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THOREAU'S INSTRUCTIONS

HENRY DAVID THOREAU is a hard man to follow. Everyone who has read him and about him knows this. Since he did not marry, he had no heavy obligations. Since he had no earthly ambitions, he was driven by no external objectives. He seemed to have none of the qualities which most men and women try to embody for practical purposes and it is puzzling, today, that he is read more and more by people who are living an almost opposite sort of life. Perhaps it is because they feel a great vacancy in their existence, an emptiness which was no part of Thoreau's life. Even while the reader, comparing the simplicities of Thoreau's time with the complicated horrors of the present, shrugs away this melancholy nostalgia, relieving himself of the obligation to find parallels, he wonders if they might be there, and keeps on reading him.

The most recent essay on Thoreau we have come across is by Jim Ralston in the November Sun (published at 412 West Rosemary Street, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514). At the beginning, Ralston says:

> More than any other commonplace notion, Thoreau attacked (largely through satire) his fellows' commonplace notions about work. "Economy" is the first and largest chapter of Walden, and Thoreau gives the subject such primary consideration because he saw work consuming people's lives before they had much of a chance to live, before they had enough time to reflect on the relationship of work to life for themselves. To Thoreau, the problem of finding one's right work and integrating it into other proper demands on one's life was a challenge that needed to be tackled early and with great energy if young adults weren't going to step blindly into traps that were indeed much easier to step into than to get out of.

How did Thoreau meet the "challenge" of finding his work? He took up work that would leave him as much freedom as possible. All his life he worked at the business his father had begun—the making of lead pencils—but only for brief intervals at a time. He became a surveyor. He taught school. He tutored. He worked for Emerson as a handyman. He lectured. He wrote articles and books, which brought him little income. And he became, in the forty-five years of his life, one of those who, as a biographer put it, are "on every list of that small handful of American writers considered to be the greatest." As to his activity as a manufacturer, in 1859, three years before he died of tuberculosis, he said, "I feel and think rather too much like a business man, having some very irksome affairs to attend to these months and years on account of my family." His father died in that year. Yet earlier Thoreau had found out how to improve the quality of the graphite that was used in pencils and the business was a going concern.

This attitude gets attention by Jim Ralston in his *Sun* essay:

> His observation throughout *Walden* is that we "need" too much, that our lives are cluttered and hopelessly complicated "frittered away by details." It is to provide ourselves with all of our so-called needs that we become work-slaves, and his suggestion was to need less, to question each and every thing we call a need, and to ask ourselves honestly: is it a need or a superfluity? Are the things that we obtain in life, that we consume, really worth the price we pay for them? Thoreau equates the cost of a thing with the amount of time it takes to afford it. And he perceives that most of what we work for is not worth the effort, is not necessary and is finally an encumbrance that destroys our freedom in two ways: both in working to obtain it and then having it, protecting it, maintaining it.
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> Most of us, for example, assume without much reflection that the good life will include a "decent" house to live in. We want to own something at least as comfortable, if not as fancy, as our neighbors have, something finer than our fathers and mothers had. We call that progress, and we "progress" so far that we altogether forget that houses were originally shelters from the extremes of weather. Thoreau loves to think our present "needs" back to their origins, and to remind us again and again that they are not so much needs as we think they are, but mostly

> superfluities. And more, to remind us how much they really cost. As for these things we call our homes, around which many of us perhaps live too much of our lives, sheltered not only from the weather but from existence itself, Thoreau says they cost us altogether too much, much more than they are worth.

We know that today, of course, since rare indeed is the young couple who can afford to buy or even build a house to start out with. And renting is in some ways worse, since who can save for the future while paying out so much every month. The situation is more or less as Jim Ralston says:

> Translate his premise into modern day finances. If we buy an average house today, and earn an average wage with which to pay for it, it will cost us ten, perhaps fifteen or twenty years of our work lives, and that's if we buy nothing else in the meantime, not even food. Thoreau says this cost is too high; it usurps too much of our time that might be used for other things. He feels that life is too precious to spend that much of it for a place to hang our hats or to get out of the rain. We need to step back from this thoughtless, mechanical behavior and think it through for ourselves: what are we really buying, and what are we really selling of ourselves to pay for it? We need to ask ourselves before we get too deeply into debt, too committed in one direction, too overextended, how is one's life well lived? How is one's time in the flesh well spent? Surely, Thoreau thinks, not devoted to shelter. That is too low. We have more important things to build.
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> He talks about other so-called necessities in the same spirit. How much do we give up for them; how much do they really cost us? In the end, do we not perhaps waste our souls putting bread on the table and clothes on our backs. Isn't it possible to think through these problems in living (in providing ourselves a living) with a little more clarity about what is good for us, and for mankind, and finally for the planet itself, which now lives on the brink of catastrophe as we go on eating our beefsteak and building our houses?

Since almost any kind of a house costs too much these days, Thoreauvian simplicity—Thoreau built his little house on Emerson's land beside Walden Pond for $28.12½—has little attraction. A thousand times his out-of-pocket cost would not be enough for the simplest type of dwelling.

Fortunately, there are other ways in which to practice simplicity, which some begin by learning to repair their own automobiles or, if they are lucky, by riding a bicycle. But most people need faster transport of some sort simply to get to their jobs. "What," Ralston asks, "does it mean in our times to need less?"

> In a society where the standard of living is measured strictly by possessions and purchasing power (as opposed to other values—say, beauty, wisdom, spaciousness, harmony), what is the chance that any other than the rare, inwardly secure individual will ever see his or her way to Thoreau's principles? The reason Thoreau won't appeal to many is that his philosophy is based on the common sense of keeping one's life loose and simple—unencumbered by excessive institutional affiliation, social roles and material things. And most people can't live by common sense because they have too much personal insecurity always nagging at them. The problems are manifold. . . .
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> Thoreau says in "Economy," when a person "has obtained those things which are necessary to life (food, clothing, shelter, fuel), there is another alternative to obtaining the superfluities; and that is to adventure on life now, his vacation from humbler toil having commenced." But what Thoreau's observation overlooks is that our pursuit of more of the same is not for more of the same, materially speaking, but for more evidence that we are somebody, that we are significant. Inside we do not feel it, or we do not feel enough of it, so we make the age-old mistake of building our lives from the outside-in, laying up treasures in the form of material riches or abstract status that material riches provide us, until we become as they are—superficial—and we lose all apprehension of our naked souls, and they shrivel up for lack of attention, for lack of exercise. . .
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> While our jobs provide us with a role and money to maintain our superficial identity, perhaps more important, they also provide us with a rhythm of busyness which keeps the lid on things; and all neatly camouflaged as responsibility, breadwirining, sacrificing ourselves for our children, good citizenship. Pad the routine with a lot of other distractions—television, sports, games, drugs, movies, nightclubs—and we are covered. We don't have to see what we are doing to ourselves, nor what we are not doing, until we lose our jobs through unemployment or retirement.

What seems wholly evident today is that in Thoreau's time it was quite possible for an individual to choose, as he did, to live a life according to his own taste and inclination. Nearly everyone was then close enough to the land to adapt himself simply to its requirements and to let all the other things go. But in the present there are strong institutional barriers which stand between us and simplicity. The water we drink, for example, is not dipped from a river or drawn up out of a well, but supplied to us by a government agency which brings it to our home in pipes, with faucets which we turn on and off. Or if we live in a canyon with no public water supply, but have a well, getting the water out of the well requires an electrically driven pump since the water table is usually pretty deep down. What do you do if some catastrophe shuts off the power? You do without water until the juice is turned on again. You can't pump it yourself or let down a bucket because the casing of the well is only four inches wide. Unless you live in the country you can't grow your own food. And if the power goes off, how long will the stores be able to supply you with kerosene, if everyone fortunate enough to have oil lamps and stoves keep on buying it?

Similar problems would apply to motor vehicles, and to the trucks which deliver food to the stores. Obviously, what we call independence does not exist in any real sense at all. Even planning for it years ahead would be a project that would take most of one's time. Simplicity, then, for us will need to be redefined. But who will do the redefining? If we had a bioregional government, the problem, at the managerial level, might prove comparatively simple. So, for individuals, becoming bioregionalists might be a sensible thing to do. There is a sense indeed in which Thoreau was a bioregionalist without anyone else campaigning to make him one. He was a friend to all living things, and this, too, is a part of the bioregionalists' credo. Making one's watershed one's native country, the sphere of one's immediate government, is another article of faith for bioregionalists.

Peter Berg asked recently:

> Is it self-defeating to avoid established governments other than immediately local ones? Not if we want to anticipate a society whose direction already lies outside those institutions. We need to uncover and follow a natural design that lies beneath industrial asphalt.

Jim Ralston's conclusion is worth repeating:

> I think Thoreau's idea to need less is ultimately the right solution, but that the audience, largely speaking, is still as unreceptive to it as ever. Certainly we have now come to a pass where the whole issue of work and consumerism needs to be re-examined, though the unimaginative politicians and union leaders are still shouting the usual nonsense of back-to-the-good-old-days of full employment. The economic experts mostly agree that the good old days are gone forever, that high unemployment is here to stay, and with it, considerably reduced spending power and considerably expanded free time. It looks like, whether we like it or not, ready or not, we are going to have to live with considerably less fluff than we've grown accustomed to.
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> But need this be a curse? More time, fewer things. Isn't there a little bit in each of us that would welcome such a change? Could we not view this inevitably as an opportunity to take Thoreau (and other prophets—Christ, for example) seriously? For somebody will have to lead us through this transition if we are not simply to destroy ourselves and the world with us.

We reached for a book in our library to look up for quotation something that Thoreau said about the true man of science and then, turning the pages, rediscovered that Emerson contributed a biographical essay on Thoreau which is a delight to read. (The book is called *Excursions* and was copyrighted in 1863, a year after Thoreau's death.) So we quote from Emerson's beginning first:

> Henry David Thoreau was the last male descendant of a French ancestor who came to this country from the Isle of Guernsey. His character exhibited occasional traits drawn from this blood in singular combination with a very strong Saxon genius.
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> He was born in Concord, Massachusetts, on the 12th of July, 1817. He was graduated at Harvard College in 1837 but without any literary distinction. An iconoclast in literature, he seldom thanked colleges for their service to him, holding them in small esteem, whilst yet his debt to them was important. After leaving the University, he joined his brother in teaching a private school, which he soon

> renounced. His father was a manufacturer of lead-pencils and Henry applied himself for a time to this craft, believing he could make a better pencil than was then in use. After completing his experiments, he exhibited his work to chemists and artists in Boston, and having obtained their certificates to its excellence and to its equality to the best London manufacture, he returned home contented. His friends congratulated him that he had now opened his way to fortune. But he replied, that he should never make another pencil. "Why should I? I would not do again what I have done once." He resumed his endless walks and miscellaneous studies, making every day some new acquaintance with Nature, though as yet never speaking of zoology or botany, since, though very studious of natural facts, he was incurious of technical and textual science.

We were led to this book by reason of a passage which comes at the end of a long study titled "Natural History of Massachusetts," which he was commissioned to write by order of the Legislature of Massachusetts in 1842, when Thoreau was twenty-five. The passage we had in mind is this:

> Wisdom does not inspect, but behold. We must look a long time before we can see. Slow are the beginnings of philosophy. He has something demoniacal in him, who can discern a law or couple two facts. We can imagine a time when,—"Water runs down hill" may have been taught in the schools. The true man of science will know nature better by his finer organization; he will smell, taste, see, hear, feel, better than other men. His will be a deeper and finer experience. We do not learn by inference and deduction, and the application of mathematics to philosophy, but by direct intercourse and sympathy. It is with science as with ethics,—we cannot know truth by contrivance and method; the Baconian is as false as any other, and with all the helps of machinery and the arts, the most scientific will still be the healthiest and friendliest man, and possess a more perfect Indian wisdom.

We do not know what the Massachusetts Legislature thought of a report on the state's natural history which had such an ending, although the rich content of the report probably made them content. The book in which it appears has material—essays—spanning his life, the later contributions being written in 1862, the year of his death. In it occurs an often quoted sentence (in the essay "Walking") which reads, "The West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wildness is the preservation of the world." A little later he says:

> Ben Johnson exclaims,—
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> "How near to good is what is fair!
>
> So I would say,—
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> How near to good is what is *wild!*
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> Life consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest. Not yet subdued to man, its presence refreshes him. One who pressed forward incessantly and never rested from his labors who grew fast and made infinite demands on life, would always find himself in a new country or wilderness, and surrounded by raw materials of life. He would be climbing over the prostrate stems of primitive forest-trees.

There is indeed no substitute for reading Thoreau. He should not have interpreters, since it is important to fall in love with him. What is it to love Thoreau? One of his friends, Emerson tells us, said, "I love Henry, but I cannot like him; and as for taking his arm, I should as soon think of taking the arm of an elm-tree." Such a man could hardly be popular. Emerson says:

> No college ever offered him a diploma, or a professor's chair, no academy made him its corresponding secretary, its discoverer, or even its member. Whether these learned bodies feared the satire of his presence. Yet so much knowledge of Nature's secret and genius few others possessed, none in a more large and religious synthesis. For not a particle of respect had he to the opinions of any man or body of men but homage solely to the truth itself; and as he discovered everywhere among doctors some leaning of courtesy, it discredited them. He grew to be revered and admired by his townsmen, who had at first known him only as an oddity. The farmers who employed him as a surveyor soon discovered his rare accuracy and skill, his knowledge of their lands of trees, of birds, of Indian remains, and the like, which enabled him to tell every farmer more than he knew before of his own farm, so that he began to feel as if Mr. Thoreau had better rights in his land than he. They felt, too, the superiority of character which addressed all men with a native authority. . . . His soul was made for the noblest society; he had in a short life exhausted the capabilities of this world; wherever there is knowledge, wherever there is virtue, wherever there is beauty, he will find a home.

REVIEW
ART OF SOCIAL CHANGE

WE have for attention a book, *Through Our Own Eyes,* that can hardly be "reviewed" since it is mainly made up of 40 color plates and 100 black and white photographs—mostly illustrations of the work of painters in third-world countries who are unknown, men and women who have experienced the pain of the times and who see suffering all around them. They became artists of a sort because they were driven to record what they felt and saw. The book was put together for much the same reasons by an articulate writer, Guy Brett, a former art critic on the *London Times.* He has traveled widely around the world to organize exhibits of the sort of works that are in his book. New Society Publishers of Philadelphia has issued the book. The price in paperback is $14.95.

Represented in it are the patchwork quilts made by the women of Chile, the paintings of artists in Shaba, the copper-producing region of Zaire in Africa, painters who tried to capture the feelings of victims of the atom bombing of Hiroshima, and finally, the decorations of the link and barbwire fence of Greenham Common (in England) where cruise missiles have been installed. Thirty thousand British women came there in response to a call to protest in December, 1982, and many of them remained to camp there and keep the protest continuous.

A Chinese expression is included, but this is in approval of the early days of the revolution.

Guy Brett is interested in the spontaneous work of simple people. In his introduction he recalls what George Thomson said about the peasants of Irish villages as recently as the 1930s:

> For them poetry has nothing to do with books at all. Most of them are illiterate. It lives on their lips. It is common property. Everybody knows it. Everybody loves it. It is constantly bubbling up in everyday conversation. . . . In many Irish villages there was till recently a trained traditional poet, who had the gift of producing poems, often in elaborate verse forms—far more elaborate than ours in modern English—on the inspiration of the moment. . . . But I soon found that no sharp line could be drawn between the professional poet and the rest of the community. It was only a matter of degree.

In Chile desperate women gather in groups of ten or twelve to sew together, making pictures on their quilts out of scraps of material they have foraged for.

> As they sew the talk ebbs and flows: about everyday problems of getting by in conditions of near total unemployment, about the latest populist gesture by the military government which most know to be phoney, about their plans and fears for the next monthly day of national protest. The talk is laced with humour but faces darken as somebody mentions a woman they all know well who was found drowned in a water-filled ditch, unable to endure her hardships any longer. . . .
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> Groups like this in the poor areas of Chile's capital Santiago have produced thousands of patchwork pictures (*arpilleras*) in the last ten years. All are based on the startling dichotomy of a childlike, innocuous, "toy town" form used to give expression to the direst realities which face the mass of people every day in most countries of the Third World. From these thousands of images a complete and detailed chronicle could be made of the experiences of the Chilean working class since the brutal military coup of 1973.

As you read Brett's text the color photographs of the patchworks acquire a strange kind of beauty which both charms and haunts. This is a long chapter and when you finish it you feel ashamed that you knew so little about the ordeal of this civilized country since the unseating of Salvador Allende. As Brett puts it:

> Regions, classes, professions, groups, even individuals have been atomized and sanitized from one another in a characterless frozen status quo. It is a chilling experience to stand in the new Santiago metro or one of the manicured public gardens (both cleaner and neater than anything in Britain), knowing the murders, tortures, mass evictions, and harassments that lie behind them. Knowing too the real destruction by the military government of the country's economic and social infrastructure built up over a century, and the means of livelihood of most of the population.

Of the sewers of the story-telling quilts or tapestries, Brett says:

> From the beginning the women introduced symbols and codes, both as a form of compressing ideas and as a means of deceiving the censorship (to depict the junta directly was to put oneself in mortal peril). In some of the finest patchworks these work together: in the "cool" emblem of economic exploitation, for example; or in the circus picture which brilliantly mixes innocuous charm with sharp satire.

The paintings done in Chinese villages by peasant artists came after 1958 and are, in a way, a pleasant relief, for they show happy people working under relieved conditions in a land that is no longer impoverished. Brett says:

> Sweeping away the old landlords after a long and gruelling war, and abolishing the feudal pattern of toiling at the point of starvation on tiny plots of land, the peasants of China, organized in new forms of association, have changed the face of the countryside. And in their paintings the land is pictured in a way it has possibly never been before in the history of art. It is impossible to confuse their images with the countryside as seen by the landlord or by the smallholder, or by the colonial settlers, or by the holiday-maker escaping from the city. They are the first landscapes painted by people who are both the collective owners and "researcher-developers" of the land.

The chapter on Africa begins with the mining area where copper is produced—Shaba, in Zaire. Here the past is mingled with the present, in pictures representing Belgian colonialism, whites supervising the whipping of black laborers, dignified portraits of Lumumba under arrest before his murder, and attractive pictures of a light-colored mermaid, Mamba Muntu, who lives in the lakes and rivers, who can confer great wealth but is also very dangerous. Of African art, Brett says generally:

> The indigenous cultures defined and defended themselves against the onslaught of colonialism. Despite their almost complete contempt for Africans, the European missionaries, administrators and soldiers could not destroy their culture which in essence was not identified with architectural monuments, libraries, complex divisions of labor, or even the masks of the dance, but with community relations and ritualized everyday activities. African culture survived at the village level. . . .
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> At the same time the continent has always been a patchwork of many peoples, many languages—many travellers.
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> There has been traditionally a cosmopolitan as well as a village consciousness. The growth of industry and urban settlements both confirmed and contradicted the inheritance. In the vernacular images the romance and novelty of city life is felt: bars, dance halls, fashions, seductions, money, all that is summed up in the culture of Highlife—the antithesis of the austere, narrow, regulated village life. And on the model of the great traditional African markets, the cities are open to all influences, all commodities. But the excitement vies with the feeling of alienation, of loss and powerlessness, and the desire to return to the home village. For these are not the stable, autonomous cities of an independent Africa. They are the creations of the neocolonial economic system, with its constant turmoil of opportunism, speculation, expediency, corruption. . . .
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> The response of the intelligentsia to these experiences has been in many ways different from that of the masses. With more leisure perhaps to ponder their implications, some art-school educated artists in many African countries have become acutely aware of the need to resist the Western onslaught. But precisely what and how to resist? The web is very complex.

One Western-trained artist set down his ideal as to "express the environment, the whole physical and spiritual concept of my society in the flux of change, using both my knowledge of Western and traditional concepts," but he found no support. Brett comments:

> But in a sense this is exactly what the popular artists have been able to do, acting out of material necessity. Where the intelligentsia experiences change as dilemma, the popular painters, musicians and writers take hold of foreign influences and materials with both hands and transform them with incredible inventiveness. They show the exaltations and sufferings of the urban life with completely frank ingenuousness.

And that, indeed, is the reason for Brett's book—to show how this is happening in various parts of the world. The section on Hiroshima is

an agony to read and to look at. The paintings recall what the painter felt and remembered and saw. "We could do nothing for the injured people but give them water."

The collages woven into the fence about Greenham Common are gently conceived and touching in effect. There are pictures, photos, children's clothing, scarfs and dolls.

> Anyone looking at the Greenham fence would have been struck by the way the might of the weapons was opposed by the most fragile things: personal possessions, baby clothes, wool. Someone left an egg in the mesh of the fence, inscribed "For peace." Aggression was met not by closing oneself, but by exposing one's vulnerability, by making visible what the dominating power excludes or denies. This turns what are supposed to be signs of weakness into symbols of strength.

"This," one critic said of Guy Brett's book, "is one authentic art about social change." We think she is right.

COMMENTARY
DOING AND UNDOING

IN a talk last year at a university in Minnesota, Wes Jackson, discussing communities of people in the community of Nature, raised several questions, one of which was: "What would be some key elements of a new ethic of land ownership and land use?" For reply he turned to a letter from Wendell Berry, who said in it:

> There are, I think, three questions that must be asked with respect to a human economy in any given place:
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> 1. What is here?
> 2. What will nature permit us to do here?
> 3. What will nature help us to do here?
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> The second and third questions are obviously the ones that would define an agenda of practical research and of work. If we do not work with and within natural tolerances, then we won't be permitted to work for long. It is plain enough for example, that if we use soil fertility faster than nature can replenish it, we are proposing an end that we do not desire. And to ignore the possibility of help from nature, for example, makes farming too expensive for humans.
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> But the second and third questions are ruled by the first. They cannot be answered—they cannot intelligently be asked—until the first has been answered. And yet the first question has not been answered, or asked, so far as I know, in the whole history of the American economy. All the great changes, from the Indian wars and the opening of agricultural frontiers to the inauguration of genetic engineering, have been made without a backward look and in ignorance of whereabouts. Our response to the forest and the prairie that covered our present fields was to get them out of the way as soon as possible. And the obstructive human population of Indians and "inefficient" or small farmers have been dealt with in the same spirit. We have never known what we were doing because we have never known what we were undoing. We cannot know what we are doing until we know what nature would be doing if it were doing nothing. And that is why we need small native wildernesses widely dispersed over the countryside as well as large ones in spectacular places.

This seems as good a place as any to pause and consider how few there are who have the habit of thinking about a new situation into which they have come in this way. We come into situations as minor deities who are able to change such places, or hurt or even ruin them, but who are obligated to consider all such possibilities. What are the obligations we incur in settling down somewhere? Why do we have such obligations? We have them because we cannot live—just nowhere! We and the rest of life are *interdependent,* and we, who have the power of choice, have the obligation to benefit both what we use to stay alive and all its sources. But only now are we beginning to think about our lives and nature in this way. It seems that at last we are actually growing up.

Should this be identified as the form of evolution we are going through? To ask ourselves: Who am I, and what is my role and function here on earth? Are these the natural questions to be asked and answered as well as possible by mature human beings? Should these questions be raised and discussed with the young, as introducing the primary project of human life?

That, certainly, was the way in which Thoreau regarded himself and the world, for as Jim Ralston says, as quoted in our lead article this week, Thoreau's central problem was "finding one's right work and integrating it into other proper demands on one's life." If you read Thoreau, and there is no higher literary occupation, you find out what he found out about what his life work was. *Walden* was the record of his discovery. If one says that he hasn't time for such research, that one has himself discovered exactly what is wrong with the world, although he in no way realizes it. That is why Wendell Berry is such important reading, too, for the people of our time. Berry is good because he is so self-conscious about the decisions he makes. His books are in some sense a revelation of how and why he makes them. That is his claim upon us, just as *Walden* and his essay, "Life Without Principle," make Thoreau's claim upon us. The only things worth reading are the things by writers who have really grown up.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
A SCHOOL TN THE MOUNTAINS

ALTHOUGH Arthur Morgan was one of America's great educators, one seldom sees his name in any of the professional journals devoted to education. Why, one wonders, should this be? For the same reason, no doubt, that you never—or almost never—see the name of E. F. Schumacher in the conventional journals dealing with economics. Neither one of these men was an academic specialist, their work and contribution was far too basic for them to be understood and appreciated by the "professionals." But Morgan and Schumacher will not be forgotten because they were genuine reformers and there were, are, and will be those who, however modestly, take up their work and give it an extended life, transforming in time the area where their efforts were spent, and more besides.

In the case of Morgan, who died at ninety-seven in 1975, something of his vision and inspiration is carried on in a school named for him, founded by Elizabeth Morgan, wife of Earnest Morgan, son of Arthur, in the Black Mountains of North Carolina (1901 Hannah Branch Road, Burnsville, N.C. 28714) on the land of Celo Community, begun by Arthur Morgan in 1939. The Arthur Morgan School is a small, coeducational boarding and day school for about twenty-four boys and girls, most of whom live in the homes of staff members. The schooling is for grades seven, eight, and nine. According to a leaflet:

> The philosophy and methods of six great educators are reflected in the Arthur Morgan School. Essentially these are the development of the whole person through a combination of study, work, and social interaction in community, stressing inner motivation and the dignity and responsibility of the individual as part of a healthy social organism. The details vary with the different educators, just as the circumstances within which they worked varied, but the central theme is the same.
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> The educators are Pestalozzi, Montessori, Dewey, Gandhi, Gruntvig, and Morgan. . . . Lucy Morgan, Arthur's wife and educational partner, received her early education in a Pestalozzi school, where mental and physical skills and activities were closely linked, and where social interaction was an essential element of learning. Lucy's first cousin, Caroline Foulke Urie, with whom she was very close, worked with Maria Montessori in Italy. The *Montessori Mother* was one of Lucy's main source books in raising her family.
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> Elizabeth Morgan, AMS founder, studied under Arthur Morgan and had strong Montessori exposure through Caroline Urie. . . . Arthur Morgan was a close friend of John Dewey, who sent his son to Antioch College. . . . Arthur Morgan circulated Gandhi's *Basic Education* concepts in America, and they figured largely in Elizabeth Morgan's thinking.

Elizabeth, who died in 1971, was taught at home by her parents (both teachers) until she entered the eighth grade. She raced through the grades, completed high school in three and a half years, and entered Antioch, being by this time a student at the Aurora Conservatory of Music. She married Earnest while going to college, raising children and running the home. She took a degree at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, in Music Education. The Earnest Morgans moved to Celo, North Carolina, when their children were grown, where the Arthur Morgan School was established after a few years of preparation.

What kind of woman was Elizabeth? After her death Earnest Morgan said:

> Elizabeth played in her first student recital at the age of five, with a little violin, and continued making music until she died. She played, among others, violin, viola, piano, French horn, accordion, recorder, and church organ. She could pick up a new instrument almost overnight. . . .
>
> Elizabeth looked for a creative solution to every problem. When our older boy, at 8 or 9, was tyrannized by a couple of black youngsters who wanted to beat him up, Elizabeth visited the boys' mother and enlisted her cooperation in having them to supper. They came, scrubbed and polished, and stiff as a couple of wooden soldiers. But the ice was broken and the three boys became fast friends. When our younger boy, at the age of six, attached himself

admiringly to an older, pre-delinquent neighbor boy, Elizabeth cultivated the older boy, gave him music lessons (he was quite musical) and gently regulated the association of the two boys. Later, when this boy was in serious trouble, this relationship was an important factor in his rehabilitation. . . .

Coming into the kitchen once we found our four-year-old hard at work filling up a large bowl with a little of every kind of food he could find. Without a word Elizabeth looked over the mixture, added a few crucial ingredients, and produced a tasty casserole.

Well, what about the school? Another leaflet says:

Housing at AMS is arranged in family groups, each composed of several students and two houseparents who share housekeeping functions. These families live in wood-heated homes on campus or nearby. Breakfasts are cooked and eaten in the houses, as are weekend lunches and two dinners each week. We eat the other meals together in the school dining room. Students help prepare the food which is nutritious, tasty, and almost entirely vegetarian—a far cry from institutional food services. Using a system of chores that are rotated weekly, students clean the kitchen, dining room, and other school buildings after meals. . . .

Recreation can be as creative and useful as study and work. Television sets are not forbidden at AMS—there just aren't any! Music and dancing there are, special events, soccer and other sports, and some loafing and horsing around which have a place too. We minimize competition. Sometimes, when we play soccer with another school, we scramble the teams. . . . Hikes, camp-outs, and mountain climbing are for everyone.

We asked Earnest Morgan for an anecdote or two, and he gave us this:

A young alumna who had attended AMS for three years came back for a visit. I asked her, "How did you find the transition to another school?"

"Very difficult," she replied.

"In what particular subjects?"

"Academics?" she said. "No problem. The hard part was going from a school where everyone cared about everyone else to a place where no one cared about anyone but himself."

Earnest adds:

When a student applies during the school year and comes for a visit, he or she is provided with a "host" student whose responsibility is to make the newcomer feel at home. Then the staff and students together discuss whether the new student should be accepted. This not only involves the students in decision-making but helps them to feel responsible for the success of the new student. Student reactions are generally favorable to applicants, but not always. In one case a girl applicant made a good impression on the staff, but not on the students. One said, "She has one face for boys, another for girls, and another for adults. She's putting on an act." . . .

With a lively bunch of young teenagers there is sometimes a problem of noise in the dining room. At one point the staff decided to have assigned seating. The students didn't like this, and at All-School Meeting a motion was made to abolish it. All the students voted for the motion, the staff against it. The students outnumbered the staff.

As a spectator at that meeting I was interested to see how the staff would deal with the matter. After the motion was passed one of the teachers spoke up. Now that the motion was passed, he said, it brought them back to the problem which assigned seating was intended to remedy—noise in the dining room. He suggested that they adopt a perspective, not a rule, but a perspective, of the students leaving one place at each table for a staff member to sit. Thus the students could sit where they wished, but the staff would be distributed throughout the room where they could exercise restraint when it was needed. The students accepted the idea and approved it unanimously.

At one time the school operated as one of its projects a mailorder business in Co-op Brand pharmaceuticals, packaged under their generic names. It was managed by a middle-aged man who was experienced in the field. He had a student assistant, a ninth-grade girl. The man died suddenly of a heart attack and no one on the staff knew anything about the business. But the ninth-grade girl, it turned out, had learned the business well and was able to train in a new manager. She had always been shy and very unsure of herself, but her success in this emergency had a splendid outcome. She emerged from this experience of a few weeks a happy and confident young adult, and later served on the board of the school.

Incidentally, the country of the Black Mountains in North Carolina is beautiful.

FRONTIERS

Illich on Mexico's Crisis

IN the journal of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, *Gandhi Marg*, for January, 1986, Ivan Illich examines the effects of "development" on the common people of Mexico, finding them bad on every count. Yet he also finds that the reaction among peasants and city dwellers has its good aspects. He says:

> For a full generation, development has been sacred and inviolate. It has been the common idol of sects, pursuing the same goal, albeit by incompatible means. The time has come to recognize development itself as the malignant myth whose pursuit threatens those among whom I live in Mexico. We ought to oppose the lease on life that a new "alternative" establishment promises. We cannot ask US bureaucrats or the new crusaders for alternatives, who derive their own dignity and incomes from the promotion of development, to demonstrate that the "three development decades" were a huge, irresponsible experiment that, in the experience of a world-majority, failed miserably. The "crisis" in Mexico enables us to dismantle development as a goal.

What, actually, did development do?

> Most peasants are aware that development has undermined their own centuries-old diversified crops. Slum dwellers know that it has made their skills redundant and their education inadequate. If they do succeed in installing community life in the hand-made shanties or abandoned buildings, bulldozers and policy—both at the service of development—will relocate them. Truly marginal groups know how it feels to be pushed, inch by inch, into the cash economy.
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> On the other pan of the education scale sit an increasing number of ex-economists and one-time sociologists or industrial managers, working at the grassroots level, who have had great difficulties in making their former peers feel the weight of what they have learned: no indicator can register the pain caused by loss of self-reliance, dignity and solidarity—the unmeasurable shadow of a quantifiable progress. . . .
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> In Mexico, the Rural Development Bank no longer contains sufficient funds to force peasants to plant sorghum for animal feed. As a result, in many places, the return to traditional intercropping of corn and beans has not only improved the diet but has restored some village solidarity—thus allowing available cash to reach farther.
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> Production cooperatives are springing up and thriving in the very heart of Mexico City, thanks to the decreasing purchasing power of those formerly employed. Shops now exist in the slums that reconstruct electrical appliances; merchants engage in the outright imitation of foreign trademarked goods that they pass as smuggled wares. I have observed more than once how slum producers put their own name and address on a product because it inspires greater trust in the client. Neighborhoods have come back to life, along with a phenomenal increase in next-door catering. Street stands and tiny markets have returned to the corners from where they disappeared years ago. In the midst of inflation, devaluation, so-called unemployment and a decline in the economically-defined national product, the majority of the people among whom I dwell are much better off than they have been for years. . . . Those who were bypassed by development are now in the privileged position. They know they are better prepared. They are champions at cutting corners, at making do with little earnings on the gray market and some sales on the black market. Surprisingly, the number of those who are relatively favored by the breakdown of the development myth is much larger than the (still larger) number of those who have lost job security. Several of us argue that, thanks to the crisis, Mexico's political stability has increased.

Illich brings his discussion to a close by saying:

> Development means to have started on a road that others know better, to be on the way towards a goal that others have reached, to race up a one-way street. Development means the sacrifice of environments, solidarities, traditional interpretations and customs to ever-changing expert advice. Development promises enrichment; and for the overwhelming majority, has always meant the progressive modernization of their poverty: growing dependence on guidance and management.
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> Mexico's predicament, which others call crisis, we herald as a chance. It is our chance to slip to others, who are now forever out of a job, the ten thousand tricks by which we have used and abused modern techniques. It is our chance to de-link well-being from development. I would like others, who

are not as lucky as the Mexicans, to be able to follow our reasoning.

For his views Illich has been called a medievalist. To us, he sounds like a man of sophisticated common sense. When in Mexico he lives in Cuernavaca. At present he is professor of medieval history at the University of Kassel, Kassel, West Germany.

In our remaining space we should like to say something about the monthly magazine, *Gandhi Marg,* in which Illich's article appeared. It began in 1957 and is now published by the Gandhi Peace Foundation in New Delhi, India. Subscription is $30 a year. Thus for thirty years it has been publishing material by Gandhians, Indian, European and American—but mostly by Indians—both historical and interpretive, of the streams of Gandhian thought, with comment on Indian affairs. In another article in the January 1986 issue, two authors, P. L. Dhar and R. R. Gaur, discuss "Technology and the Crisis in the West." They begin:

> It is now common knowledge that Western society is passing through a crisis. In spite of its opulence and material prosperity the society is virtually sitting on a precipice—waiting only for a decisive push to throw it into an alley of chaos. Organized crime and excessive violence, juvenile delinquency, broken families, enormously high divorce rate, drug addiction and child abuse, corruption and a general feeling of insecurity have become the hallmarks of the society which, rather unfortunately, developing nations like India, are trying to ape blindly. We often console ourselves with the mistaken belief that all that we are following is the economic development pattern of the West, *and not their values,* and that our own value system is sound enough to insulate us from the fallouts of economic development being felt in the West. Consequently, we blindly adopt their economic development strategies—more growth, more industries, more energy consumption, more consumer goods, high technology—for the "well-being" of our downtrodden masses. Thus following their parading, setting up of a widespread heavy industrial base (with the help of available Western technologies) has been adopted as the "strategy" for promoting welfare of the masses in many developing nations.

The writers wholly reject these policies for the underdeveloped nations and proceed to an analysis of the close linkage between the industrial way of life and the problems which are overtaking the West.