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ASPECTS OF THE HUMAN BEING

IT sometimes happens that young women—say, between twenty and thirty—imagine themselves to be in love with a much older man, perhaps because they dislike the impatient aggressions of inconsiderate youth and because of the hope that an older man will be kinder and "safe" to become fond of. These assumptions, of course, may be wrong, and the young woman may be wholly unaware that her attentions to the man may be unstabilizing to him, increasing his male egotism and providing a flattery he by no means deserves. Pain is usually the result of unreasoning or impulsive response to the erotic impulse, although there seems a sense in which it should be regarded as a rather remarkable device of nature to ensure the perpetuation of the species. To be without the hungers of the flesh would be a great deprivation to us as individuals, even though such appetites account for a large proportion of the problems of life. Does Nature, one wonders, have "intentions" in endowing us with these qualities?

The question implies the possibility that nature is more than a vast aggregation of habits—habits both useful and necessary yet also constraints which may stand in the way of intelligent action. Habits, then, you could say, are not there for our government but for our use. The habits, say, on which the human ability to play the piano depends, if made into rulers of the way we play, may become a barrier to inspiration—the wonder of the lyrical line is not felt, it is mechanically executed. This is an aspect of the eternal opposition—and sometimes the exquisite collaboration—between freedom and order. Freedom without order is meaningless chaos, yet freedom subject to rigid constraints is no longer freedom but slavery.

The resolution of this opposition is the art of life. The artist is indeed the resolver of contradiction. You can "test" a child with true-false forms and copy-book rules, but what will you really know about the child, afterward? But a student violinist—you don't ask him academic questions but listen to him play.

There is a parallel to this sort of thinking in Harold Goddard's essay on William Blake (Pendle Hill Pamphlet No. 86). Goddard says:

> Why did Milton, without intending to, make Satan a sublime and magnificent figure, and God in comparison a pale and ineffectual one? Blake's answer is the profoundest comment ever made on *Paradise Lost.* "The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it." . . .
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> Let me take an illustration. Suppose two human beings are bound back to back without ever having seen each other, a knife placed in the hand of each and a word whispered in the ear of each that the other is responsible for his predicament. It is easy to imagine the struggle that will ensue. Whereas the two men, brought freely face to face in the first place, might have embraced and been fast friends Something like this, according to Blake, is what happens in a world ruled by Reason. Reason, he declares, is the Great Divider. Aristotle, who, if anyone, ought to know, defines it in the same way, as the setter of bounds. Now Blake, who almost defied form, is no enemy of bounds, provided they are imposed from within. He hated nothing on earth as he did the blurry, the indefinite, the merely general. "The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this," he says: "That the more distinct, sharp, and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of an art." "Truth has bounds, Error none." "Nature has no Outline, but Imagination has." But the tyranny of bounds imposed from without is an entirely different matter:
>
> A Robin Red breast in a Cage
> Puts all Heaven in a Rage.

Goddard turns to Education.

> Is it the god our time takes it to be, with the power to lift the child's mind from darkness to light, or is it the force that captures the child's mind while it is still plastic and enslaves it? Both, of course. . . . What if we were suddenly flooded with counterfeit coin and nobody could tell the difference but a few

experts? That is the case, Blake would say, in the mental world. And no wonder, for there the coin is the counterfeit. It changes character as it changes pockets. So abstract words do as they pass from lip to lip. Abraham Lincoln was right: there is a wolf's dictionary. Blake understood this.

The Vision of Christ that thou dost see
Is my Vision's Greatest Enemy . . .
Thine is the friend of All Mankind,
Mine speaks in parables to the Blind:
Thine loves the same world that mine hates,
Thy Heaven doors are my Hell Gates . . .
Both read the Bible day and night,
But thou read'st black where I read white.

Another passage is of deep interest:

Now to Blake the deepest and most disastrous of all the abstractions and divisions Reason has effected is the division of Hell from Heaven, and by the Marriage of Heaven and Hell he means the end of. that divorce. If that sounds like nonsense to you, you do not understand what he means by Hell. Not a medieval or puritanical place of torment, but what the old mythologies call the Underworld, and modern psychology calls the unconscious. The two are of course identical. Neurosis is currently defined as the state of being at war with oneself. Actual war is the inevitable product of a world where millions of individuals are at war with themselves. Only he whose life is worse than war will willingly go to war. (Perceive that and you will never again make the mistake of *dividing* the peace question from the social question.) Integrate the conscious and the unconscious, is the modern psychological cry. Marry Heaven and Hell, says Blake, meaning the same thing. If you divide a flower from its root—its underworld—, or if you cut it off from the sun, it will wither and die. What can reunite us with our lost underworld? An overworld? . . . IMAGINATION. That is Blake's answer. . . .

In Milton Satan is a divine criminal who is flung out of Heaven for his pride, establishes a kingdom of evil and tempts Eve, and through her Adam, to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But in the Greek myth, Prometheus is a sort of divine Robin Hood who steals fire from Heaven and at the price of being crucified by Zeus bestows the gift of the gods on suffering humanity. Plainly these are opposite versions of the same story. It is the greatness of Blake that he accepts both and reconciles them. "Heaven, Earth and Hell henceforth shall live in harmony."

How is this to be done?

The man who believes that a man is a man, a tree is a tree, that the sky is blue and grass green, a foot twelve Inches long and a minute sixty seconds, that you can find the essence of things by measuring and weighing them, to whom Hesiod's statement that a half is greater than the whole is nonsense, in short, the hard-headed commonsense man to whom things are what they seem is in a state of single vision, or Newton's sleep, in the prison of his senses or his reason or both.

But escape from this prison, take note, comes not by rejecting the senses but by purifying them, not by rejecting reason but by subjecting it to the imagination.

How do you purify the senses? The first necessity for purifying them is to *want* to—not to dull them or get rid of them but to make them usable as tools. Who has written about this? Several, perhaps, have written about it, but we know only Thoreau. How does one become a Thoreau—develop, that is, his sense of taste, experience his longings, learn contentment with his achievements? We quickly confess we do not know. It is probably a work of ages, yet from him we do learn that it can be done, and that, finally, a human can take joy in it. Reading and absorbing his ideas would be a first step in what Blake called marrying heaven and hell.

Let us go back to the erotic impulse, and consider the habits of nature of which the erotic impulse is one. What accounts for it? It makes sense to say, as we have already said, that this impulse or drive is nature's way of assuring the perpetuation of the species. Even though civilized humans have exercised unusual ingenuity in frustrating nature's purpose, it still works for the great majority: they go on having more and more babies. And what if, in future centuries, those babies and their descendants become the actual population of the world? And the "civilized" races die off from being enemies of nature? Our philosophers and moralists don't say much or anything about this possibility, having as most people do, a foreshortened view of human life.

What can we say about the division of mankind into the sexes? One thing is evident: men and women *need* each other, with very few exceptions.

It is as though males and females are incomplete people without their counterparts in the opposite sex. Once in a while you meet a strong woman or a tender man, but mostly they find balance by uniting in one way or another. Yet, at the same time, one also finds both masculine and feminine qualities in the same human. This comes out most evidently in the arts, where the work that is done, ideally, transcends sex. There are women writers of this sort, and now and then a male with the sensitivity commonly unique to women.

What are we trying to suggest? Well, we are edging toward the idea that the most highly evolved human beings have a balance of male and female qualities—that this is an aspect of human development that the evolutionists, who are mostly biologists, seem to ignore entirely. In the book on the sexes that he wrote with his wife, Theodore Roszak remarked in his essay that the virtues have no sex. In other words, a point is reached in evolution where the sex doesn't matter at all. One could say that good *minds* transcend sex. The best recent evidence of this that we have is the work—the books and articles—of Simone Weil. One does not—can not—know for sure, but she seemed to live and think most excellently, but without the erotic impulse. Yet she had a sure grasp of what she called love.

Are there, then, stages of human development in which the erotic impulse is required and necessary, but other, perhaps higher, stages where it has no function any longer. From this way of looking at things, what can we say about erotic desire? We have wondered about this, eventually reaching the conclusion that from the natural point of view, it takes three to bring about the birth of a baby—the mother, the father, and the incoming ego.

Intuitive writers sense this. As George Sibley put it in *Part of a Winter* (1978), after delivering his wife of a girl baby, alone in a mountain cabin . . . "her face on emerging—and I'd seen it first, before anyone or anything else in *this* world—had been Buddha-like, cowled with history." What if *all* babies are like that, reborn from an ancient past, bringing with them, to parents able to recognize the sublime nature of the event, a visitor from a timeless world into our time-bound existence. The baby had *"a face cowled with history."* Was the erotic impulse the incoming soul's way of knocking for admission? It may be so, if we have respect for the ways of nature, ages older than our current notions about such things. Another passage by Sibley sets the tone for such reflections.

> Unlike Barbara's, the baby's was not a sound against the night. Light and quick, her signs of life were more a barely visible flutter than an audible rhythm. Have you ever watched a butterfly sitting on a leaf, at rest, but its wings still worked on by the subtle convection currents we can't even feel? So lightly did life seem to rest on the baby, less than two hours old. It seemed entirely appropriate to say that she wasn't entirely all there yet; she was nothing more than a rallying point for something still struggling in from the night.

It is exactly as Wordsworth said, many years ago:

> Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
> The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
> Hath had elsewhere its setting,
> And cometh from afar:
> Not in entire forgetfulness,
> And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come. . . .

There are, it seems clear, two minds in us, the mind of the body and the mind of the soul. The mind of the body thinks literally; for this mind, again as Wordsworth put it,

> A primrose by a river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him
> And it was nothing more.

The mind of the soul has no such confinement. It thinks in octaves and hears unplayed harmonies. Giving this mind its natural play, Harold Goddard wrote in his essay on Blake:

> One day a man is standing in front of a fire. He has looked at a fire before and thought it was just something that was red and leaped up and burned you if you touched it But today he notices how it was started by a spark from another fire, how, given fuel, it mounted up, burned hotly began to subside, sank into embers, then into ashes, and to all appearances, was gone; and suddenly he thinks: *My life is like a fire.* He has achieved a simile. But he doesn't stop there. Now he feels a kindling and warmth inside

himself and he cries: *My life is fire.* He has achieved a metaphor. From this it is but a step to the omission of the "is." Life and fire have become synonyms. He can never see one without the other. He has achieved a symbol, a poetic image. With this hint he begins looking around him and realizes, astonished at his former blindness, that as still water gives back the image of his face, so everything around him gives back the image of his life: the path that goes up the hill and then down, the unseen wind that sails his boat, the tree that is two trees, one going down into the earth and the other up into the sky, the brook flowing past, always the same, never the same. "All things transient are but symbols," says Goethe. "I caught two fishes, as it were, on one hook," is Thoreau's homelier way of putting it.

This is the language of the soul. It is often the language of poets and of dreamers. Goddard points out how our two languages are often mixed, and then we have to distinguish among sometimes several meanings.

"The gods first appeared to men in dreams," says Lucretius.

And yet, as Angels in some brighter dreams
Call to the soul, when man cloth sleep:
So some strange thoughts transcend our wonted themes
And into glory peep.

That is Henry Vaughan. These are all great names. To come closer to home, here is the dream of a college student—a girl in one of my classes a few years ago. "I was skimming along over hill and dale, particularly over snowy hilltops, and flying with me were three birds of an unearthly blue. Suddenly I exclaimed to anyone who might be listening, 'Why, we're going East!' One of the birds looked up rather saucily at me, and all at once the birds were cardinals of as bright a red as they had been a bright blue."

Many psychologists would explain that dream as repressed sex. That is all right if you are explaining the flower in terms of the root. (Personally I think a daisy resembles the sun, and a delphinium the blue sky, more than they do their respective roots, which, I daresay, are indistinguishable except to an expert.) But a lovelier and more profound explanation, it seems to me, would be to say that life in this dream is trying to ascend, to evolve human wings. Beautiful images are the wings of the soul. Psyche in art is always a winged girl. . . .

But it doesn't have to be at night. Our moods are merely our dreams by daylight. . . . Whoever has known imaginative love, whoever has created a work of art and felt inspired at the moment he conceived it has an inkling of Blake's state of threefold vision.

He who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sun rise.

Here it is appropriate to recall the content of L.L. Whyte's book, *The Unconscious Before Freud* (1960), for evidence of other ways of interpreting dreams, richer and more consistent with the higher longings of human beings. Then, the reader might turn to *Ego and Instinct* by Yankelovich and Barrett for realizing that, as these writers say, for Freud the "pleasure principle" remained throughout his life "the regulating principle of the id, . . . the fundamental law of psychic life." They then repeat an interchange between Freud and Ludwig Binswanger. Freud admitted to Binswanger that he recognized the "spiritual" (*geistige*) as a reality.

"Man has always known that he has a spirit," he remarked to the younger psychiatrist, "it has been for me to show him that he is instinctual." Confronting the contemporary situation, we are hardly likely to agree with him that man today knows he has spirit.

Freud made a similar admission in a letter to Binswanger:

I've always lived only in the *parterre* (pit) and basement of the building. You claim that with a change of viewpoint one is able to see an upper storey which houses such distinguished guests as religion, art, etc. . . . If I had another lifetime of work before me, I have no doubt that I could find room for these noble guests in my little subterranean house.

It is a pity he did not say more along these lines, for very nearly the whole world has been converted by him to an animal view of man. Today, however, that heavy pall of belief is slowly passing, with attention being given to the other aspects of the human being. The evidence of their reality is ample and ready for inspection by those who have decided to look around.

REVIEW
A LIVING MIND

LAFCADIO HEARN was not always a man easy to get along with. If you were an editor, and dared to move one of his commas around, you became a rascal and a blackguard. If the editor persisted, Hearn would simply break his contract with the publisher, refusing to complete a series half of which had already been published. Very likely, this would mean he would go hungry for a while, for when the checks stopped he had no other money for food. But when his word-order or punctuation was tampered with, Hearn did not think about food but of the integrity of his prose. Yet when you become absorbed in what he wrote, come to recognize his preternatural power of words, you understand what others may regard as excessive fussiness. He was a writer, and what he wrote was the blood of his life.

He was an idealist and a visionary, too. The thing to do is to get one of his books and soak in it for a while—not just read it but let it flow through your being. In 1899, when Hearn was lecturer on English literature at the imperial University in Tokyo, Little, Brown published his *Exotics and Retrospectives,* a volume of brief essays on a variety of subjects. In it a recollection (seven pages) of being awakened at night by the music of what he calls a "Serenade" tells what he heard. Here is one brief passage:

> The flutes had dove-tones; they cooed and moaned and purled;—and the mandolines throbbed through the liquid plaint of them, like a beating of hearts. The players I could not see: they were standing in heavy shadows flung into the street by a tropical moon,—shadows of plantain and of tamarind.

The music generates this prose:

> Flutes and mandolines—a Spanish melody—nothing more. Yet it seemed as if the night itself were speaking, or, out of the night some passional life long since melted into Nature's mystery, but continuing to haunt the tepid, odorous, sparkling darkness of that strange world, which sleeps under the sun, and wakens only to the stars. And its utterance was the ghostly reiteration of rapture that has been, and never again could be,—an utterance of infinite tenderness and of immeasurable regret.
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> Never before had I felt how the simplest of music could express what no other art is able even to suggest;—never before had I known the astonishing possibilities of melody without ornament, without artifice,—yet with a charm as bewildering, as inapprehensible, as the Greek perception of the grace supreme.
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> Now nothing in perfect art can be only voluptuous; and this music, in despite of its caress, was immeasurably, ineffably sad. And the exquisite blending of melancholy with passion in a motive so simple,—one low long cooling motive, over and over again repeated, like a dove's cry—had a strangeness of beauty like the musical thought of a vanished time,—one rare survival, out of an era more warmly human than our own, of some lost art of melody.

Hearn's life is briefly sketched by Kenneth Rexroth in the book he edited, *The Buddhist Writings of Lafcadio Hearn* (1977, Ross-Erikson Publishers, Santa Barbara). He was born in 1850 on the Ionian island of Santa Maura and died in Okubo, Japan, in 1904. His mother was a beautiful Greek woman, his father an Irish surgeon major stationed in the British navy in Greece. At two he went to Ireland, after which his father and mother separated, she returning to Greece, he marrying again and going to India. Hearn never saw either of them again. Hearn was brought up by bigoted relatives, sent to school in France, where he learned French, and then to a boarding school in England where he lost an eye in an accident on the playing field. At seventeen he was withdrawn from school, the money for his education running out, and his uncle gave him passage money to America. Hearn now had "to make his own way in the world."

He went to Cincinnati, where he struggled to survive for a year, sometimes going hungry, until he finally got a reporter's job. His gory stories of sensational crimes and murders became popular, but Hearn was fired because of the story that he was living with a mulatto woman. He was, but they were married, which then counted for

nothing because mixed marriages were not recognized by Ohio law. But even another job on another Cincinnati newspaper could not keep him in Ohio and in 1877 he migrated to New Orleans. There he alternated between literary reporting and hunger, yet his writing made him semi-famous in the South. "He translated and adapted French stories, principally Gautier, Maupassant, Flaubert, and Loti (none of whom yet had a reputation in America); he wrote original stories in the lavish prose style he was perfecting at the time; and he collected local legends and factual narratives." His reputation grew and *Harper's* hired him to do travel pieces. His books of that time included *Stray Leaves from Strange Literatures* (1884), *Some Chinese Ghosts* (1887) and a novel, *Chita* (1889). Then, in 1890, he went to Japan for *Harper's*. There he became a school teacher in a region little affected by Western civilization. He married a Japanese woman, Koizume Setsuko, later taught in a government college, and finally became professor of literature at Tokyo Imperial University. His years in Japan were the happiest time of his life. "At the turn of the century," Rexroth says, "Hearn was considered one of the finest, if not the finest, of American prose stylists."

In another short essay in *Exotics and Retrospectives*, "Of Moon-Desire," Hearn tells of a small child who asked for the Moon. He tried to explain why he could not reach up and get the Moon for the child, but the babe was insistent: " By standing on the roof of the house, you probably could poke it with the bamboo." Hearn was moved to muse how very natural it was for children to want the moon.

> Have we any right to laugh at the child's wish for the Moon? No wish could be more natural. . . . Now, foolish as it may seem, to merely empirical reasoning, the wish of the child for the Moon, I have an idea that the highest wisdom commands us to wish for very much more than the Moon—even for more than the Sun and the Morning Star and all the Host of Heaven.
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> I remember when a boy lying on my back in the grass, gazing into the summer blue above me, and wishing that I could melt into it,—become part of it. For these fancies I believe that a religious tutor was innocently responsible: he had tried to explain to me, because of certain dreamy questions, what he termed "the folly and the wickedness of pantheism,"—with the result that I immediately became a pantheist, at the tender age of fifteen. And my imaginings presently led me not only to want the sky as a playground, but also to become the sky!
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> Now I think that in those days I was really close to a great truth,—touching it, in fact, without the faintest suspicion of its existence. I mean the truth that the wish to *become* is reasonable in direct ratio to its largeness,—or, in other words, that the more you wish to be, the wiser you are; while the wish to *have is* apt to be foolish in proportion to its largeness. Cosmic law permits us very few of the countless things that we wish to have, but will help us to become all that we can possibly wish to be. Finite, and in so much feeble, is the wish to have: but infinite in puissance is the wish to become; and every mortal wish to become must eventually find satisfaction. By wanting to be, the monad makes itself the elephant, the eagle, or the man. By wanting to be, the man should become a god.

On the wings of poetic ecstasy Hearn carries this idea to its conclusion:

> Nay!—surely the time must come when we shall desire to be all that is, all that has ever been known,—the past and the present and the future in one,—all feeling, striving, thinking, joying, sorrowing,—and everywhere the Part,—and everywhere the Whole. And before us, with the waxing of the wish, perpetually the Infinities shall widen.

In another of Hearn's volumes, *Gleanings in Buddha Fields,* published by Harper in 1898, there is an exquisite fantasy of the memory of past lives or incarnations, called "Within the Circle." He begins by saying:

> Neither personal pain nor personal pleasure can be really expressed in words. It is never possible to communicate them in their original form. It is only possible, by vivid portrayal of the circumstances or conditions causing them, to awaken in sympathetic minds some kindred qualities of feeling. But if the circumstances causing the pain or the pleasure be totally foreign to common human experience, then no representation of them can make fully known the sensations which they evoked. Hopeless, therefore, any attempt to tell the real pain of seeing my former

> births. I can say only that no combination of suffering possible to individual being could be likened to such pain,—the pain of countless lives interwoven. It seemed as if every nerve of me had been prolonged into some monstrous web of sentiency spun back through a million years,—and as if the whole of that measureless woof and warp, over all its shivering threads, were pouring into my consciousness, out of the abysmal past, some ghastliness with name,—some horror too vast for human brain to hold.

Then relief came to him—a withdrawal from the past: "Oh! how unspeakably delicious that sudden shrinking back of multiplicity into unity! that immense, immeasurable collapse of Self into the blind oblivious numbness of individuality!" The voice of the one who had saved him said:

> Power to see all former births belongs only to those eternally released from the bonds of Self. Such exist outside of illusion,—outside of form and name; and pain cannot come nigh them.
>
> But to you, remaining in illusion, not even the Buddha could give power to look back more than a little way.
>
> Still you are bewitched by the follies of art and of poetry and of music,—the delusions of color and form,—the delusions of sensuous speech, the delusions of sensuous sound,

It is in this way that Hearn conveys the teachings of the Buddha to his readers. Was Hearn a Buddhist? The answer must be both yes and no. He belonged to no sect, subscribed to no creed, yet studied and absorbed the great ideas that have come down to us from the Buddha. He accepted the transforming effect of these ideas and they became a part of his life.

COMMENTARY
A CASUAL COMPARISON

IT is hard to imagine why a "religious tutor" should have felt obliged to condemn pantheism as folly and wickedness, as Hearn tells us in the quotation in this week's review. Yet for the boy of fifteen, this led him to at once decide to be a pantheist, on grounds of a determined independence and an intuitive feeling of his own.

And this feeling also led him, as he explains, to make a crucial distinction between "having" and "being." The wish to *have,* he says, "is apt to be foolish in proportion to its largeness," while "the more you wish to be, the wiser you are." And he adds, "By wanting to be, the man should become a god."

What, indeed, is "a god"?

We could say that a god is a being who has entered consciously upon an infinite process of *becoming.* This begins by expanding our capacity to understand the universe. There is no other form of intelligence that we know of that has this power—to understand the world we live in, all its parts. We are indeed a part of the world, a unit among countless other units which together make up the world, yet this power to understand the world—as well as to misunderstand it but to make corrections of our mistakes—is surely unique. It is a power which puts human beings in a class by themselves, capable of becoming either gods or devils. In other words, becoming a god involves *choosing* to become a god. And this capacity of choice between good and evil, we are then obliged to say, is what makes us what we are—sometimes truly half-gods and sometimes half-monsters.

Camus revealed his essential grasp of human nature when, speaking of the Americans, he wrote:

> Everything happens in the store. . . . Returning, I walk down Broadway, lost in the crowd and the enormous illuminated billboards. Yes, there is an American tragedy. It's what has been oppressing me since I arrived here, but I still don't know what it's made from. . . . In the bus a middle-class American sitting opposite me gets up to give his seat to an old Negro lady.

A casual comparison, perhaps, yet revealing.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

HOLT'S DIATRIBE

TODAY is a day, like some other Mondays or Tuesdays, when we don't start out with a bright idea of what to write about, so as usual, we go to the shelf where books about working with children are and pick one we remember as being good. Happily, there are a number of such books, although some are better than others. Again, often as usual, we end up selecting a book by John Holt. Why Holt? This question will have been answered by the end.

We picked out Holt's *How Children Fail*, his first book, published back in 1964, and perhaps the best, although all his books are good. It is a book we've read several times, and will go on reading as long as MANAS is published with a page on "Children . . . and Ourselves." You can't wear out Holt or use him up. Today we skipped around, turning the pages of our Delta paperback edition, and wound up reading carefully the last section, "To Summarize." Then we asked ourselves, "Why is he so good?"

The answer came through: Because, while he isn't writing about children right here—he is of course; he *always* writes about children—but about grownups, about ourselves. And more than anything else, he is saying that we are not honest with children, or with ourselves. The man has candor, and he joins candor with insight; the result is wisdom. More than that, he has found out how to make wisdom more or less acceptable, which even Socrates found difficult to do. Long before he died Holt gave up on trying to reform the schools. It is too difficult and not worth the effort. There is little chance that he or anyone else can reform parents and teachers, but it is at least possible, or not impossible, so he concentrated on that. And in spite of his dark reports he exuded optimism. He was that kind of man.

In this summary he begins by pointing out that there are bright children and dull children—a fact of life. No one can help this or change it, but he maintains that *something* can be done, that *all* children can make progress. The bright child can only be slowed down by adults, not stopped. He will find a way to get where he wants to go. But the dull child can be very nearly ruined by adults. Here is what Holt says:

> Nobody starts off being stupid. You have only to watch babies and infants, and think seriously about what all of them learn and do, to see that, except for the most grossly retarded, they show a style of life, and a desire and ability to learn that in an older person we might well call genius. Hardly an adult in a thousand, or ten thousand, could in any three years of his life learn as much, grow as much in his understanding of the world around him, as every infant learns and grows in his first three years. But what happens, as we get older, to this extraordinary capacity for learning and intellectual growth?
>
> What happens is that it is destroyed, and more than by any other one thing, by the process that we misname education—a process that goes on in most homes and schools. We adults destroy most of the intellectual and creative capacity of children by the things we do to them or make them do. We destroy this capacity above all by making them afraid, afraid of not doing what other people want, of not pleasing, of making mistakes, of failing, of being *wrong.* Thus we make them afraid to gamble, afraid to experiment, afraid to try the difficult and the unknown. Even when we do not create children's fears, when they come to us with fears readymade and built-in, we use these fears as handles to manipulate them and get them to do what we want. Instead of trying to whittle down their fears, we build them up, often to monstrous size. For we like children who are a little afraid of us, docile, deferential children, though not of course, if they are so obviously afraid that they threaten our image of ourselves as kind, lovable people whom there is no reason to fear. We find ideal the kind of "good" children who are just enough afraid of us to do everything we want, without making us feel that fear of us is what is making them do it.

The trouble, in short, is not with the children, it is with us. Only extraordinary parents don't do what Holt says here. A tough-minded child who wants to learn what he has to learn in his own way will almost certainly irritate the parent who thinks that there is a right way and a wrong way of doing

things. But that is not really at stake. What is at stake is the *independent spirit* of the child. A high aim of all education should be to preserve this spirit, even though it may seem ridiculous to us. Holt goes on:

> We destroy the disinterested (I do *not* mean *un*interested) love of learning in children, which is so strong when they are small, by encouraging and compelling them to work for petty and contemptible rewards—gold stars, or papers marked 100 and tacked to the wall, or *A's* on report cards, or honor rolls, or dean's lists, or Phi Beta Kappa keys—in short, for the ignoble satisfaction of feeling that they are better than someone else. We encourage them to feel that the end and aim of all they do in school is nothing more than to get a good mark on a test, or to impress someone with what they know. We kill, not only their curiosity, but their feeling that it is a good and admirable thing to be curious, so that by the age of ten most of them will not ask questions, and will show a good deal of scorn for the few who do.

You can't change human nature, people say, but Holt, for good and sufficient reason, was determined to try. For after all, the offenses he has been describing are exactly that—human nature—and he is pointing out what they do to the young. He has other complaints to unload:

> We encourage children to act stupidly, not only by scaring and confusing them, but by boring them, by filling up their days with dull, repetitive tasks that make little or no claim on their attention or demands on their intelligence. Our hearts leap for joy at the sight of a room full of children all slogging away at some imposed task, and we are all the more pleased and satisfied if someone tells us that the children don't really like what they are doing. We tell ourselves that this drudgery, this endless busywork, is good preparation for life and we fear that without it children would be hard to ' control." But why must this busywork be so dull? Because, in schools where every task must be completed and every answer must be right, if we give children more demanding tasks they will be fearful and will instantly insist that we show them how to do the job. When you have acres of paper to fill up with pencil marks, you have no time to waste on the luxury of thinking. By such means children are firmly established in the habit of using only a small part of their thinking capacity.

If you think about what Holt says you realize there is no need to wonder about the problems of the world. The explanation is right here in what is wrong with the schools and with most parents. The parents, however, are in a better case than the schools because they are not forcibly institutionalized and some of them may have real maturity. With them is the hope of the future and of the world. Meanwhile, do read Holt's books, especially this one. No one will need urging about the others, once the first is read.

Three more paragraphs from his summary:

> School tends to be a dishonest as well as a nervous place. We adults are not often honest with children, least of all in school. We tell them, not what we think, but what we feel they ought to think; or what other people feel or tell us they ought to think. Pressure groups find it easy to weed out of our classrooms, texts, and libraries whatever facts, truths, and ideas they happen to find unpleasant or inconvenient. And we are not even as truthful with children as we could safely be, as the parents, politicians, and pressure groups would let us be. Even in the most non-controversial areas our teaching, the books and the textbooks we give our children present a dishonest and distorted picture of the world.
>
> The fact is that we do not feel an obligation to be truthful to children. We are like the managers and manipulators of news in Washington, Moscow, London, Peking, and Paris, and all the other capitals of the world. We think it is our right and our duty, not to tell the truth, but to say whatever will best serve our cause—in this case, the cause of making children grow up into the kind of people we want them to be, thinking whatever we want them to think. We have only to convince ourselves (and we are very easily convinced) that a lie will be "better" for the children than the truth, and we will lie. We don't always need even that excuse; we often lie only for our own convenience.
>
> Worse yet, we are not honest about ourselves, our own fears, limitations, weaknesses, prejudices, motives. We present ourselves to children as if we were gods, all-knowing, all-powerful, always rational, always just, always right. This is worse than any lie we could tell about ourselves.

The most encouraging thing about Holt's books is that they sell. To buy one or more of them, write to Holt Associates, 729 Boyleston St., Boston, Mass. 02116.

FRONTIERS

A Parisian in America

WHILE publication of Albert Camus' *American Journals* may not be an authentic Frontiers event, lovers of Camus' prose will want to read this book for the portraiture of his everyday life—the account of what he was like at unimportant moments. The book has about 150 pages dealing with his travels in the United States, and a much longer description of a lecture tour of South America. The publisher is Paragon House and the price is $15.95.

One feels, reading these pages, that there *is* a natural poetry in everything Camus thought and wrote. Even his casual thoughts have this quality. On board the ship coming to America, he writes:

> In the evening after dinner, since we are going to sail near the Azores, I go onto the deck and, in a corner sheltered from the strong wind which has been blowing since our departure, I revel in a pure night, with rare but enormous stars which pass quickly in a straight line above the ship. A slender moon gives the sky a light without brilliance which lights up the turbulent water with its reflection. Once again I look, as I have for years, at the designs that the foam and the wake make on the surface of the water, this lace which is incessantly made and unmade, this liquid marble . . . and once more I look for the exact comparison that will hold for me this marvelous flowering of sea, water, and light that has escaped me for so long now. Still in vain. For me it is a recurring symbol.

In New York he is afflicted by fever and a cold. Yet he gets about the city.

> At the corner of East 1st, a little bar where a loud juke box smothers all conversations. To have five minutes of silence, you have to put in five cents. . . .
>
> A little better this morning. Visit from Liebling, of the *New Yorker*. Charming man. Chiaromonte then Rube. The latter two and I have lunch in a French restaurant. In my opinion, Ch. talks about America like nobody else. I point out to him the "funeral homes." He tells me how they function. One way to know a country is to know how people die there. Here, everything is anticipated. "You die and we do the rest," say the advertisements. The cemeteries are private property: "Hurry up and reserve your place." Everything happens in the store. . . . Returning, I walk down Broadway, lost in the crowd and the enormous illuminated billboards Yes, there is an American tragedy. It's what has been oppressing me since I arrived here, but I still don't know what it's made from. . . . In the bus a middle-class American sitting opposite me gets up to give his seat to an old Negro lady. . . .
>
> The day spent dictating my lecture. In the evening a little stage fright, but I throw myself into it right away and the public is "hooked." But while I'm speaking someone lifts the box office receipts which were supposed to be given to French children. At the end O'Brien [Justin O'Brien Camus' translator] announces the theft, and a spectator proposes that everyone give the same sum at the exit that he originally gave when entering. Everyone gives much more and the receipts are considerable. Typical of American generosity. Their hospitality, their cordiality are like that too, spontaneous and without affectation. It's what's best in them.

Camus was at the height of his fame when writing this in 1946. Yet, born in 1913, he was still a comparatively young man. Toward the end of his visit he wrote:

> Sad to still feel so vulnerable. In 25 years I'll be 57. 25 years then to create a body of work and to find out what I'm looking for. After that old age and death. I know what is the most important for me. And I still find a way to give in to little temptations, wasting time on frivolous conversations or fruitless idling about. I've mastered two or three things in myself. But how far I am from the kind of superiority that I so badly need.

This is not a book to read all by itself, which is why it takes so long to make some kind of review of it. You keep going to his works—reading again *The Just Assassins*, for one thing, then turning to *The Myth of Sisyphus*, which is only four pages, but what pages! Who else has written with such understanding of the human situation? It calls for wondering and brooding, in order, finally, to accept the heroism of Sisyphus. The last paragraph:

> I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain. One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus

teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain in itself forms? world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.

Leaving America, Camus wrote:

> Marvelous night on the Atlantic. This hour when the sun has disappeared and the moon has just barely been born, when the west is still luminous and the east is already dark. Yes, I've loved the sea very much—this calm immensity—these wakes folded under wakes—these liquid routes. For the first time a horizon that measures up to the breadth of a man, a space as large as his audacity. I've always been torn between my appetite for people, the vanity and the agitation, and the desire to make myself the equal of these seas of forgetfulness, these unlimited silences that are like the enchantment of death. I have a taste for worldly vanities, my fellows, for faces, but, out of step with this century, I have an example in myself which is the sea and anything in this world which resembles it. O sweetness of nights where all the stars sway and slide above the masts and this silence in myself, this silence which finally frees me from everything.

Some notes by Roger Quilliot, "a long-time editor of Camus," will make a fitting conclusion. He says in his introduction:

> The amazing thing is that Camus tells us nothing about his visits to the American universities, which should have been astonishing to a French traveller, nor about the most prestigious of them, Harvard, which nonetheless recorded his passage in its monthly bulletin. His notes suggest a kind of bewilderment, both admiring and reproachful, face to face with this New World, limitless both in its skyscrapers and its expanses; and a vague anxiety about the unconscious expansionism implied by such colossal power.

In South America, where he experienced the onset of a sickness, he had to endure "the uneven quality of his hosts and how he is received—everything is set up to irritate a man who detests fashionable gatherings, but who knows that having undertaken this trip, he must also accept these annoyances."