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A PLACE CREATED

AFTER at least a century of neglect, Thomas Carlyle is again having his innings. Emerson understood and appreciated him, and Thoreau wrote a splendid evaluation of his work, but in the twentieth century, until now, he has been studiously ignored. What could anyone do with a man who violently attacks industrialism—saying in a few pithy paragraphs practically everything (of importance) that Jacques Ellul declared over a hundred years later in *The Technological Society*—and then, as if that were not sufficient to discredit him, added the championship of heroes and hero-worship?

Obviously, Carlyle understood us better than we have understood him. Writing in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1829, he declared the time to be "the Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word." In *The Machine in the Garden* (Oxford University Press, 1964), Leo Marx gives the substance of Carlyle's essay ("Signs of the Times"), which contains a double indictment:

> Playing upon all possible connotations of "machinery," Carlyle turns it into the controlling symbol for a new kind of culture. It is the culture, the inner world of thought and feeling, that really interests him, but he regards the image of machinery as representing the causal nexus between the new culture and the outer world, or society.

The effect of machinery on the outer world is bad enough. Carlyle wrote:

> Our old modes of exertion are all discredited, and thrown aside. On every hand, the living artisan is driven from his workshop, to make room for a speedier, inanimate one. The shuttle drops from the fingers of the weaver, and falls into iron fingers that ply it faster. . . . There is no end to machinery. Even the horse is stripped of his harness, and finds a fleet fire-horse yoked in his stead. . . . For all earthly, and for some unearthly purposes, we have machines and mechanical furtherances; for mincing our cabbages; for casting us into magnetic sleep. We remove mountains, and make seas our smooth highway; nothing can resist us. We war with rude Nature; and, by our resistless engines, come off always victorious, and loaded with spoils.

Exactly. And as Lynn White, Jr., put it in 1967, "surely no creature other than man has ever managed to foul its nest in such short order." One need only consult the writings of E. F. Schumacher, Ivan Illich, and Wendell Berry to find extensive present-day elaboration of these critical themes. But how could fairly intelligent human beings regard what Carlyle was excoriating as "good," and for so long?—until, indeed, mechanical system after mechanical system begins to break down before our eyes?

What worried Carlyle most was the resulting blindness. As Leo Marx says:

> It is the second, or "inward," sense of the word "machine," however, to which Carlyle devotes most attention. What concerns him is the way "the mechanical genius has diffused itself into quite other processes. Not the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also." Here "machinery" stands for a principle, or perspective, or system of value which Carlyle traces through every department of thought and expression: music, art, literature, science, religion, philosophy, and politics. In each category he detects the same tendency: an excessive emphasis upon means as against ends, a preoccupation with the external arrangements of human affairs as against their inner meaning and consequences.

That politics and administration have a necessary mechanical aspect, Carlyle was well aware, but he feared that mechanical thinking would eventually be regarded as the solution for all problems. Mr. Marx says:

> His point is that the age is increasingly reliant upon "mere political arrangements," and that in politics, as in all else, less and less account is being taken of that which "cannot be treated mechanically." Carlyle's immediate target is utilitarianism, with its emphasis upon the proper structure of institutions. But back of that philosophy he sees the environmentalism of the eighteenth century—the view that, on the whole, external conditions determine the quality of life, hence human suffering can best be attacked by contriving better social machinery. . . . To account for a man's ideas and values only, or even chiefly, by the circumstances in

> which he lives is, according to Carlyle, to divest his thought of will, of emotion, and creative power. If the mind is a reflex of what is [as Locke had taught], how can it possibly control circumstances? . . . "Practically considered," says Carlyle, "our creed is Fatalism; and, free in hand and foot, we are shackled in heart and soul with far straiter than feudal chains." . . .
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> In using the machine as a symbol of the age, he is saying that neither the causes nor the consequences of mechanization can be confined to the "outer" or physical world. The onset of machine power, he says, means "a mighty change in our whole manner of existence." This is the insight which would lead him to use the new word "industrialism," . . . The machine represents a change in our whole way of life, Carlyle argues, because "the same habit regulates not our modes of action alone, but our modes of thought and feeling. Men are grown mechanical in head and heart, as well as in hand."

In the past ten or fifteen years, dozens of books have appeared which confirm this contention. The entire counter-culture movement is saturated with the outlook put so clearly by Carlyle in 1829.

What did he want to do about the threat of mechanical thinking? His idea was to restore man's conception of himself, to enlarge both his sense of capacity and his sense of responsibility. How was this to be done? If Maslow had been around in that time, Carlyle would certainly have quoted him. In *Farther Reaches of Human Nature,* Maslow said:

> If we want to know how fast a human being can run, then it is no use to average out the speed of a "good sample" of the population; it is far better to collect Olympic gold medal winners and see how well they can do. If we want to know the possibilities for spiritual growth, value growth, or moral development in human beings, then I maintain that we can learn most by studying our most moral, ethical, or saintly people.

Resorting to the same sort of common sense, Carlyle wrote *On Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841). By this book he hoped to show how a new society might be born and made to rise on the ashes of the old. Parliamentary maneuvering was hardly the way. As Noel Annan has remarked:

> The answer came to Carlyle through his notion, so hated by us . . . that history can be seen as the history of great men as well as the movement of impersonal forces. The true hero does not lash the mob into submission, nor does he rely on the slavish adulation of flunkies and valets. The true hero awakens the latent heroism in his followers. To the six types of hero which Carlyle identified in his famous lectures, there should be added a seventh—regenerated man himself.

To speak in this way (in 1974—in the June 27 *New York Review of Books*) is to show that Carlyle's book is no longer "hated," but is being recognized as a precise antidote to machine thinking. Today the return to the Carlylean way of thinking—whether or not he is mentioned—has the air of revelation and new discovery. Writing in *Harper's* for last November, Henry Fairlie openly adopts Carlyle's position, beginning:

> We do not have heroes any longer, or perhaps it is more accurate to say, we do not make heroes anymore. There are some who do not mind this, and even think we may be safer without heroes. But even they acknowledge that the absence of heroes is a mark of our age, telling us something about the kind of people we are. . . .
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> A society that has no heroes will soon grow enfeebled. Its purposes will be less elevated; its aspirations less challenging; its endeavors less strenuous. Its individual members will also be enfeebled. They will "hang loose" and "lay back" and, so mellowed out, the last thing of which they wish to hear is heroism. . . . If we no longer have any heroes, it may not be because no one is fit to be a hero, but because we are not fit to recognize one. It may even be that the powers-that-be in our societies do not want us to have heroes. Heroes are against things-as-they-are. They break through the pattern of valetdom, the ruck that most of us accept out of indifference or weariness. They say that things aren't necessarily so, that they can be altered if we strain to change them. All heroes are rebels—which does not mean that all rebels are heroes—and as rebels they are spirited. Our times are dispirited.

Mr. Fairlie's article—"Too Rich for Heroes"—is mainly devoted to showing how to recognize a hero, how to distinguish a real hero from some public relations image or fabrication. There is one infallible guide: The hero always has an aroused conscience; conscienceless, cruel men are *not* heroes. And the hero also inspires:

> In the meanest of individuals, he [Carlyle] said, there lies something noble, "the unspeakable Divine Significance . . . that lies in the being of every man," and Emerson says much the same, if differently. It is in this sense that we may, without any mysticism, speak of the hero as larger than life. He reminds us of what lies unrecognized and unused in ourselves, and hardly less lies unrecognized and unused in our societies. But we have to wish to be reminded if we are to find the hero who will do the telling.

Fifty years ago, if anyone had asked what was really wrong with the world, in nine cases out of ten it would have been said that the rich and the powerful have deprived others of their rightful share of the earth's bounty. While there is truth in the charge, and may continue to be for a long time, the criticism one hears today is more directed at ourselves than toward a bad or selfish class. There is a deeper ill than greed for wealth and its unequal distribution:

> If we now have no heroes anymore, in the wider landscape of our civilization, it is because we have no shared values to inspire us to a common effort, of which the hero would be a model. In the grossly distorted individualism of today, we are incapable of imagining the selflessly disinterested hero. This may not seem to matter; we may think we can do without him. But what it also means is that we are incapable of imagining the selflessly disinterested hero in ourselves who would give himself to a cause.

There are then two questions: What is a hero? How are heroes made? The first question is easier to answer than the second. For the first there are both classic statements and classic examples. We take one statement from Ortega (*Meditations on Quixote*):

> The hero anticipates the future and appeals to it. His gestures have a utopian significance. He does not say that he is but that he wants to be. . . . As something made to live in a future world, the ideal, when it is drawn back and frozen in the present, does not succeed in satisfying the most trivial functions of existence; and so people laugh. . . . It is a useful laughter: for each hero whom it hits, it crushes a hundred frauds. . . .
>
> . . . there are men who decide not to be satisfied with reality. Such men aim at altering the course of things; they refuse to repeat the gestures that custom, tradition, or biological instincts force them to make. These men we call heroes, because to be a hero means to be one out of many, to be oneself. If we refuse to have our actions determined by heredity and environment it is because we seek to base the origin of our actions on ourselves and only on ourselves. The hero's will is not that of his ancestors nor of his society, but his own. The will to be oneself is heroism. . . . His life is a perpetual resistance to what is habitual and customary. Each movement that he makes has first had to overcome custom and invent a new kind of gesture. Such a life is a perpetual suffering, a constant tearing oneself away from that part of oneself which is given over to habit and is a prisoner of matter.

What Zakir Husain has said of Gandhi (quoted in Martin Green's *The Challenge of the Mahatmas*) makes so apt an illustration of what Ortega says that we insert it here: "His thought and speech expressed his whole personality, and his personality was not an accident of nature, or a product of inherited culture; it has been fashioned by himself, in accordance with a moral design."

Another statement on the hero—in this case called "great actor"—by John Schaar (in No. 19 of *American Review*) extends what Ortega says and verifies the illustration of Gandhi:

> One of the most important differences between great actors—think, say, of Gandhi, or Lenin or Lincoln, or Malcolm X—and most of the rest of us is that they hold their views in a way we do not. They are their views. We *have* views. . . . Great actors of course also take some of their views from others. Some they forge themselves. But once the idea or vision is forged or assimilated, it is held in a certain way. The actor does not have or possess the idea; rather, he is possessed by it. He lives his views. . . .
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> Very many great actors think in mythic terms. They are possessed by a myth, they act within it, they see it as more real than the world others call real. We, of course, think ourselves beyond myth: we are cool and intelligent. We know the difference between myth and reality. . . . We do not acknowledge that we too have myths. Sometimes when we look back over our lives, we can see that we acted on a myth, but we cannot see that we are doing that now, for if we could, then our views and beliefs would no longer be mythic. We can only see others' myths, not our own. And, finally, we cannot see that an element of the mythic mentality is probably necessary for action, because we can never know—in the meaning we ordinarily give that term—enough to assure a successful outcome.

How are heroes made?

No one can answer this question. There is no formula for indomitable will. No one can explain why Gandhi decided to redesign himself according to an ideal he held continually before himself. Moreover, there is more to a hero than his heroic actions. He has mysterious resources. Mr. Fairlie says:

> At the beginning of his essay on "Character" Emerson says that one cannot find the *weight* of such men as Philip Sidney or George Washington in their deeds alone, that what they did does not add up to the man. What lay behind their works was character, a "reserved force which acts directly by presence," and on which they could always draw, more even than they had occasion. It is enough for such men simply to arrive. Yes! But only if their own time will recognize them. We feel the "reserved force" in Washington. He was unspent to the last. . . . Unable to find heroes of our own, we are even shame-faced to talk of him as a hero. . . . Carlyle again saw what was happening. "Show our critics a great man, a Luther for example, they begin to what they call 'account' for him; not to worship him but to take the dimension of him,—and bring him out to be a little kind of man!"

So we cannot say how heroes are made, for that would be taking their dimensions, listing their ingredients, the sum of which might not be heroic at all. Mr. Fairlie wonders about this, but fortunately only wonders:

> In how many classrooms now does a picture of Washington crossing the Delaware hang on the walls? It has been replaced by the daubs of the child's own "self-expression." It is well enough to put these dribbles on the door of one's refrigerator—if one must—but the darlings should at least have some heroes on the walls of their schools. The young need heroes if they are to be led out of and beyond themselves. Sidney had the ballad of Percy and Douglass. He never read it "but that I found my heart moved more than with a trumpet." Alexander slept with the Iliad under his pillow. . . . Washington may not have been a well-read man. But the heroes of antiquity were in the air he breathed.

The *Harper's* writer strikes a blow for myth and fairy tale:

> No previous generation has treated childhood with such little respect, edging the child to cowardice, not allowing it its tribulations, lest we feel guilty, and so denying it the opportunity to develop its own heroic fantasies. . . . Fairy tales with their heroes and villains, cruelty and forgiveness, ugliness and beauty; with their strong child's sense of the endless struggle between good and evil, their breathtaking way of giving the child a hundred worlds to inhabit when it still has only its own. But among all these fantasies none is more important than the fantasizing of the child's own environment, its past and its present, which it must not only people but people with heroes.

Thoreau believes that the same nourishment is needed by adults. Choosing Carlyle's *Heroes* to stand for all his works, he admits the element of exaggeration in such writing but declares it necessary:

> There is very little of what is called criticism here; it is love and reverence, rather, which deal with qualities not relatively, but absolutely great; for whatever is admirable in a man is something infinite, to which we cannot set bounds. These sentiments allow the mortal to die, the immortal and divine to survive. There is something antique, even, in his style of treating his subject, reminding us that Heroes and Demi-gods, Fates and Furies, still exist; the common man is nothing to him, but after death the hero is apotheosized and has a place in heaven, as in the religion of the Greeks. . . .
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> Exaggerated history is poetry, and truth referred to a new standard. . . . He who cannot exaggerate is not qualified to utter truth. No truth, we think, was ever expressed but with this sort of emphasis, so that for the time there seemed to be no other.

Why have we need of heroes? Mr. Fairlie has given us many reasons, and Ortega has defined the hero's character. John Schaar describes the actual work of heroes, which seems a sufficient answer to this question:

> The future is not a result of choices among alternative paths offered by the present, but a place that is created—created first in the mind and the will, created next in activity. The future is not someplace we are going, but one we are creating. The paths to it are not found but created, and the activity of creating them changes both the maker and the destination. The place reached is rarely the place intended, and is often unrecognizable to the actor, who is himself altered by the activity.

REVIEW
SOME NATURAL RELIGION

THINKING is opening up new channels for the flow of the mind, exploring new paths where thought can go. It relates things which previously seemed separate and apart. We have been reading in Wendell Berry's *The Unsettling of America*—a good book to go back to—and found in the chapter, "The Use of Energy," what seem splendid examples of thinking. Mr. Berry, after all, is a farmer and a poet and an English teacher, so to have good ideas about energy he would either need to "bone up" on the subject or do some thinking. Doubtless he did both, but the thinking is especially evident and draws you into the chapter.

He begins:

> "Energy," said William Blake, "is Eternal Delight." And the scientific prognosticators of our time have begun to speak of the eventual opening, for human use, of "infinite" sources of energy. In speaking of the use of energy, then, we are speaking of an issue of religion, whether we like it or not.

This is hardly what one expects of a paper on energy use. Perhaps the idea of "infinite" sources of energy excited Berry's suspicion. These people, he may have thought, are making too free a use of incommensurable coefficients, dealing with matters wholly outside of normal human experience. We don't really know anything about whatever is "infinite," since nothing infinite can be measured or defined. To say a thing is infinite is to say it is beyond our grasp. So we shouldn't throw words like that around as though we know what we're talking about, giving other people the feeling that, for us, who know so much, not even the sky is the limit. We can go anywhere, do anything. There *are* grounds for suspicion in such use of language.

For this writer, the questioning becomes fruitful:

> Religion, in the root sense of the word, is what binds us back to the source of life. Blake also said that "Energy is the only life. . . . " And it is superhuman in the sense that humans cannot create it. They can only refine or convert it. And they are bound to it by one of the paradoxes of religion: they cannot have it except by losing it; they cannot use it except by destroying it. The lives that feed us have to be killed before they enter our mouths, we can only use the fossil fuels by burning them up. We speak of electrical energy as "current": it exists only while it runs away, we use it only by delaying its escape. To receive energy is at once to live and to die.

Call this the enrichment of the mind with illustrations and analogues. Is there any other way to grow in understanding? There is nothing sticky about Preacher Berry's exposition of religious truth, since it promises to be a practical affair. Moreover, he engages unexercised portions of our minds, which can be either pleasurable or embarrassing. He continues:

> Perhaps from an "objective" point of view it is incorrect to say that we can destroy energy; we can only change it. Or we can destroy it only in its current form. But from a human point of view, we can destroy it also by wasting it—that is, by changing it into a form in which we cannot use it again. As users, we can preserve energy in cycles of use, passing it again and again through the same series of forms; or we can waste it by using it once in a way that makes it irrecoverable. The human pattern of cyclic use is exemplified in the small Oriental peasant farms described in F. H. King's *Farmers of Forty Centuries*, in which all organic residues, plant and animal and human, were returned to the soil, thus keeping intact the natural cycle of "birth, growth, maturity, death, and decay" that Sir Albert Howard identified as the "Wheel of Life." The pattern of wasteful use is exemplified in the modern sewage system and the internal combustion engine. With us, the wastes that escape use typically become pollutants. This kind of use turns an asset into a liability.
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> We have two means of bringing energy to use: by living things (plants, animals, our own bodies) and by tools (machines, energy-harnesses). For the use of these we have skills or techniques. All three together comprise our technology. Technology joins us to energy, to life. It is not, as many technologists would have us believe, a simple connection. Our technology is the practical aspect of our culture. By it we enact our religion, or our lack of it.

This seems restorative of the whole idea of religion. Religion is not made of competing words in competing Holy Books. Holy books may have the possibility of religious truth in them, but religion really begins with the way people live lives in harmony with their ideas about meaning and human purpose. If the lives are all fouled up, then the thing to do is to examine critically both the ideas and the practice of them. Either one or both make serious mistakes. What we think or what we do is not "binding us back."

Mr. Berry says:

> I began . . . by trying to make a clear distinction between the living organisms and skills of technology and its mechanisms, and to say that the living aspect was better than the mechanical. I found it impossible to make such a distinction. I thought of going back through history to a point at which such a distinction would become possible but found that the farther back I went the less possible it became. When people had no machines other than throwing stones and clubs, their technology was all of a piece. It stayed that way through their development of more sophisticated tools, their mastery of fire, their domestication of plants and animals. Lives, skills, and tools were culturally indivisible.
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> The question at issue, then, is not of distinction but of balance. The ideal seems to be that the living part of our technology should not be devalued or overpowered by the mechanical. Because the biological limits are probably narrower than the mechanical, this calls for restraint on the proliferation of machines.
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> At some point in history the balance between life and machinery was overthrown. I think this began to happen when people began to desire long-term stores or supplies of energy—that is, when they began to think of energy as volume as well as force—and when machines ceased to enhance or elaborate skill and began to replace it.

This sort of thinking is far from common, these days; it has nothing to do with the acquisitive motives behind the manuals for managers. There is, after all, an enormous difference between showing a profit and living a life. Showing a profit is of course a condition of survival in business, but mere survival is not a formula for living a life. Survival only allows the living to go on. For the most part, knowing no other value, our civilization has exaggerated its essentials into the goal of more and more profit, calling the result the Progress which brings us Better Things.

The kind of thinking which seeks the fulfillment of meaning is not concerned with these calculations. Its assumptions are at another level and its reasoning moves in another direction, dealing with realities which are simply not there for the acquisitive frame of mind. For example, this is the way Wendell Berry thinks about what some people call patriotism:

> The concept of country, homeland, dwelling place becomes simplified as "the environment"—that is, what surrounds us. Once we see our place, our part of the world as *surrounding* us, we have already made a profound division between it and ourselves. We have given up the understanding—dropped it out of our language and so out of our thought—that we and our country create one another, depend on one another, are literally part of one another; that our land passes in and out of our bodies just as our bodies pass in and out of our land; that as we and our land are part of one another, so all who are living as neighbors here, human and plant and animal, are part of one another, and so cannot possibly flourish alone; that, therefore, our culture must be our response to our place, our culture and our place are images of each other and inseparable from each other, and so neither can be better than the other.
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> Because by definition they lack any such sense of mutuality or wholeness, our specializations subsist on conflict with one another. The rule is never to cooperate, but rather to follow one's own interest as far as possible. Checks and balances are applied externally, by opposition, never by self-restraint. Labor, management, the military, the government, etc., never forbear until their excesses arouse enough opposition to *force* them to do so. The good of the whole of Creation, the world and all its creatures together, is never a consideration because it is never thought of; our culture now simply lacks the means for thinking of it.

There is no more positive and valuable mode of critical thinking than this. It demonstrates the truth of Plato's statement that Ideas rule the

world. What we do not think about cannot possibly be brought into being by us. And the ground of all thinking is its primary assumptions—the outlook from which we *start*.

By way of an example he shows where now prevailing assumptions lead. No matter how well intentioned we are, we cannot accomplish with "money"—sending checks to good causes—what needs to be done within the grain of our own lives. On working through organizations, he says:

> Although responsible use may be defined, advocated, and to some extent required by organizations, it cannot be implemented or enacted by them. It cannot be effectively enforced by them. The use of the world is finally a personal matter, and the world can be preserved in health only by the forbearance and care of a multitude of persons. That is, the possibility of the world's health will have to be defined in the characters of persons as clearly and as urgently as the possibility of personal "success" is now so defined. Organizations may promote this sort of forbearance and care, but they cannot provide it.

This seems an account of how contemporary natural religion might be generated.

COMMENTARY
IDEAS WHOSE TIME HAS COME

THOREAU'S appreciation of Thomas Carlyle—briefly quoted on page 7—appeared in *Graham's Magazine* in 1847. It was a review of what the Scot essayist had written by the time he was fifty, and is itself a gem of expression which gives ample reason for going back and reading both these writers again and again. Both had muscle as well as grace in their prose. Speaking of Carlyle's qualities, Thoreau said:

> This man has something to communicate. Carlyle's are not, in the common sense, works of art in their origin and aim; and yet, perhaps, no living English writer evinces an equal literary talent. They are such works of art only as the plough and corn-mill and steam-engine—not as pictures and statues. Others speak with greater emphasis to scholars, but none so earnestly and effectually to all who can read. Others give their advice, but he gives his sympathy also. It is no small praise that he does not take upon himself the airs, has none of the whims, none of the pride, the nice vulgarities, the starched, impoverished isolation, and cold glitter of the spoiled children of genius. He does not need to husband his pearl, but excels by a greater humanity and sincerity.
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> He is singularly serious and untrivial. We are everywhere impressed by the rugged, unwearied, and rich sincerity of the man. We are sure that he never sacrificed one jot of his honest thought to art or whim, but to utter himself in the most direct and effectual way—that is the endeavor. These are merits which will wear well. When time has worn deeper into the substance of these books, this grain will appear.

That time is now. We have only to turn to the few quotations in this issue of MANAS to recognize the truth of Thoreau's prediction.

Thoreau is no less admiring of Carlyle's language:

> Indeed, for fluency and skill in the use of the English tongue, he is a master unrivalled. His felicity and power of expression surpass even his special merits as historian and critic. Therein his experience has not failed him, but furnished him with such a store of winged, ay and legged words, as only a London life, perchance, could give account of. We had not understood the wealth of the language before. Nature is ransacked, and all the resorts and purlieus of humanity are taxed, to furnish the fittest symbol for his thought. He does not go to the dictionary, the word-book, but to the word manufactory itself, and has made endless work for the lexicographers. Yes, he has that same English for his mother-tongue that you have, but with him it is no dumb, muttering, mumbling faculty, concealing the thoughts but a keen, unwearied, resistless weapon. He has such command of it as neither you nor I have; and it would be well for any who have lost horse to advertise, or a town-meeting warrant, or a sermon, or a letter to write, to study this universal letter-writer, for he knows more than the grammar or the dictionary.

This is criticism by an equal! The just compliments to Carlyle are possible only because of Thoreau's genius. But he does not only praise. His critical comment is that Carlyle calls his readers to action, not to thought or philosophy. But a peculiar virtue results:

> One merit in Carlyle, let the subject be what it may, is the freedom of prospect he allows, the entire absence of cant and dogma. He removes cart-loads of rubbish, and leaves open a broad highway. His writings are all unfenced on the side of the future and the possible. Though he does not inadvertently direct our eyes to the open heavens, nevertheless he lets us wander broadly underneath, and shows them to us reflected in innumerable pools and lakes.
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> These volumes contain not the highest, but a very practicable wisdom, which startles and provokes. Carlyle does not oblige us to think; we have thought enough for him already, but he compels us to act.

In short, Carlyle should belong to the Americans, now. We need him, and he speaks directly to us.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
SWEET-SOUR REFLECTIONS

A SPECIAL temperament is required to write a book about "play." Does anybody really need to be told how to play? Isn't play something like fairy tales? If children are denied the imaginative stories which have come down through tradition, they invent their own, it is said. Wouldn't they make up ways of playing, too? Perhaps spirited and resilient children would invent their own games, but years ago teachers in poverty-stricken Appalachia found that the singing games normally transmitted from one generation of children to another had died out, and specialists from New York had to go South to *teach* them to the children and get the cycle of play going agate!

That we may now need a book on how to play seems somewhat ominous. Years ago Ananda Coomaraswamy (in *The Bugbear of Literacy*) pointed out that when scholars and musicologists feel the need to collect folk songs and put them in books, the songs are no longer sung by the people and have to be "preserved," as in a museum. Has this now happened with play?

Anyone who grew up on the streets of a large city, fifty or sixty years ago, would probably say, Not true! Children then played stick-ball in the streets—traffic was light in those days—and if they had no ball they played something called "one-a-cat," in which a short piece of wood was used instead of a ball. The wood (about three inches of broomstick) was pointed at one end so that if you hit the point with a longer stick, used as a sort of bat, it would fly in the air while you began to run bases. Then there was marble season, and kites in the suburbs.

In the first chapter of *Ways To Play*, just published by Rodale Press (edited by James McCullagh, $6.95 in paperback), Paul Hogan declares:

> In America today, children's play is at its lowest point in history. The basic elements of life—fire, water, food and shelter—are no longer a part of the scene in our playgrounds. Play is directed from above (adults) and scorned. Our playgrounds are designed by adults and destroyed by children.

It may be a pity, but after you look through this book—starting, perhaps, a bit disdainfully—you realize that such a book is needed, after all. It tells what a great many of the young (and adults) are missing. Mr. Hogan reminds us in his contribution (eight writers make the book) of the time when many children worked in textile mills.

(Admirers of Bellamy's *Looking Backward* may be interested to know that sight of small children going to and from work in a mill in New England, where Bellamy lived, inspired him with the fervor to *change* the society where such things were acceptable.) But the mills were not the only enemies of childhood. Hogan says:

> Often the problem was to choose between the lesser of two evils. Many children actually chose work in the mill or mine in preference to going to school, being beaten by the teacher, learning nothing and being abused at home for being a parasite. At least one could bring home a pay envelope and contribute to the family.

Today, of course, it is different. . .

> The child is no longer the slave of the mill owner. Our children have replaced the mill owner with TV, junk foods emporia and blocks of concrete called playgrounds. The child is not left alone to develop at a normal rate, the boy is bombarded with commercial doubts about his masculinity as much as the girl is questioned about her femininity. Buy this, visit fantasy land, try a new breakfast cereal that not only barks but makes you more attractive to the opposite sex, wear the latest fad, play the latest record, hang out at this week's "in" spot.
>
> Fifty years ago, the children in the six one-room schoolhouses of my home township, Charlestown, played in the mud and snow and enjoyed the elements and each other. Now, with a new million-dollar school complete with terrazzo floors, the children are not allowed to play in the snow. They spend several hours a day on a school bus and are taught more by machines than humans.
>
> Their playgrounds are static and sterile. There are no rope and tire swings. The manufactured swings are broken. The architect told us the terrazzo floor would be impervious to snow, mud or water. But the janitor doesn't want to do his job and mop the

floor, so 350 country kids can't build snow forts or men or slide or skate. They go home and terrorize their parents with their pent-up energy.

Today there is neither time nor space in the child's world for tree houses, caves, mud puddles and such. There are no more mud puddles. All is asphalt. The tree house has been replaced by a $5,000 prefabricated steel pipe rocket ship which challenges the imagination in two ways. The first challenge which appears in the four-color catalogue is to help the child imagine he is an astronaut. This challenge lasts up to fifteen minutes.

The greater challenge is to see how to take the rocket ship apart. This might take up to a full workweek for ten children. I can't believe our recreation leaders don't see this. I can only conclude that they have too great an investment to back off now and redirect their energies and our money to service rather than product.

Well, reading this may produce indignation of various sorts. Ours is aimed at the expression, "recreation leaders." Not at those friendly people, but because we seem to need them. What a ridiculous expression! "Teacher" is not a ridiculous expression, and in a society which makes some sense to itself and to children, what help is needed in recreation would be given casually by the teachers. Trained "professionals" would not be required.

We ought to be most uncomfortable about living in a society which can't get along without scores of specialists—recreation leaders, social workers, truant officers, and so on—rank upon rank of service people trained to deal with the inadequacies and pick up the pieces of a society still quite blandly ignorant of how far it has gone wrong.

This seems the thing to say to oneself, now and then, while reading even a very good book about how to play, and how to make normal play a little more possible for children. We need the book (and these helpful people), but what a crying shame that we do! This is not a need we should ever get adjusted to!

Nor should we remain complacent about a home environment in which there is nothing for children to do in behalf of the family but mow the lawn and wash the dishes. How many adults are now left who grew up on a farm and can remember what it was like? Only four or five per cent of the population now works in agriculture, many of them on enormous agribusiness enterprises, which is something like working in a factory. No place for children there (except as "workers").

So, today, we may need specialists to help us realize what progress and modern life have shut out.

What is play, anyway? One good definition is "work without responsibility." This accounts for much of what it means to children, who continually play at being adults. Of course, if children never see familiar adults at work (and couldn't make much sense out of what adults do if they did), it is natural enough for them to play at being astronauts or men from Mars who seem never to do anything but shoot rocket machine guns at each other, or fence, as in *Star Wars*, with lethally radiant swords.

Ways To Play is a richly illustrated (with splendid photographs) encyclopedia of ways to recover natural play for children and ourselves—a healthy-minded book for people who may have forgotten how to play and what play means to children. A dreamy concluding passage is by the architect, Malcolm Wells:

Someday, perhaps during our lifetimes, if the life-movement continues its lusty growth, the towns and cities of America will be all vine-draped and meadowed, ready for outdoor healthful play. The underground architecture movement alone is likely to return thousands and thousands of asphalt acres to life. All we need is a clear choice, a choice between dead, polluted, ugly cities, and clean, healthful, beautiful cities, and we'll make the right decision. We'll no longer have to set aside old railroad beds or unused corners of shopping centers for play. Acres of gardens and lawns, forests and wildflowers, will lie at our doorsteps.

Imagine running to work in bare feet!

Well, architects are entitled to a little playing around with really good ideas.

FRONTIERS

Goliath, and a David or Two

THIS week we have a grab-bag of contradictions—first a horror story (or a collection of them), then some counter-forces against a world of horrors (such as they are), and finally some notes on a little action toward another kind of life.

The horror stories are in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* for last September. They are not inappropriate there. That magazine was started by scientists who felt it necessary to speak out against the threat of nuclear war. They believed that they understood better than other people the dimensions of its horror and should tell the public what they know.

The article which compelled notice here is by Charles Schwartz, who begins:

> The University of California is the *alma mater* of every single nuclear weapon in the U.S. military arsenal. Since the dawn of the Atomic Age, this great university has been the government's trusted administrator of two unique laboratories whose mission has been to develop ever-improved warheads for all the nation's strategic nuclear weapons.

The labs are in Los Alamos, N.M., and Livermore, Calif., and we learn that the University has little of importance to say about what is done in them. The writer maintains that "there is practically no control over the labs other than the military; that there is very little effective review of the weapons programs by the democratically responsible people in either the executive or legislative branches of our government; and that the university, by playing the silent partner in this arrangement, has committed a grave disservice to the people of this nation." When, a little over a year ago, six persons sat in the office of U.C. President Saxon for thirty hours, hoping to persuade him to provide someone who would publicly debate with them on whether or not the University of California should be so deeply involved in the nuclear weapons business, he ordered their arrest.

Mr. Schwartz concludes his factually searching account:

> Thus the university provides an aura of academic respectability to the business of weapons development and provides the laboratory management with a two-sided carte blanche: they are free of any supervision from within the university and yet the university name gives them independence from any other source of control.
>
> What the university has given to the weaponeers is more than freedom, it is license: license to promote their own bureaucratic and political interests with an absolute minimum of accountability to the democracy that they claim their work is intended to protect.

Other horror stories in the *Bulletin* include one on the imprisonment of Yuri Orlov, a Soviet physicist, for daring to work for human freedom in Russia, one on the threat of cancer in any amount of "low-level ionizing radiation," George Kistiakowsky's much published exposé, "The Folly of the Neutron Bomb," and, finally, a study by Joseph Weizenbaum showing the misuse of computers and listing the cultural delusions fostered by some computer scientists. The prospect of what may happen when home computers become common is pictured in terms of the increasing invention of *needs* for the minicomputer to deal with. This professor of computer science at M.I.T. points out:

> The use of large-scale computer-based information systems induces an extremely poverty-stricken notion of knowledge and fact. Unfortunately, this same notion—a kind of pragmatic positivism bordering on scientism—dominates much of the thinking of modern intellectuals and political leaders, as well as ordinary people. It has no *necessary* relationship to the computer, but the computer is its most stark symbolic manifestation.

What counter tendencies can be observed ~ On the anniversary of the birth of Lyof Tolstoy, Norman Cousins (in the *Saturday Review* for Oct. 28 of last year) provided a perceptive account of the life and work of the great Russian writer, about whom new books are now appearing. After reviewing the contradictions in Tolstoy's life, Mr. Cousins says:

> The fact of paradoxes and inconsistencies is not what is most important in any evaluation of Tolstoy and his work. What is important is that he had a vision of true nobility—not the nobility conferred by political or ecclesiastical authority but the nobility conferred by human decency and the acceptance of moral responsibility. Through the magic of his words he brought sensitivities to life that helped shape the contours of human thought in millions of people everywhere. His words were sublime in a way that gave a vision of what human beings might achieve or become. Whether he is the greatest writer of any age or place, or the greatest Russian writer, or even the author of the finest single novel in any language is not relevant. What is relevant is that his writings enlarge our awareness of the preciousness of life even as they give us a glimpse of the hidden potentialities of the human mind and soul.

To this we add a brief quotation from Tolstoy's daughter Tatyana, who said in her book, *Tolstoy Remembered:*

> "I would like to stress this trait in my father's character: not only did he never preach or moralize to people, even within the family, he refrained from ever giving them advice. He talked to us very rarely about his beliefs. His inner struggle was something he pursued alone.

The bad things happening are obvious and easy to count, the good things partly subjective and often difficult to identify. That may be one of the important differences between good and evil. We probably have little idea of how much, in these evil days, we are supported by intangible good.

Meanwhile, various useful experiments and innovations are going on, reported in journals like *Rain, Self-Reliance, People and Energy,* and others of like content. We have room for short notice of a story in *Compost Science/Land Utilization,* of which Jerome Goldstein (formerly with *Organic Gardening*) is editor. Miranda Smith tells about reclaiming neglected and abandoned land in the South Bronx. The Bronx Frontier Development Corporation obtained access to twelve wasting acres and after months of frustrating preparation is now producing 500 cubic yards of compost per week, using vegetable waste from a large local market and leaves from a nearby township. The article concludes:

> The lots have been prepared by the community groups who will be using them to grow vegetables or provide recreational space. The greening of the South Bronx begins in earnest this year.