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THE RESOURCES OF THE AGE

A FEW months ago, commenting on a current volume, a reviewer (Warren Wagar) said: ". . . what humanity needs now is better myths, not disenchanted counsels of prudence and patience." For a number of reasons, this declaration has the ring of pertinence. Myths are what we live by.

What about "facts"? Facts become operative in our lives only as we fit them into a mythic scheme. Myths are dramatic embodiments of meaning and purpose. Northrop Frye has a clarifying passage in *The Stubborn Structure:*

> . . . science exhibits a method and a mental attitude, most clearly in the physical sciences, of a stabilized subject and an impartial and detached treatment of evidence which is essential to all serious work in all fields. The humanities, on the other hand, express in their containing forms, or myths, the nature of the human involvement with the human world, which is essential to any serious man's attitude to life. As long as a man lives in the world, he will need the perspective and attitude of the scientist; but to the extent he has created the world he lives in, feels responsible for it and has a concern for its destiny, which is also his own destiny, he will need the perspective and attitude of the humanist.

Implicit here are the materials of an old and continuing argument. The perhaps half-developed mystic contends that he makes the world, is responsible for it, and can change it according to his will or needs, as he learns how. The scientist replies, "Nonsense! The world is out there, given in experience, with forces and laws of its own, and you had better find out what they are and adapt yourself to them." Well, both seem in a sense right, yet in another sense wrong—the problem being to tell when are they right and when are they wrong, and how these apparently opposing views can be made to harmonize and work together. One has, in short, an *intuition* of the truth in both views, but this intuition does not spell itself out in particular cases.

Myth embodies a hypothetical spelling out in a drama in which we can and do take part.

Since we are able to see the importance of myths, how does one go about myth-making, in order to have better ones?

There is a good book on this subject—not to suggest, however, that after one reads it he will be able to make a fine myth. Elizabeth Seeger, who gave much thought to the question, became convinced that great myths are composed only at the dawn of immense historical epochs, during the birthtime of the human world. Myths, moreover, are required to have hidden truths in them—meanings that emerge only in time, along with corresponding confrontations of experience. To *write* a myth, you have to understand how this works, and know it in the sure way that birds know how to fly. Quite possibly, there can be no new myths. What talented writers can do, however, is work with existing mythic resources, retelling the stories, deepening their meaning, and contributing to the unfoldment of which the myth is capable, and which indeed it *needs*.

The book on myth-making, *Mythopoesis,* by Harry Slochower, begins with a statement that seems, in effect, to justify Warren Wagar's claim that we need new myths:

> Ours is an alienated and alienating era. This condition is not only attributable to dislocations in our socio-economic relations. The hunger for bread is gradually being met by the development of technology which is liberating the energies of our natural resources. But there is a deeper hunger which is not being satisfied by these achievements. . . . How do I prevent myself from being flattened by the system, the machine, "integrated" with the party, the committee, the organization? How can I feel and say "I exist?"

Working with old myths, refining and enriching them, showing what may be their hidden

truth, is an activity which speaks to this question. Dr. Slochower says:

> Mytho-*poesis* (from the Greek *poiein,* meaning to make to create) *re*-creates the ancient stories. And, while mythology presents its stories as if they actually took place, mythopoesis transposes them to a symbolic meaning. Indeed, the mythopoeic works examined in this study arose when the literal account of the legend could no longer be accepted. They arose in periods of crisis, of cultural transition, when faith in the authoritative structure was waning.

Comparing the several Western mythopoeic works dealt with in his book, he says:

> *Oedipus a*nd *Hamlet* have more universal echo than *Moby Dick* and *The Trial; The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Magic Mountain* have a broader canvas than Gide's *Theseus* and Sartre's *The Flies. The Divine Comedy* is more structured than *Don Q~ixote.* What they all have in common is that each sounds the perennial motifs of human nature, its origin, quest and destiny. This is their universal relevance. But each speaks this universal language in its particular dialect. Every epoch has its own myth which provides the center of its life, gives the tone, manner and rhythm to its existence, permeates its institutions and thought, its art, science, religion, politics, its psychology and its folkways—that is, *the myth organizes the values of its epoch.*

This is enough "introduction." To get going more seriously we borrow from a nineteenth-century theosophical journal a brief version of an East Indian myth—not a "creation" myth or a "hero" myth, but what might be called a "self-knowledge" myth, since this, surely, is the sort of myth we need to develop in the present. The allegory begins with the idea of a time when there was no universe—but when the universe was about to be. Then—

> . . . the great IT, the One that rests in infinity and ever *is,* dropped its reflection, which expanded in limitless Space, and felt a desire to make itself cognizable by the creatures evolved from its shadow. The reflection assumed the shape of a Maharaja (great King). Devising means for mankind to learn of his existence, the Maharaja built out of the qualities inherent in him a palace, in which he concealed himself, satisfied that the people should perceive the outward form of his dwelling. But when they looked up to the place where stood the palace, whose one corner stretched into the right, the other into the left infinitude—the little men *saw nothing*; the palace was mistaken by them for empty space, and being so vast remained invisible to their eyes. Then the Maharaja resorted to another expedient. He determined to manifest himself to the little creatures whom he pitied—*not as a whole but only in his parts*. He destroyed the palace built by him from his manifesting qualities, brick by brick, and began throwing the bricks down upon the earth one after the other. Each brick was transformed into an idol, the red ones becoming Gods and the grey ones Goddesses; into these the Devatas and Devatis—the qualities and attributes of the Unseen—entered and animated them.

This plural embodiment of divine attributes, it is suggested, was the origin of polytheism, but the myth could also serve as a paradigm of every sort of intellectual, moral, and cultural development. The Maharaja is hidden within, but his parts are everywhere about. Supposing this to be the case, then feeling it, and finally *knowing* it, might be the stages of increasing self-knowledge. Allegories, metaphors, imaginary personifications are some of the means of dwelling on such possibilities.

We want to know about ourselves. But our "selves" are abstract, unseen, inaccessible, and modern thinkers have until recently declared them nonexistent. (See David Hume and Ralph Barton Perry on the futility of introspection.) Accepting this view, we focused our science on the world—on all those "parts" out there—until we were finally overtaken by the alienation Dr. Slochower speaks of. Now comes the demand that we seek better myths. For a start, we may find the Maharaja myth useful in organizing the values of the age now coming into being. Its applications are various. One use of it would be to look at the world to see what parts of the human past, present, or future are reflected there.

In *Books and Habits* (Dodd, Mead) Lafcadio Hearn muses:

> Could a world exist in which the nature of all the inhabitants would be so moral that the mere idea of what is immoral could not exist? . . . a world in which no one could have any idea of envy, ambition

> or anger, because such passions could not exist, a world in which not to be loving, not to do everything we human beings now call duty would be impossible. Moreover, there would be no difficulty, no pain in such a performance; it would be the constant and unfailing pleasure of life. Morality would have been transmuted into inherited instinct.

Thinking about this wildly speculative idea, one recalls that a lifelong student of insects, R.W.G. Hingston (author of *Instinct and Intelligence*), decided that "instinct began in a reasoned act which gradually became unconscious." According to Bertrand Russell, Samuel Butler thought this, too. Hearn, it seems, was in agreement:

> Can we imagine such a world? I answer that such a world actually exists. The world of insects actually furnishes examples of such a moral transformation and the important thing is the opinion of scientific men that humanity will at last, in the course of millions of years, reach the ethical condition of the ants.

Hearn then sets out to prove his case from the testimony of dozens of scientific observers. Horrors! one may say. Who wants to be an ant!

Relief from this prospect lies in the fact that ants are only a *part* of the Maharaja's endowment, reflected in Nature. And Hearn remarks at the outset:

> Also, I must remind you that the morality of the ant, by the necessity of circumstance does not extend beyond the limits of its own species. Ants carry on war outside their own borders; were it not for this, we might call them morally perfect creatures.

Turning to one of the writers Dr. Slochower deals with in his book, we might ask what is the determining quality in Herman Melville's work that qualifies him as a mythopoeic artist?

An introductory passage in *The Long Encounter* (University of Chicago Press), a study of Melville by Merlin Bowen, gives a clue:

> It may be questioned whether his books are stories or novels at all, in the customary meaning of those words: certainly plot and character are not their strong points. Nor do all of them have to do with the sea. But there is one thing that all of them have in common, and that is a concern with the problem of self-discovery, self-realization. And here—how different he was in other respects—Melville was at one with his age, with such men as Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and his exact contemporary Whitman, . . .

We quote a little Whitman, who must have known for himself some version of the Maharaja myth:

> I celebrate myself;
> And what I assume you shall assume;
> For every atom belonging to me, as good belongs to you.
> . . .
>
> What is a man, anyhow? What am I? What are you?
> All I mark as my own, you shall offset with your own;
> Else it were time lost listening to me.
> . . .
>
> I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars,
> And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren,
> And the tree-toad is a chef-d'œuvre for the highest,
> And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven, . . .
> You are also asking me questions, and I hear you;
> I answer that I cannot answer—you must find out for yourself.

Whitman divined the presence of the whole in the parts.

Back to Mr. Bowen on Melville:

> To begin with a clear definition of the self would be good, if it were possible. But what the self is, neither Melville nor perhaps anyone else has ever satisfactorily defined, except in terms of what it is not. We may say, however, that it appears in Melville's work (and particularly in his imagery) as something that is both given and achieved: as aboriginal, stable, though ever elusive center of identity on the one hand, and on the other as a realization in action of the full human and individual potential. A man is both his inmost sense of self and the outward declaration of that sense in his interaction with the opposing world. The very character which that world assumes for him is in large part an expression of and a clue to his personality. For identity comes through one's realization of separateness from this outer world. The more highly developed one's sense of self (as distinguished from mere blatant and unreflective egotism), the keener the awareness of one's

> separateness from the not-self, of the basic hostility or indifference of the universe. And with this problem will come the problem of choice—or of the adoption, at any rate—of a life-attitude, a policy or course of action, in the following-out of which each man realizes himself and his destiny. In all of Melville's major works, accordingly (if we except the heroless *Confidence-Man*), and in most of his minor ones, we find ourselves looking on at the pitting, in some sense, of the single individual against the universe. It is this encounter understood as a problem both of perception and of action that lies at the center of all of Melville's work.

This crucial contradiction, or contrast and duality—of perception and action—of what we do and what we are (what we do is limited, has definition, while what we are is unlimited, timeless, and has no definition)—has been well put in capsule form by Aldo Leopold:

> To the laborer in the sweat of his labor, the raw stuff on his anvil is an adversary to be conquered. So was the wilderness an adversary to the pioneer.
>
> But to the laborer in repose, able for a moment to cast a philosophical eye on his world, that same raw stuff is something to be loved and cherished, because it gives definition and meaning to his life.

The man is both—both laborer and philosopher. "I am," said Ortega, "myself and my circumstances." What resolves the tension between self and circumstances? The self-knowledge which includes the world, seems a good answer.

Leaving out the world, the "other" and the others, makes for the wrong sort of self-knowledge. Hence Melville, to know himself, ranges far and wide. He goes to sea. Joyce Carol Oates, engaging in the same pursuit, thinks about his work (in an article in *Psychology Today,* May, 1973)

> The illusion of originality and isolation can be very destructive to the writer who is, for personal reasons, unstable to begin with. Though a man like Herman Melville did the work of a hundred men, not one—Melville himself felt he bore the burden of his efforts, and believed "himself" a failure. In the physical world, it is never a loss to a man's pride when he cannot overcome an obstacle that would require two men to handle it, but in the imaginative world, it is quite possible for a single individual, attempting the labor of countless individuals, to feel destroyed. . . .
>
> One of the holiest of our myths always has been the unique, proud, isolated entity of a "self": perhaps it is through an exploration of this phenomenon that our other myths will be exposed, devaluated, or given a new value, absorbed into the consciousness of a new world. . . .
>
> In surrendering one's isolation, one does not surrender his own uniqueness, he only surrenders his isolation. It is time for psychology to take very seriously the propositions advanced by all the great mystics—that the "self" is part of a larger reservoir of energy, call it any name you like. As long as the myth of separate and competitive "selves" endures, we will have a society obsessed with adolescent ideas of being superior, of conquering, of destroying. The pronoun "I" is as much a metaphor as "schizophrenia," and it has undergone the same "metaphor-into-myth" process. Creative work, like scientific work, should be greeted as a communal effort—an attempt by an individual to give voice to many voices, an attempt to synthesize and explore and analyze. All the books published under my name in the past 10 years have been formalized, complex propositions about the nature of personality and its relationship to a specific culture (contemporary America). The propositions are meant to be hypothetical and exploratory, inviting responses that are not simple, thalamic praise/abuse, but some demonstration that there is an audience that participates in the creation of art. Many myths must be exposed and relegated to the past, but the myth of the "isolated self" will be the most difficult to destroy.

Whitman declared himself to be "multitudes," but his self was not "divided" in the pathological sense that R. D. Laing writes about. How does a single center of awareness encompass all the rest without "getting lost"? Is this only for Maharajas?

The Maharaja myth is indeed versatile for assimilating the modern quest for self-knowledge, in all its diversity. The King threw out bricks of his cosmic dwelling—parts of himself—hoping that men would recognize him (and themselves) in these building materials, since *he* (and *they*) were reflected in all the parts. That is, in them were "the qualities and attributes of the Unseen."

So, too, Whitman threw out bricks—his poems. Melville threw out bricks—his novels. They spoke a common language although in local dialects. We are made richer by the dialects. Reading them, we read the signature of the age, but also that of the King. And to the mythmakers come peak moments when they realize what they are doing, or have done. After completing *Moby Dick*, Melville wrote to Hawthorne:

> A sense of unspeakable security is in me this moment, on account of your having understood the book. I have written a wicked book, and feel spotless as the lamb. Ineffable socialities are in me. I would sit down and dine with you and with all the gods in old Rome's Pantheon. It is a strange feeling—no hopefulness is in it no despair. Content—that is it; and irresponsibility; but without licentious inclination. I speak now of my profoundest sense of being, not of an incidental feeling.

Yet this was the man who believed himself a "failure." A human failure, perhaps, but a promethean success.

It does not seem extravagant to say that the myths we need are already in evolution—sending up tendrils—fragile, yet tenacious of life—in the work of the mythopoeists of our time. They are at once individual creations and collaborative affairs; we all participate, for being in the audience is to be a part of the play.

REVIEW
G. LOWES DICKINSON

LAST spring—in the issue for April 23—we printed here some quotations from *Letters from a Chinese Official*, a little book first published in America in 1903. The foreword explained that the letters were by an educated Chinese who had spent many years in England. These communications compared English (and American) civilization with Chinese ways:

> Among you no one is contented, no one has leisure to live, so intent are all on increasing the means of living. The "cash-nexus" (to borrow a phrase of one of your own writers) is the only relation you recognize among men.
>
> Now to us of the East all this is a mark of a barbarous society. We measure the degree of civilization not by the accumulation of the means of living, but by the character and value of the life lived.

A few months after our review appeared an English reader informed us that the real author of *Letters from a Chinese Official* was G. Lowes Dickinson, Cambridge scholar, teacher, world traveler, historian, and essayist. That E. M. Forster did a biography of Dickinson indicates the esteem and affection he attracted among the English who knew him. Our correspondent, who had Dickinson for a tutor at Cambridge, recalled that the young Chinese students at the university in those days (before World War I) regarded him with a respect approaching reverence. Dickinson seems to have preserved his anonymity in relation to the *Letters* for a few years, but later they were listed as his work (they first appeared in England as *Letters from John Chinaman*) in a bibliography.

A curious tension pervades the thought of G. Lowes Dickinson. He tried all his life to understand the differences between East and West. In his view, the spirit of the West was to "overcome" the world, to shape it closer to the heart's desire, while the East longed to put an end to the struggle, to return to "Eternity." Although a Westerner, he made heroic efforts to comprehend the East. He found himself most at home in the Platonic philosophy—which might be regarded as a philosophic halfway house between Eastern and Western themes—and his knowledge of Greek enabled him to read all of Plotinus in the original. Perhaps because of his Platonic cast of mind, Dickinson seems more of a sojourner in the West than a "native." He is the meditative observer. While engaged in Western affairs, he is also an onlooker, and a philosopher who tries to see life through others' eyes. He sides with the West, but the attraction of the Eastern spirit haunts all his days. He never completes the synthesis between the two, an accomplishment too precocious, perhaps, for a man so deeply engaged in high Western projects of Platonic intent. But his attempt to understand Eastern aspiration may excite similar wonderings in the reader. His particular fondness for China may have been due to his recognition of certain very "English" qualities in the Chinese. They are not very "religious," he finds, and a quite practical race.

In *Appearances*, a small volume growing out of his travels in the Orient and America, he describes his visit to Peking, which seems to him a vast garden or park. There, he says, one finds the roads laid out by Kubla Khan, reaching in four directions, from which extends a maze of streets and lanes where nearly a million people scurry about, intent upon mundane errands. The time is a few short years after the suppression of the Boxer rebellion, and Dickinson is moved to comment on the English inscription on a palace wall where the besieged British defended themselves against the furious Boxers. "Lest we forget!" it says.

> Forget what? The one or two children who died in the Legation, and the one or two men who were killed? Or the wholesale massacre, robbery and devastation which followed when the siege was relieved? This latter, I fear, the Chinese are not likely to forget soon. Yet it would be better if they could. And better if the Europeans could remember much that they forget—could remember that they forced their presence and the trade on China against her will; that their treaties were extorted by force, since they exacted from China what are ironically called

"indemnities" which she could not pay except by borrowing from those who were robbing her. If Europeans could remember and realize these facts they would perhaps cease to complain that China continues to evade their demands by the only weapon of the weak—cunning. When you have knocked a man down, trampled on him, and picked his pocket, you can hardly expect him to enter into social relations with you merely because you pick him up and, retaining his property, propose that you should now be friends and begin to do business. The obliquity of vision of the European residents on all these points is extraordinary. They cannot see that wrong has been done, and that wrong engenders wrong.

The complaint of a British businessman in Shanghai, "We see too much of things Chinese!", makes Dickinson exclaim:

Too much! They see nothing at all, and want to see nothing. They live in the treaty ports, dine, dance, play tennis, race. China is in birth-throes, and they know and care nothing. A future in China is hardly for them.

The influence of the West in China becomes for Dickinson the mark of the Beast:

Western civilization, wherever it penetrates, brings with it water-taps, sewers, and police; but it also brings an ugliness, an insincerity, a vulgarity never before known in history, unless it be under the Roman Empire. It is terrible to see in China the first wave of this Western flood flinging along the coasts and rivers and railway lines its scrofulous foam of advertisements, of corrugated iron roofs, of vulgar meaningless architectural forms. In China, as in all ok civilizations I have seen, all the building of man harmonizes with and adorns nature. In the West everything now built is a blot. Many men, I know, sincerely think that this destruction of beauty is a small matter, and that only decadent aesthetes would pay any attention to it in a world so much in need of sewers and hospitals. I believe this view to be profoundly mistaken. The ugliness of the West is a symptom of disease of the Soul. . . .

Coming to America in 1909, Dickinson is impressed by the energy of Americans and appalled by its aimless direction—or rather, the shallow goals pursued. Americans are young in spirit, but undeveloped:

It is as though they had never faced life and asked themselves what it is; as though they were so occupied in running that it has never occurred to them to inquire where they started and whither they are going. A dimension of life, one would say, is lacking, and they live in a plane instead of a solid. . .

The impression America makes on me is that the windows are blocked up. It has become incredible that this continent was colonized by the Pilgrim Fathers. That intense, narrow, unlovely, but genuine spiritual life has been transformed into industrial energy; and this energy, in its new form, the churches, oddly enough, are endeavoring to recapture and use to drive their machines. Religion is becoming a department of practical business. . . .

It does not concern itself with a life beyond; it gives you here and now what you want. "What *do* you want? Money? Come along!—Success? This is the shop!—Health? Here you are! Better than patent medicines!" The only part of the Gospels one would suppose that interests the modern American is the miracles; for the miracles really did *do* something. As for the Sermon on the Mount—well, no Westerner ever took that seriously.

This conversion of religion into business is interesting enough. But even more striking is what looks like a conversion of business into religion. Business is so serious that it sometimes assumes the shrill tone of a revivalist propaganda.

How can Dickinson be on the side of the West, if this be what he thinks of America? America, after all, is the "essence" of the West, and it would soon be spreading its bustling, acquisitive spirit throughout Europe. He explains in his concluding essay that making use of time to *some* purpose is better than escape to a do-nothing Eternity. He, like Walt Whitman, was persuaded that "commercialism is the infancy, not the maturity, of a civilization." He hopes that, somehow or other, the West will grow up.

I have said in the preceding pages hard things about Western civilization. I hate many of its manifestations, I am out of sympathy with many of its purposes. I can see no point, for instance, in the discovery of the north or the south pole, and very little in the invention of aeroplanes; while gramophones, machine guns, advertisements, cinematographs, submarines, dreadnoughts, cosmopolitan hotels, seem to me merely fatuous or

> sheerly disastrous. But what lies behind all this, the tenacity, the courage, the spirit of adventure, this it is that is the great contribution of the West. It is not the aeroplane that is valuable; probably it will never be anything but pernicious, for its main use is likely to be for war. But the fact that men so lightly risk their lives to perfect it, *that* is valuable. . . . We are living very "dangerously"; all the forces are loose, those of destruction as well as those of creation, but we are living towards something; we are living with the religion of Time.

But what is Time *for?* Have all these finite undertakings no possible meaning? Mr. Dickinson gives many pages to showing how the men of the West have made themselves captives of time's bypaths and box canyons. What ought they to be doing, instead? He answers:

> I seem to have learned this: the importance of that process in Time in whose reality we believe does not lie merely in the betterment of the material and social environment, though we hold the importance of that to be great, it lies in the development of souls. And that development consists in a constant expansion of interests away from and beyond one's own immediate interests out into the activities of the world at large. Such expansion may be pursued in practical life, in art, in science, in contemplation, so long as the contemplation is of the real processes of the real world in time. To that expansion I see no limit except death, And I do not know what comes after death. But I am clear that whatever comes after, the command of life is the same—to expand out of one's self into the life of the world.

So Dickinson, in the end, sides with the naturally pagan poet, John Keats, in his reading of the enigmas of time and eternity. For Keats refused to see the world as a "vale of tears." Call it rather a vale of "soul-making," he announced. Surely something worthy is going on here!

But what if the worthiness cannot be understood except by those who know that while they live and act in time, their true being is rooted in Eternity? This may be the beneath-the-surface lesson to be learned from the East. One cannot be a *fruitful* child of the times without a sense of the birthlessness and deathlessness of those who, in their inmost selves, belong to Eternity. Why did not Dickinson discover this in his explorations of the East? He may have felt it, but he did not discover it. Was it that the East displays too many shallow and ineffectual readings of its own hungers, just as the West advertises ad nauseam the meaningless preoccupations Dickinson lists in this book?

The matter, no doubt, is paradoxical. But what impresses the reader most is Dickinson's determined movement—gracious, unimpatient, yet uninterrupted—toward a resolution.

COMMENTARY
ART AND THE ARTIST

SOME reflections on art by Joyce Carol Oates—in the July 3, 1973 *America Journal*—are in direct key with what is quoted from her in this week's lead (see page 7) and have contrapuntal interest:

> The artistic activity, an instinct that predates any conception of the democratic constitution of the universe, in fact what we call "civilization" itself, was never meant to be a lonely and self-enhancing process. Its relation to our entire species (if you believe in evolution, its relation to that as well) is incontestable, and frequent claims of independence, the creation of art for its own sake, must be interpreted as the artist's claim of freedom from some specific, limiting, suffocating political milieu—Joyce's Ireland, for instance. But the individual artist is sometimes confused and rejects his universal self out of a disgust with his personal, historical, finite self. Is the continent we call North America identical with its various names, boundaries, and ever-disappointing rulers?
>
> We should never confuse ourselves with our "names." They are only shorthand, superficially symbolic ways of referring to points of consciousness. . . .
>
> For most artists, the reluctance to communicate openly, the desire to be different, isolated, eccentric, obscure, is a quite explicable acknowledgment that—at least for the time being—their communications are probably not very significant. What is called "writer's block" is a delicate way of pointing to this phenomenon: in fact, in psychological terms, "writer's block" simply means that there is definite unconscious resistance to some project the conscious mind has devised. In the unconscious resistance there is probably great instinctual wisdom. *Don't bother! Don't write that one again! Stop! No!* Very healthy, the unconscious and its irrefutable judgments; one resists one's deeper instincts at the risk of catastrophe.

On the effect of a work of art:

> What is the transformation of an individual by a work of art (the close reading of, for instance, *Crime and Punishment*) but a therapeutic miracle—a magical therapy? In one sense, the artist expresses only phases of his own personality, his emotions, in terms of objective images. . . . If his art is sophisticated enough, he transcends the level of personal emotion and awakens a universal emotion, so that we not only sympathize with him, we *are* him, we are transformed into him. But this relation between private emotion and the larger, public context in which he dramatizes that emotion is a difficult one.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
UNENGAGING REFLECTIONS

WHAT is the best way to approach the problem of mass education?

This question may be inadequate and misleading, since there can hardly be a "best way" of doing anything, except in terms of a particular goal which has been defined and understood.

How, for example, do you conceive the purpose of education? Is it, essentially, a way of improving the economic condition of those who go to school—and, by bettering their material situation, of contributing to their general well-being and health?

Or, from looking lately at the figures on crime and juvenile delinquency, are you wondering if education of some sort may be the only available means of restoring social morality?

Various other approaches have manifest value and ought not to be neglected. One is the contention of Robert M. Hutchins that the goal of a general education is a better understanding of the meaning of human life, to be obtained by assimilating the insights of the best thinking that human beings have done, throughout history. He maintains that in a democratic society, every man is a king, and if it is true, as Plato decided, that there can be little social good until kings become philosophers, then education must mean a striving in this direction for all. The practical requirement of training in some way of making a living ought not, Mr. Hutchins says, to be confused with the essential purpose of education. What shall it profit a man to get a good job, if he knows no reason to raise his expectations above the goal of material welfare?

Since the entire complaint of the ecologists and environmentalists could easily translate into Dr. Hutchins' diagnosis—if not his remedy—this view of education can hardly be ignored.

But this is very general. Some passages from Nancy Milio's new book, *The Care of Health in Communities* (Macmillan, 1975, $8.95) provide a focus on present practice in relation to general human welfare:

The mushrooming of higher levels of education, fostered by hopes for advanced status and economic mobility, has produced some anomalous outcomes. From the underdeveloped countries come reports that graduates are unwilling or unable to perform the practical tasks required in the world of work. They thus become under- or unemployed. Another way to view this is that the educational system—and those determining the allocation of resources—are not preparing students for the work that needs to be done. They are over-educating them—in terms of concentrated time spans and specialized learning—and to that extent, at least, making them irrelevant to their country's needs. This has been done with the advice and aid of Western affluent nations, an approach recently coming under increasing criticism. Thus, because of uneven access and limited efficacy of education, the possibilities for effectively dealing with societal problems diminishes further.

Similar criticisms are made of academic education in the affluent countries, even though, relatively speaking, they can—perhaps—better afford the extravagance of irrelevant education, or miseducation. The charge of lack of efficacy has been made by those who show that job performance is not necessarily related to formal educational credentials.

At the same time, major educational reform, which is taking place in many countries, has focused, rather, on the second "universal" problem of education, that of providing access to all segments of the population. In such countries as England and the United States, some success in those reforms has not resulted in the expected narrowing of the affluent-poor income gap. Explanations suggested for this are that as educational opportunity increased, the higher-paying jobs became increasingly professionalized, and more formal degree requirements were emphasized, rather than secondary education or on-the-job-acquired skills. Differences have narrowed between high- and low-income students at the *secondary* level of education, in terms of providing more *years* of education to working class families, although not necessarily enhancing their income. The expansion of university education has given relatively more advantage to the higher-income groups.

An example of reform allowing improved educational access in the United States is black students, who, since 1967, are entering university and graduate programs faster than other social groups. At the same time, the education of low-income blacks is deteriorating. And, proportionately more blacks occupy the lowest economic levels in the country.

> Overall, significantly more have more education, but their unemployment rates have not diminished.

Why does Nancy Milio interest herself in these matters? Because experience and research made it evident to her that the general material and social environment is far more important in the maintenance of health than the remedial services provided by public or other agencies.

But even if we could bring the outcast and destitute up to a higher standard of living, by means of education enabling them to fit into the more affluent society, other bewildering factors might then come into play. Miss Milio says, for example:

> The obvious question, and the central problem for those concerned about promoting health, then, is what is it about "progress," urbanization, and industrial development that produces wider affluence, longer life, and better health but at the same time seems to threaten health and life? . . . In a more direct relation to health, urban industrial life has allowed a wide choice of foods, especially for the affluent. A paradoxical result is that health-damaging obesity has now reached significant proportions, especially among adult Americans and adolescent boys. Further, the eating patterns of affluent populations, which emphasize high concentrations of refined sugars and starches, have been implicated in a wide range of diseases—from dental caries, constipation, and hemorrhoids to coronary thrombosis, diabetes mellitus, and gastric ulcers.
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> The forms of transportation and recreation, also associated with affluence, take high tolls in injury, disability, and death. Work environments have produced as many as 25 million injuries per year, increasing at about 3 per cent each year in the 1960 decade. Occupationally induced diseases kill 100,000 persons annually.
>
> Consistent with these threats to health associated with urban life and affluence is the finding that in certain nonurban, nonpoor regions, death rates are below average and life-spans longer.

It follows from this, and from a lot of similar analysis and criticism of the customs, habits, and goals of the affluent technological society, that more education for *participation* in such a society is likely to be self-defeating; and improved delivery of health services of the conventional sort can have but small effect, since all too often these services become applicable only after malnutrition, low resistance, and sometimes actual infection have been recognized and, so to say, "established."

We add a sardonic comment by Leopold Kohr (in *Resurgence* for May-June) which emphasizes the contradictions in the claim that "more education" will improve the general welfare, as presently conceived:

> The principal sign of progress is that it reduces our need to work. But human nature requires work not only for subsistence, but also for self-respect. Hence the more progress relieves us of the need to work, the more it creates in us the want to work. The only agency that can satisfy this want is the government. Only government can hide unemployment in the guise of employment. . . .
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> The second is the field of education. The workers themselves need little of it, since their horse sense makes them understand most of what they do. But the non-practicing supervisors need a lot of it. They must be able to quantify their observations, write smart memoranda, then make them unintelligible by mathematicizing them *pour epater le bourgeois.* Only years at college enable them to do this. Since academic preparation tends thus to be inversely proportionate to its practical usefulness, education will in future prove an even more effective absorber of technological unemployment than bureaucracy. Now that the computer has made an illiterate out of every Ph.D., it is indeed not hard to envision that students will ultimately be kept off the labor market for so long that the day of their heals will be the same as the day on which they will be administered the last sacraments. Sentenced to serve education and life concurrently, they will not feel that progress has enabled them to live longer. Worn out by perpetual study in a computerized world of non-comprehension, all they will feel is that it has taken longer to live.

Well, if you shut out the grounds of Prof. Kohr's barbed humor, you may be able to get on with some plans for mass education—"feasible" plans, that is—but ought one to spend one's time in this way? True, we now have a society of two hundred million people and a lot of enormous school buildings, so an effort must be made. But any attempt at this mass level is bound to shut out *something* of crucial importance, until we change the scale of all such enterprises. Was Solon, one wonders, bothered by such considerations when he was thinking up laws that he hoped might civilize the ancient Greeks?

FRONTIERS

Elaborations of Common Sense

RESURGENCE is a journal published every two months in England. It is edited by Satish Kumar and among its associate editors are Danilo Dolci, Leopold Kohr, Jayaprakash Narayan, and E. F. Schumacher. To give an idea of its contents, one might say that the thirty-six good-sized pages of each issue are filled with the nuts and bolts of how to reform, improve, or radically change our ideas of the meaning of human life and progress. For readers in the U.S. a year's subscription is $7.00 (airmail $10). The address is 275 Kings Road, Kingston, Surrey, England.

Especially good are the letters from readers, commenting on what has appeared in the paper. Here is part of the response (in the May-June *Resurgence*) by an anonymous general practitioner to a review of Ivan Illich's *Medical Nemesis:*

> We are motivated by our training to sidestep causes and to treat symptoms which cause the patient distress. Prevention, in medical terms, means surveying a given section of the people for the early signs of a disease already established. This method thoroughly unnerves many people. We are also trained to offer treatment to all patients. Perhaps this represents a magic talisman to ensure continuing contact between the omniscient physician and the subservient patient. This unhealthy relationship could be phased out by encouraging the alternative systems of medicine. Modern western medicine is out of touch with the natural healing powers of the body and appears to be foundering in an increasingly complicated situation demanding more chemical additives, more teams of specialists to maintain and monitor each organic breakdown, more cripples and chronic sufferers surviving but not living.

Nutritionists, this doctor points out, have started another trend. They have exposed "refined sugar and fats as the main factor inducing coronary thrombosis, and recently refined diets as the cause of bowel disease." He adds:

> People themselves are finding out that a change to a vegetarian diet greatly improves or eliminates rheumatic and digestive diseases. So we are learning (or our patients are!) that it is less expensive and far safer to take personal care of our health—none of which costs the state one penny.

After speaking of the value of osteopathy, homeopathy, and acupuncture, he sketches a program to take the place of the enormously expensive and unwieldy National Health Service which now prevails in Britain:

> The new communities of the fourth world will rarely require doctors or healers of any persuasion, because the environment will be healthy, the food simple, and a proper balance will be maintained between physical and mental exercise. Members of these groups can easily obtain a knowledge of these simple down-to-earth methods of healing by reference to public libraries. Herbal medicine should be studied particularly because many of the remedies lie close at hand in the fields and hedges of England.

Certain other shrewd suggestions are made, as for example reducing doctors' fees by the cost of the drugs they prescribe, and giving osteopaths and naturopaths a chance to show the merits of their approach to health. The schools might also provide courses in alternative methods of healing. "We must," the doctor says, "give up the passive role of 'patient' imposed on us by western medicine."

Most of the articles in *Resurgence* elaborate the implications of sheer common sense. The reader is not in the hands of the experts, but is helped to recognize his own competence to make many of the decisions which bigness of industry and complex organization have put out of his reach. Take for example E. F. Schumacher's discussion of the size of organizations and its effect on people. He says:

> There are three things healthy people most need to do—to be creatively productive, to render service, and to act in accordance with their moral impulses. In all three respects modern society frustrates most of the people most of the time. Frustration makes people unhappy and often unhealthy. It can make them violent or completely listless. It makes them feel insignificant and powerless.

Mr. Schumacher examines the practical functioning of organizations from several

viewpoints. They have value, of course, but if they outgrow their optimum size the value grows less and less, until instead of being useful they menace human well-being. Following is a portion of his analysis:

> Many books have been written about moral individuals in immoral society. As society is composed of individuals, how could a society be more immoral than its members? It becomes immoral if its structure is such that moral individuals cannot act in accordance with their moral impulses. And one method of achieving this dreadful result is by letting organization become too large. (I am not asserting that there are no evil individuals capable of doing evil things no matter what may be the size of organizations or, generally, the structure of society. It is when ordinary, decent, harmless people do evil things that society gets into the deepest trouble.) . . .
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> Organizations . . . may well grow to a size that they wholly lose their nature or are altogether spoiled. An organization may have been set up to render various services to all sorts of needy people; it grows and grows, and suddenly you find that it does not serve the people any more but simply pushes them around. There may be complaints that the organization has become "too bureaucratic" and there may be denunciations of the bureaucrats. There may be demands that the incompetent bosses" of the organization should be replaced by better people. But few people seem to realize that bureaucracy is a necessary and unavoidable concomitant of excessive size, that bureaucrats cannot help being bureaucrats; and that the apparent incompetence of the bosses has almost nothing to do with their personal competence. . . .
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> The administrators of a large organization cannot deal concretely with real-life problems and situations; they have to deal with them abstractly. They cannot enjoy themselves by devising, as it were, the perfect shoe for a real foot: their task is to devise composite shoes to fit all possible feet. The variety of real life is inexhaustible, and they cannot make a special rule for each individual case. Their task is to anticipate all possible cases and to frame a minimum number of rules—a small minimum indeed!—to fit them all.
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> . . . the conclusion is obvious: let us organize units of such a size that their administrative requirements become minimal. In other words, let us have them on a human scale, so that the need for rules and regulations is minimized and all difficult cases can be resolved, as it were, on the spot, face to face, without creating precedents—for where there is no rule there cannot be a precedent.

Well, there is a lot more of this sanctified common sense in *Resurgence*, with plenty of practical illustrations—examples left out, here, because of space limitations.