft of his possessions and heartbroken over his dead children (they are mentioned only once in the poem). He has become Everyman, grieving for all of human misery. He suffers not only his own personal pain, but the pain of all the poor and despised. He is himself afflicted by what God has done to the least of these little ones.

And, now, perhaps, Job is ready to understand, in a sense. From the Voice which comes out of the whirlwind, he *is* instructed in his own ignorance, in the shallow depths of his morality and in the puerile limitations of his calculations of justice and injustice.

Where were you when I planned the earth?  
 Tell me, if you are so wise.  
 Do you know who took its dimensions,  
 measuring its length with a cord?  
 What were its pillars built on?  
 Who laid the cornerstone,  
 while the morning stars burst out singing  
 and the angels shouted for joy!

Thus, as Mitchell suggests, Job is vouchsafed the vision of the divine form as including all forms, which comes to Arjuna in the eleventh discourse of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and he is totally humbled, although he remains honest and courageous. It is this constant attitude of Job, whether in prosperity or in utter defeat and deprivation, that wins the battle for him, so that all he lost, and more, is restored to him. Job says simply:

I am speechless: what can I answer?  
 I put my hand on my mouth.  
 I have said too much already;  
 now I will speak no more.

He no longer demanded human justice but submits to the rhythm of the universe, without pretending to understand it. He learns the endurance of Sisyphus and the agonized joy of Prometheus chained to the rock. He qualifies himself to live in the world beyond time and right and wrong. How does he do this? That is the secret of the myth.

## COMMENTARY

### A MODERN THEORY OF FREEDOM

LATELY we have been using this space to call attention to books which ought not to be neglected, yet have been forgotten. At any rate, one seldom sees any reference to them. We are thinking, here, of the books of Michael Polanyi. Basically, they are *Personal Knowledge*, a difficult yet highly valuable work on scientific knowledge, and two other books easier to understand—*Science, Faith and Society* and *The Tacit Dimension*. What was Polanyi's chief contribution? He showed the fundamental moral foundation of scientific knowledge. If scientists could not trust one another, he pointed out, there could be no science. It is hardly possible to exaggerate the importance of this insight. Once, years ago, when a friend asked A. H. Maslow why he allowed himself to be elected President of the American Psychological Association, he said that having this position enabled him to do certain things he thought it important to do—for example, he was able to bring Michael Polanyi to this country.

In the introductory section of *Science, Faith and Society* (first published in this country in 1964 by the University of Chicago), he tells about his visit to Moscow:

At Easter 1935 I visited N. I. Bukharin in Moscow. Though he was heading for his fall and execution three years later, he was still a leading theoretician of the Communist party. He explained to me that the distinction between pure and applied science, made in capitalist countries, was due to the inner conflict of this type of society which deprived scientists of the consciousness of their social functions, thus creating in them the illusion of pure science. Accordingly, Bukharin said, the distinction between pure and applied science was inapplicable in the Soviet Union. This implied no limitation on the freedom of research; scientists would follow their interests freely in the U.S.S.R., but, owing to the internal harmony of socialist society, they would inevitably be led to lines of research which would benefit the current Five Year Plan. The comprehensive planning of all research was to be

regarded merely as a conscious confirmation of the pre-existing harmony between scientific and social aims.

In 1935 I could still smile at this dialectical mystery-mongering, never suspecting how soon it would show terrible consequences. Vavilov's persecution at the hands of T.D. Lysenko had already begun. It led to his dismissal from office in 1939 and then to his arrest and death in a prison camp around 1943. This campaign wrought havoc among biologists and paralyzed whole branches of biology in Soviet Russia from 1939 until well after Stalin's death in 1953. The physical sciences got off more lightly. By the time of this writing, the natural sciences have been almost completely liberated from ideological subservience to Marxism, which continues to be imposed on the study of economics, sociology and the humanities. . . .

It was in facing these events that I became aware of the weakness of my position I was defending. When I read that Vavilov's last defense against Lysenko's theories in 1939, was to evoke the authority of Western scientists, I had to acknowledge that he was appealing to one authority against another: to the authority accepted in the West against the authority accepted in Soviet Russia.

This was not good enough for Polanyi. He wanted a "philosophy of science" to pit against the Marxist view.

How was its general acceptance among us to be accounted for? Was this acceptance justified? On what grounds?

This was why he wrote the book, *Science, Faith and Society*. He finds, and demonstrates, that the ultimate foundation of scientific faith lies in intuitive grounds, what in his later book he calls "tacit knowing." The authentic practice of science, he maintains, is an art. The progress of science, he shows, rests upon the consensus of scientists. "Every succeeding generation is sovereign in reinterpreting the tradition of science. With it rests the fatal responsibility of the self-renewal of scientific convictions and methods. To speak of science and its continued progress is to profess faith in its fundamental principles and in the integrity of scientists in applying and amending these principles."

Polanyi quotes from Nicolas Gimes, the Hungarian Communist who in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 turned against Stalinism:

Slowly we had come to belief, at least with the greater, the dominant part of our consciousness . . . that there are two kinds of truth, that the truth of the Party and the people can be different and can be more important than the objective truth and that truth and political expediency are in fact identical. This is a terrible thought . . . if the criterion of truth is political expediency, then even a life can be "true" . . . even a trumped up political trial can be "true." And so we arrived at the outlook which infected not only those who thought up the faked political trials but often affected even the victims; the outlook which poisoned our whole public life, penetrated the remotest corners of often affected even the victims; the outlook which poisoned our whole public life, penetrated the remotest corners of our thinking, obscured our vision, paralyzed our critical faculties and finally rendered many of us incapable of simply sensing or apprehending truth. This is how it was, it is no use denying it.

The writer of these words, Polanyi says, was executed in Budapest in 1958 at the orders of Moscow.

Polanyi concludes his introduction:

I have argued that a general respect for truth is all that is needed for society to be free. The way freedom and truth have proved identical in the battle against Stalinism bears out my views. I hope to see a modern theory of freedom, conceived on these lines, emerging from this battle.

The reader of *Science, Faith and Society* will recognize in it such a "modern theory of freedom."



# CHILDREN

## . . . and Ourselves

### ON THE UNIVERSITY

IN the collection of essays published last year, *Home Economics*, (North Point Press), Wendell Berry included a discussion titled "The Loss of the University." It was written for the enlightenment of those who still suppose that the university is a place where one should go to get an education. He begins by saying:

The predicament of literature within the university is not fundamentally different from the predicament of any other discipline, which is not fundamentally different from the predicament of language. That is, the various disciplines have ceased to speak to each other; they have become too specialized, and this over-specialization, this separation, of the disciplines has been enabled and enforced by the specialization of their languages. As a result, the modern university has grown, not according to any unifying principle, like an expanding universe, but according to the principle of miscellaneous accretion, like a furniture storage business.

Some specialization, as he points out, is obviously necessary, but too much is bad for everyone.

The impropriety begins, I think, when the various kinds of workers come to be divided and cease to speak to one another. In this division they become makers of *parts* of things. This is the impropriety of industrial organization, of which Eric Gill wrote, "Skill in making . . . degenerates into mere dexterity, i.e. skill in doing, when the workman . . . ceased to be concerned for the thing made or . . . has no longer any responsibility for the thing made and has therefore lost the knowledge of what it is that he is making. . . . The factory hand can only know what he is *doing*. What is being made is no concern of his." Part of the problem in universities now (or part of the cause of the problem) is this loss of concern for the thing made and, back of that I think, the loss of agreement on what the thing is that is being made.

The thing being made in a university is humanity. Given the current influence of universities, this is merely inevitable. But what the

universities, at least the public-supported ones, are mandated to make or help to make is human beings in the fullest sense of those words—not just trained workers or knowledgeable citizens but responsible heirs and members of human culture. If the proper work of the university is only to equip people to fulfill private ambitions, then how do we justify public support? If it is only to prepare citizens to fulfill public responsibilities, then how do we justify the teaching of arts and science? The common denominator has to be larger than either career preparation or preparation for citizenship. Underlying the idea of a university—the bringing together, the combining into one, of all the disciplines—is the idea that good work and good citizenship are the inevitable by-products of the making of a good—that is, a fully developed—human being. This, as I understand it, is the definition of the name *university*.

The functional fulfillment of this meaning in practice requires a common tongue. Without a common tongue the university loses its unity. Then the institution, the teachers, and the students, no longer know what a university is, and cannot understand the responsibilities of those who take part in the work of a university.

Here it would be well to draw back for a while and think about the meaning of what has been said. A *human* society is an association the members of which have certain clear responsibilities, transmitted by instruction and tradition. These responsibilities include the transmission of a sense of meaning and of the pursuit of meaning. A university is not a place where one goes simply to learn to "get ahead" along a certain path. It is a place where one grows up to one's chosen responsibilities. It is a place where one learns, or ought to learn, the consequences of what one does and schools oneself in the values which ought to be preserved through positive action. Berry illustrates this point:

For example, it is still perfectly respectable in land-grant universities for agricultural researchers to apply themselves to the development of more productive dairy cows without considering at all the fact that this development necessarily involves the failure of many thousands of dairies and dairy

farmers—that it has already done so and will inevitably continue to do so. The researcher feels at liberty to justify such work merely on the basis of the ratio between the "production unit" and the volume of production. And such work is permitted to continue, I suspect, because it is reported in language that is unreadable and probably unintelligible to nearly everybody in the university, to nearly everybody who milks cows, and to nearly everybody who drinks milk.

The desirability or undesirability of such a situation ought to be, Berry suggests, considered and debated in a university, by the departments of philosophy, history, and also literature, but this, he says, is not likely to happen. Who, besides agriculturalists, will be interested in the ethics of agricultural research? Berry continues:

Language is at the heart of the problem. To profess, after all, is "to confess before"—to confess, I assume, before all who live within the neighborhood or under the influence of the confessor. But to confess before one's neighbors and clients in a language that few of them can understand is not to confess at all. The specialized professional language is thus not merely a contradiction in terms, it is a cheat and a hiding place; it may, indeed, be an ambush. At the very root of the idea of profession and professorship is the imperative to speak plainly in the common tongue.

That the common tongue should become the exclusive specialty of a department in a university is therefore a tragedy, and not just for the university and its worldly place; it is a tragedy for the common tongue. It means that the common tongue, so far as the university is concerned, *ceases* to be the common tongue; it becomes merely one tongue within a confusion of tongues. Our language and literature cease to be seen as occurring in the world, and begin to be seen as occurring within their university department and within themselves. Literature ceases to be the meeting ground of all readers of the common tongue and becomes only the occasion of a deafening clatter *about* literature. Teachers and students read the great songs and stories to learn *about* them, not to learn *from* them. The *texts* are tracked as by the passing of an army of ants, but the power of songs and stories to affect life is still little acknowledged, apparently because it is little felt.

Berry turns to "career preparation" as the supposed objective of education, pointing out that: "The 'job market' may be overfilled; the

requirements for this or that career may change; the student may change, or the world may." Then he says:

Yet the arguments for "career preparation" continue to be made and to grow in ambition. On August 23, 1983, for example, the Associated Press announced that "the head of the Texas school board wants to require sixth-graders to choose career 'tracks' that will point them toward jobs." Thus, twelve-year-old children would be "free to choose" the kind of life they wish to live. They would even be free to change "career tracks," though, according to the article such a change would involve the penalty of a delayed graduation.

But these are free choices granted to children not prepared to make them. The idea, in reality, is to impose adult choices on children, and these "choices" mask the most vicious sort of economic determinism. This idea of education as "career track" diminishes everything it touches: education, teaching, childhood, the future. And such a thing could not be contemplated for sixth-graders, obviously, if it had not already been instituted in the undergraduate programs of colleges and universities.

To require or expect or even allow young people to choose courses of study and careers that they do not yet know anything about is not, as claimed, a grant of freedom. It is a severe limitation on freedom. It means, in practice that when the student has finished school and is faced then, appropriately, with the need to choose a career, he or she is prepared to choose only one. At that point, the student stands in need of a freedom of choice uselessly granted years before and forfeited in that grant.

Quite evidently, the government should be prohibited from interfering with the process of education, which ought to be in the charge of the wisest of our time.

## *FRONTIERS*

### Help for the Shoshone

WE have a letter, undated but recent, from the National Indian Youth Council, Inc., signed by the executive director, Gerald Wilkinson, who is, according to the listing of officers, a Cherokee. The letter is written in behalf of the Shoshone tribe of Indians. The Shoshone, according to a reference work, are a branch of the Uto-Aztec family and occupy territory from central Wyoming to eastern California. The letter begins:

In 1974 the U.S. government filed a trespass action against Mary and Carrie Dann, two traditional Shoshone women living on their ancestral tribal lands in Nevada. After more than ten years of legal proceedings, the United States Supreme Court handed down a ruling last year which could result in dispossessing these Shoshone people and making them into landless, federally-dependent Indians.

The Indian Youth Council is working to prevent this result. The letter continues:

The Shoshone lands are marginal at best—640 acres are needed to grass a single cow. But for thousands of years the Shoshone people have survived without destroying their surroundings. They gather wild foods and hunt according to the seasons and live in harmony with their environment.

Now the U.S. government covets the Shoshone lands. It wants the land primarily for military purposes and nuclear activities, including laser weapon test ranges, a test area for the stealth bomber and a high-level nuclear waste disposal site. These demands would effectively turn the Western Shoshone homeland into a military "sacrifice area."

Mr. Wilkinson asks:

Can this happen? Are the Shoshones trespassers? Did the Dann sisters and their extended-family band move onto government lands in defiance of law to steal wild onions and pinenuts? *No*. The land has belonged to the Western Shoshone Nation for perhaps 10,000 years. The United States recognized the Shoshone title at Ruby Valley in 1863 when it solemnly signed a treaty of peace and friendship.

The treaty of Ruby Valley has never been abrogated or amended. It still stands as domestic and

international law—just like any other treaty between the U.S. and another nation. But what began as an act of Shoshone goodwill to facilitate travel to California is being perverted by the federal government to swindle the Shoshones out of their land, their heritage, and their livelihood.

The letter then describes what it terms the "most shameless attempt to defraud the Shoshone" in 1979. The government tried to pay the Shoshone \$25 million, or fifteen cents per acre for land the Indians never agreed to sell. The Shoshones refused the money, but, claiming to be their trustee, the government put the money into a government account and declared the transaction complete. Wilkinson quotes the comment of Jack Anderson in the *Washington Post* (April 28, 1984), who said:

The government argued, somewhat absurdly, that just by its offer of payment it became the owner of Shoshone land—and thus the Danns were trespassers.

This "Godfather" theory of real estate—making an offer that can't be refused—should strike fear in the heart of every homeowner in the country. You like that big house on the hill? Offer to buy it—at any price you choose—and it's yours, according to the government's reasoning.

As Wilkinson says:

The situation is desperate. How can an impoverished people hope to survive the financial burden of a sustained legal onslaught spanning not just decades, but generations?

He does, however, see "two rays of hope":

Although the Supreme Court decided in 1985 that the Shoshones were legally "paid" for their land in 1979 (despite the fact no Shoshone has ever received any money), the Court did not decide who actually owns the land and sent the case back to the lower court for further proceedings. There, the government contended that Shoshone title was extinguished in 1979 by the phony "payment," and sought an immediate order to eject the Shoshones. On July 31, 1986, the lower court refused the government's demand to order the Dann family off the land. The National Indian Youth Council was one of the chief litigators in this court case.

We have not won, however. The government, outraged by the Shoshones' successful act of defiance is certain to appeal. The Shoshones themselves must appeal in any event, because the lower court held that the 1979 "payment" extinguished the Shoshone aboriginal title throughout their ancestral homeland

Our second cause for hope is the fact that the Interior Department has in principle agreed to negotiate a legislative solution with the Shoshones. This would amount to a new treaty reconfirming Shoshone land rights which would then be ratified by Congress. The government recently suspended these negotiations preferring instead to try to remove the Indians by court order. However, we believe the new court decision may force renewal of the talks. The Indian Youth Council is on their negotiating team and is providing it legal and other advice in this process.

If we succeed, things will remain much the same in Shoshone country. Except that the Shoshones who have been there for thousands of years will no longer be labeled as trespassers and live with the fear of being suddenly dispossessed and assessed damages.

If we fail, the Shoshones will be forced off their native land forever. They will have to leave the desert, where they are self-sufficient and productive, forever, and they will join the ranks of the dependent, urban poor. There they will face the degradations of welfare, homelessness, and alcoholism. And worse, they will have to stand by and watch as their homeland, which they revere as their Earth Mother, is stripped and excavated to house and test nuclear weapons of war.

Wilkinson wants help in two ways. He wants people to write to the President, appealing for justice to the Shoshone people. And he wants gifts of money to help the Indians to carry on their legal struggle. The address of the National Indian Youth Council is 318 Elm Street S.E., Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102.