VOLUME XXXVII, NO. 13
MARCH 28,1984

THE ACTS OF INDIVIDUALS

CONCERNING the making of history there are two schools of thought. The first of these, perhaps still the dominant one, holds that the major contributing factors that shape our lives are all environmental and that we can do very little about them—Herbert Spencer's view. Later scholars of related persuasion were H.A.L. Fisher, who mournfully admitted that he saw no unfolding plot or rhythm in the course of events, which to him seemed the succession of emergency after emergency, presenting only one rule for the historian—that they are unpredictable; and the American, Charles A. Beard, whose credo was: "It may be that some larger world process is working through each series of historical events; but ultimate causes lie beyond our horizon."

The other view of history maintains that humans may take a conscious part in shaping their destiny. Perhaps somewhat arbitrarily, we choose Thomas Carlyle—of fame as both essayist and historian—as the first distinguished protagonist of this view. After him, and certainly as distinguished, came William James, and then, more or less in our own time, Frederick J. Teggart and A. H. Maslow. Maslow did not write history, but he taught a psychology suggesting that humans can in significant measure take charge of their own lives.

We have good reason for inviting attention to the contrast between these views, for insofar as we take either one or the other seriously, we become either active or passive in relation to our own history. There are urgent reasons for making up our minds on this question, since the recent events in the history of our own country—and of the entire western world—suggest a distinctly downward course. How much, we might ask ourselves, have past decisions to do with this trend? And what of today? Are we the passive victims of inexorable fate? That it often seems so, one must admit. And if experts like Fisher and Beard have no counsel as to how to get at and change the processes of history, who are we to declare that this is possible? As the TV journalist said when confronted with evidence that technical and political authorities had misled the public about what had happened at Three Mile Island: "Who am I to be the arbiter between Ph.D.'s?"

Well, there is a line of thinking that will give us support. At the beginning of his *Heroes and Hero-worship* (in the first of a series of lectures of which the book was made, given in 1840), Carlyle declared:

> . . . Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, the patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realization and embodiment of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history, it may justly be considered, were the history of these.

Carlyle, as we know, did not make himself popular with this contention. He wrote—or lectured—only eight years before Marx and Engels published their *Communist Manifesto,* the gospel of the militant Mass Man, which made clear their failure to appreciate the services of great men in the formation of the democratic societies which emerged in the nineteenth century, after the era of revolution. A full century would have to pass before the significance of Carlyle's dictum would begin to gain acceptance. Yet de Tocqueville, writing five years or more before Carlyle's address, had warned his own countrymen of the lack in France of guidance to its new form of government. "Democracy," he said, "has consequently been abandoned to its wild instincts, and it has grown up like those children who have no parental guidance, who receive their education in the public streets, and who are acquainted only with the vices and wretchedness of society." Carlyle, we might remember, had attained fame in 1837 with his *History of the French*

Revolution and was doubtless fully aware of the tendencies of which de Tocqueville warned. As a reviewer, Noel Annan, said ten years ago in the *New York Review of Books*, Carlyle's problem was to understand how, after revolution, the organic growth of a new society could be fostered and led. The unimaginative processes of parliamentary government could not show the way. Annan said:

> 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.

In 1873, in his *Study of Sociology*, Herbert Spencer argued that even the "great man" is wholly the product of society. He is not an initiator but a *resultant.* An outspoken opponent of the "great man theory of history," Spencer said: "The genesis of societies by the action of great men may be comfortably believed so long as, resting in general notions you do not ask for particulars. But now, if, dissatisfied with vagueness, we demand that our ideas shall be brought into focus and exactly defined, we discover the hypothesis to be utterly incoherent." This assertion, and the arguments which followed, became a challenge to William James. Accordingly, in a lecture, "Great Men and their Environment," before the Harvard Natural History Society (later published in the *Atlantic Monthly* for October, 1880), James said:

> Now, it seems to me that there is something one might almost call impudent in the attempt which Mr. Spencer makes, in the first sentence of this extract, to pin the reproach of vagueness upon those who believe in the power of the initiative of the great man.
>
> Suppose I say that the singular moderation which now distinguishes social, political, and religious discussion in England, and contrasts so strongly with the bigotry and dogmatism of sixty years ago, is largely due to J. S. Mill's example. I may possibly be wrong about the facts; but I am, at any rate, "asking for particulars," and not "resting in general notions." And if Mr. Spencer should tell me it started from no personal influence whatever but from the "aggregate of conditions," the "generations," Mill and all his contemporaries "descended from," the whole past order of nature in short, surely he, not I, would be the person "satisfied with vagueness." . . .
>
> Can it be that Mr. Spencer holds the convergence of sociological pressures to have so impinged on Stratford-upon-Avon about the 26th of April, 1564, that a W. Shakespeare, with all his mental peculiarities, had to be born there—as the pressure of water outside a certain boat will cause a stream of a certain form to ooze into a particular leak? And does he mean to say that if the aforesaid W. Shakespeare had died of cholera infantum, another mother at Stratford-upon-Avon would needs have engendered a duplicate copy of him, to restore the sociological equilibrium,—just as the same stream of water will reappear, no matter how often you pass a sponge over the leak, so long as the outside level remains unchanged? Or might the substitute arise at "5tratford-atte-Bowe"? Here, as elsewhere, it is very hard, in the midst of Mr. Spencer's vagueness, to tell what he does mean at all.

By reason of the importance of this question, we repeat here Harold Goddard's reasons for opposing literary evaluations which declare that great writers are no more than "products of their times." In *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, he says:

> Why are Shakespeare's ideas in so many instances indistinguishable from what may be called the ideas of his time? But why, then, we may ask in turn, has the world shown no such consuming interest in the other men who followed those same fashions and held those same ideas? Plainly, it is something that differentiates Shakespeare from his age not something that integrates him with it, that is the source of his attraction for us. . . . There are two ways of fitting into one's environment that are as opposite as night and day. To fit into one's age as mud does into a crack, or to be molded by it as putty is under a thumb is one thing; to fit into it and to use it creatively as a seed fits into and uses soil is quite another. The secret of why the germinating seed selects certain ingredients of the soil, while utterly ignoring others, lies in the seed, not in the soil.

Back to James, to his brief statement of what he believes about the making of history:

> The mutations of societies, then, from generation to generation, are in the main due directly to the acts or the example of individuals whose genius was so adapted to the receptivities of the moment, or whose accidental position of authority was so critical

> that they became ferments, initiators of movement, setters of precedent or fashion, centres of corruption, or destroyers of other persons, whose gifts, had they had free play, would have led society in another direction.

In a brief note, a reply to Grant Allen's criticism of the foregoing position declared by James, in which Allen contended that a nation's great men "are but slight deviations from the general level," James concluded: "And I for my part cannot but consider the talk of the contemporary sociological school about averages and general laws and predetermined tendencies, with its obligatory undervaluing of the importance of individual differences, as the most pernicious and immoral of fatalisms." "Suppose," he went on, "there is a social equilibrium fated to be, whose is it to be,—that of your preference or mine? There lies the question of questions, and it is one which no study of averages can decide."

(The quotations from William James are taken from the Dover edition of James's *The Will To Believe* and his *Human Immortality*, bound in one volume.)

A passage in A. H. Maslow's *Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (1971) is directly related to James's remark about the uselessness of "averages" when it comes to understanding human excellence. In psychological research of this sort Maslow called for "a change in our conception of statistics, and especially of sampling theory."

> What I am frankly espousing here is what I have been calling "growing tip-statistics," taking my title from the fact that it is at the growing tip of a plant that the greatest genetic action takes place. . . .
>
> If I ask the question, "Of what are human beings capable? " I put the question to this small and selected superior group rather than to the whole of the population. I think that the main reason that hedonistic value theories and ethical theories have failed throughout history has been that the philosophers have locked in pathologically motivated pleasures with healthily motivated pleasures and struck an average of what amounts to indiscriminately sick and healthy, indiscriminately good and bad specimens, good and bad choosers, biologically sound and biologically unsound specimens.
>
> If we want to answer the question how tall can the human species grow, then obviously it is well to pick out the ones who are already tallest and study them. 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.
>
> On the whole I think it is fair to say that human history is a record of the ways in which human nature has been sold short. The highest possibilities of human nature have practically always been underrated. Even when "good specimens," the saints and sages and great leaders of history have been available for study, the temptation too often has been to consider them not human but supernaturally endowed.

In a way, Maslow is here but repeating James in urging the study of the best "specimens," or, as James put it,stressing that "in picking out from history our heroes, and communing with their kindred spirits,—in imagining as strongly as possible what differences their individualities brought about in this world, while its surface was still plastic in their hands, and what whilom feasibilities they made impossible,—each one of us may best fortify and inspire what creative energy may lie in his own soul."

Why, one may ask, have not more scientific thinkers adopted this encouraging view? The explanation is given by James in saying: "The causes of production of great men lie in a sphere wholly inaccessible to the social philosopher." The trained scientist must become a layman when considering the question. He has no more competence to answer it than the rest of us. "For him," as James says, "as for Darwin, the only problem is, these data being given, How does the environment affect them, and how do they affect the environment?" The inclination of the scientifically minded is to minimize as unimportant what they cannot explain, so that geniuses or great men are defined as "but slight deviations from the general level." Actually, reading a few biographies soon puts an end to this all-too-casual assumption.

We go, finally, to the American historian, Frederick J. Teggart. In his preface to *Rome and China* (University of California Press, 1939), he calls attention to an important aspect of history which, as he points out, has been largely ignored. He says:

> . . . I may point to the great religious movements associated with the names of Zoroaster in Persia, Lao-tse and Confucius in China, Mahavira (founder of Jainism) and Gautama Buddha in India, the prophets Ezekiel and Second Isaiah, Thales in Ionia, and Pythagoras in southern Italy. All these great personages belong to the sixth century B.C., and their appearance certainly constitutes a class of events. Yet, though the correspondence of these events has frequently been observed, no serious effort has ever been made, so far as I have been able to discover, to treat the appearance of these great teachers—within a brief compass of time—as a problem which called for systematic investigation. But without this knowledge how are we to envisage or comprehend the workings of the human spirit?

Really serious thinkers—men like Carlyle, James, Maslow, and Teggart—do not evade these most difficult questions and problems, but try to keep them alive and before us. They do not minimize the great because they are few, and seem scientifically inexplicable, but remind us of them as unsolved mysteries. Teggart continues:

> Think of ancient Egypt and Babylonia. Think of Sophocles and Shakespeare. How are the cessations of effort to be accounted for? Think of the old antagonists Greece and Persia. On these questions men have speculated and have written many books. But no one has approached the questions with any semblance to the patient care exercised in the study of an atom of hydrogen, even though the systematic investigation of the problems hinted at lies well within the limits of possibility.

Robert Nisbet, in his chapter on Teggart as historian and teacher in Joseph Epstein's *Masters* (Basic Books, 1981), recalls the way in which, in a class at Berkeley, he stressed the importance of such conjunctions in history as the appearance in the sixth century B.C. of these several teachers who had immeasurable historical impact:

> How, Teggart would ask, his voice rising in dramatic emphasis, are we to confront this astonishing phenomenon? As a true *problem*, warranting the most careful research? Or do we walk away from it as a—and his voice would ascend still higher—all stops pulled—*mere coincidence?*

He also drew attention to "the sporadic, uneven appearances in world history of the great ages of intellectual and cultural achievements—such as the Athens of Pericles, the European twelfth century, the Age of Elizabeth, the Han dynasty in China, the Age of the Guptas in India, and so forth." For twenty years before publication of *Rome and China*, Nisbet says, these ideas were presented to students in his introductory course and to senior graduate seminars in which students "worked at the problem constituted by recurring ages of sterility as well as of efflorescence in human achievement."

Teggart, however, was a loner in education; his unconventional approach in both scholarship and teaching isolated him from the rest of the faculty. The same cannot be said of James, although he proved unable to give the direction to psychological research that was suggested in his books and essays. In an age of mediocre scholars determined to consolidate the stance of nineteenth-century materialism, applying it to all branches of investigation and learning, James was a brilliant maverick of independent mind. He saw clearly that work in keeping with the assumptions of the science of his time was wearing away at the conception of the human being as an entity possessed of free will, imaginative powers, and capable, in rare cases of unusual development, of having a profound effect on history and the affairs of men.

James—like the others, Carlyle, Teggart, and Maslow, we have quoted—was able to look at the world without submitting to the prejudice of conventional minds. These writers and teachers, along with the great humans they admired, studied, and wrote about, became makers of history by focusing on the sources of desirable historical change.

REVIEW
DARWIN—AFTER A CENTURY

ANOTHER book on Charles Darwin—*Darwin's Legacy*—has appeared, edited by Charles L. Hamrun, professor of biology at Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota, with contributions by Stephen Jay Gould, Irving Stone, Richard Leakey, Peter Medawar, Edward O. Wilson, and Jaroslav Pelikan (published by Harper & Row, 1983, $5.95). The contents are the result of papers presented by the participants of the eighteenth Nobel Conference (1982), a series of meetings begun by Edgar M Carlson. The book is essentially in honor of Darwin, at the time of the centennial of his death, and it is plain that he deserves to be honored, whether as a practicing scientist or a progressive force in humanism.

How, then, should Darwin be evaluated, in this last quarter of the twentieth century? The contributors do not argue this question, but each one manifestly has his own opinion. For example, Sir Peter Medawar, awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1960, distinguished clearly between Darwinism and "the hypothesis of evolution." He said:

> Evolution is an historical statement about what is thought to have happened in the past. Darwinism is an attempted explanation of how evolution came about. If Darwinism is found wanting, this should not in any degree shake our confidence in evolution. Another cause for misunderstanding is the belief on the part of the lay public that one *proves* such hypotheses as the hypothesis of evolution. It is thought that there are a number of proofs, the acceptance of which justifies our believing in evolution. This is not the case. . . . Misgivings about Darwinism itself are an entirely separate consideration. I answer most emphatically, and no amount of questioning will make me change this opinion, that the profession believes in evolution and that a professional biologist is an evolutionist. He realizes that the alternative to thinking in evolutionary terms about the subject matter of evolution is to avoid thinking at all. That is a rather desperate expedient to which it seems the opponents of the hypothesis of evolution are ever more frequently having recourse.

This expression gives evidence of the willingness of evolutionists to consider that the very idea of evolution may itself evolve, or change. An interesting contrast with the views of the biologists is presented by Prof. Pelikan, a cultural historian who teaches history at Yale. Tracking down the first use of the term "evolution" in English, drawing on "the fossil record of the English language (otherwise known as the Oxford English dictionary)," he finds it occurring in "the writings of the Cambridge Platonists, Henry More and Ralph Cudworth," from whom he quotes. He then says:

> From these passages, it is evident that in the earliest stages of its own evolution as an English word, *evolution* was closely related to, and seems sometimes to have been virtually identical with, the Neoplatonic concept of emanation. Significantly, Henry More is also one of the earliest witnesses for the use of *emanation* as an English word: "Man's soul not by creation. . . . Wherefore let it be by emanation," he said.

Evidently, for the Cambridge Platonists as well as for the Neoplatonists, evolution or emanation meant a growth or development of soul through the exercise of mind, or "our rational faculties," as Benjamin Whichcote put it in his *Aphorisms.* This idea is in striking contrast with the view of the present-day anthropologist, Richard Leakey, director of the National Museums of Kenya and leader of expeditions to well-known sites in Africa. Discussing what makes the difference between, say, a chimpanzee and a human, he rejects the matter of comparative intelligence as of practically no importance. Our humanness, he declares, is evidenced by the fact that we walk on two legs while chimpanzees and gorillas walk on four. He regards our upright stance as much more important than our intelligence, remarking light-heartedly that even "some of our friends are not particularly intelligent." Leakey, it seems, has only a physiological conception of man and human evolution However, to be fair, we should report that when a man in one of his audiences asked him whether he had in all his experience ever "met a

monkey that knew the meaning of sin," Leakey said that this word signified the capacity to tell right from wrong and that he doubted that we should be able to find the origin of this ability by "looking at fossils."

Irving Stone, Darwin's most recent biographer (*The* Origin, 1980), asks, "What was the human mind prior to Charles Darwin's body of work? What basic changes in the thought processes of that mind did his books bring about?" He answers that Darwin loosened the shackles of bigotry on the human mind.

> No one man frees the mind of its shackles. Yet in the nineteenth century, those shackles, heavily encrusted with barnacles, were shaken by Charles Darwin as leader and as symbol for the freedom of investigation. The powers he released were in the natural sciences, the life sciences. But once the new virus of freedom against public opposition was injected into the social corpus, it quickly infected all aspects of man's endeavor. . . . What precisely did Darwin change? He unbolted the heavily locked doors of our minds and let them stand open to the sunshine of free inquiry.

The idea of "the evolution of evolution"—an expression used by Prof. Pelikan—seems the heart of the matter, when it comes to an evaluation of Darwin's contribution. The same may be said of serious practice of any of the sciences. A fundamental of science is that "final truth" is not a scientific goal, but rather a steady movement toward conclusions which may be at least closer to the truth. Darwinism, in short, may in the progress of time undergo radical revisions, resulting in the abandonment of temporary scientific "orthodoxies," some of which may have expression in this book. For example, no matter what Prof. Leakey may think about the importance of intelligence in contrast with "bipedalism," it can be pointed out that Darwin admitted in a letter to Wallace that the "survival of the fittest" as applied to man meant survival in terms of the development of his "intellectual and *moral* qualities." (1864.) There may be a legitimate symbolism in equating an "upright" stance with moral development, but it is hard to believe, as Leakey suggests, that the "grassland habitat," which he places at about nine million years ago, is responsible for the emergence of modern man. He says that what concerns him "at the moment" is "whether or not we can relate the beginnings of bipedalism to that event."

From the viewpoint provided by Irving Stone—that Darwin's great contribution was an emancipation of the human mind from the bonds of reductive religious dogma—we might take note of the fact that Galileo may be similarly honored for directing the attention of the awakening mind of Europe to observation and experiment, instead of relying on the texts of the scholastics for knowledge of the natural world. Yet Galileo was also the putative author of the mechanist doctrines which in the course of three hundred years became a form of bondage almost as stultifying to human development as the unimaginative claims of religious orthodoxy. William James noted this in his *Psychology: Briefer Course*, remarking that when psychology is finally liberated from its materialistic origins in modern times, it will be essentially a metaphysical discipline. And a present-day cultural anthropologist, Marshall Sahlins, observed dryly in a recent book that while we think we are descended from "savages," all the other peoples in the world think their ancestors were the gods.

That changes in our conception of evolution are to be expected is also the conclusion of Peter Medawar, who says:

> In the early years of the century, the mechanism of heredity of which Darwin had no conception at all, slowly began to be known because of the promulgation of Mendel's experiments, especially by William Bateson in England. From the standpoint of the man who knew something about heredity, Darwinism seemed very unsatisfactory. To him it seemed altogether too glib and facile. William Bateson said of Darwinism, the discussion of anything to do with the origin of species nowadays is marked by "the apathy characteristic of an age of faith." Every one believed Darwin had solved it all, but Bateson was very clear that he had not.

Meanwhile, two paragraphs from Stephen Jay Gould's contribution, which opens the book, might be read as showing the grip of the mechanistic doctrines on the nineteenth-century mind, and of other influences which may have had a shaping effect on Darwin. Has the world or the universe any intrinsic meaning? Darwin seemed to think not. Prof. Gould says:

> If a denial of inherent progress were not radical enough, Darwin also introduced the specter of randomness into evolutionary theory. To be sure, randomness only provides a source of *variation* in Darwin's theory. Natural selection (a deterministic process) then scrutinizes the spectrum of random variants and preserves those individuals best adapted to changing local environments. Still, chance in any form was anathema to many nineteenth-century thinkers, both then and now.
>
> Darwin's theory also challenged the comforting assumption that evolution must be purposive, working toward the good of species or ecosystems. The theory of natural selection, established in perhaps unconscious analogy to the individualistic, laissez-faire economics of Adam Smith (whom Darwin had been studying intensely just before he formulated his theory), speaks only of individuals struggling for personal success. In modern terms, natural selection concerns the unconscious struggle of individuals to leave more of their genes in surviving offspring. Any benefits to species, any harmony in ecosystems, arise merely as a byproduct of this struggle among individuals or, in the case of ecosystems, as a natural balance among competitors.

It is a universal experience among humans that, as they grow into maturity, they become increasingly hospitable to philosophic explanations of life. Is this now the case with respect to the Darwinian conception of evolution? Theodore Roszak's book, *Unfinished Animal*, is an inquiry into the meaning of such questions.

COMMENTARY
THE UNCLASSIFIABLE

THOSE who become influential in history are sometimes a curious mix of both good and bad influences. The same Herbert Spencer, of whom William James makes mincemeat for his opposition to Carlyle's idea that great men are the major causes of historical development, was the man who foresaw the threat of statism and wrote effectively about it (see *The Man Versus the State,* 1884). Spencer understood what happens when libertarian Liberalism becomes Welfare Statism. Yet he is also charged with originating modern conservative capitalist doctrine and exercising a wide influence in this way, especially in America through the advocacy of John Fiske. On the other hand, as a philosophical thinker Spencer helped to free many minds from the bonds of orthodoxy; for example, in the case of Lafcadio Hearn, Spencer's rejection of anthropomorphism in religion prepared the mind of a literary genius for appreciation of philosophic Buddhism. In short, Spencer can neither be embraced nor summarily dismissed. His discussion of the uses of language are of value to all writers, and what he said about the education of children will bear frequent repetition: "They should be *told* as little as possible, and induced to *discover* as much as possible."

What is the best sort of influence? The right answer, we think, is influence that cannot generate any sort of orthodoxy—influence which is provocative and liberating, and which resists codification. Carlyle had this sort of influence, so did James, so does Maslow.

It's pretty hard to make an orthodoxy out of Plato, unless you misuse his ideas and ignore some of his most important conceptions. James would certainly not submit to conventionalization, nor would Maslow, although there has been considerable over-simplification of the latter. The good writers, in other words, open up avenues for fresh thinking because of the power in what they say. They stimulate and inspire rather than make you comfortable with present opinions.

We might note here that there cannot possibly be an orthodoxy on how to teach your children at home—an activity which *depends* on originality and imagination. This is alone a great recommendation for Holt's program—which is not a "program" but an act of responsibility.

People who are unclassified and cannot be imitated, it seems clear, exert the best influence of all.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

ADVENTURE AT HOME

A BOOK that could be taken as a strong argument for home schooling, but ought to be read as a delightful adventure story by a mother about herself and two children—a boy, Ishmael, of eight or ten, and a girl, Vita, from five to seven—is *Better Than School* (Larson Publications, Burdett, New York, 14818, $14.95) by Nancy Wallace. You could call it the life and times of a homemaker. Bob and Nancy Wallace live in a small town in New Hampshire. They have unusual friends, one of them John Holt. Bob works at home as a translator of ponderous tomes into German, and he finds that the hubbub of the children around the house isn't as disturbing to his concentration as the buzz of talk in the office where he used to work. The move to teach their children at home began when they found that the school life and environment was making their little boy *sick.* The story of their relations with the school board is tiresome, sometimes revolting, but in the end encouraging.

The Wallaces bucked the system, schooled themselves in tactics, and were finally called to a long meeting in which the Decision would be made. Telling about what happened, Nancy Wallace relates:

> As the evening progressed, I was struck forcibly with the realization that here were five arbitrarily chosen people, none of whom knew Ishmael or were particularly interested in him, with the power to make a crucial decision about his life—a decision that Bob and I and Ishmael should have had the right to make in the privacy of our own home. I felt as though that right was being taken away from us, or as if it had never been our own. It was frightening.
>
> The meeting dragged on, and everybody's tempers grew shorter the more exhausted they became. Finally, around 10:30 P.M., the chairman of the school board asked the superintendent for his recommendation. He responded as I guess we knew he would: "I recommend against allowing the Wallace boy to be taught at home." And he went on to say how he regretted ever showing us the guidelines. He rambled about the bad precedent we'd be setting and justified his decision by saying that, after all, Ishmael was only in school for seven hours a day and we could "enrich" him for the remaining seventeen hours at home.
>
> At last the school board voted. As the chairman said "All those in favor raise your hands," I closed my eyes. I couldn't bear to see all those hands sitting idly in their laps. But then I felt Bob clutch me. I opened my eyes again and, by God! I saw five hands raised in the air. It was amazing. I gasped with relief. I would have jumped up and down, but the board members looked so pained and harassed that we felt it would be best to get out of there as quickly as possible. Out in the dark night, Bob and I hugged each other. We had won! Ishmael was free.

From time to time the Wallaces met some quite decent and helpful people on the school boards—they had to qualify Ishmael each year for teaching at home—but there is nevertheless a striking contrast between the behavior of the educational bureaucracy and these intelligent, resourceful, and determined parents. As the weeks went by, and as the parents learned how to do less "teaching," and to take direction from the boy's own interests, they discovered that education authorities—some of them—had no idea of the importance of a child's spontaneous inclinations. The school board required an outline of the "curriculum" that would be used with Ishmael. Apparently, school boards—this one, at any rate—believe in standardized curriculum design, and that if the children are not made to follow what the schools prescribe, they are being neglected or even led astray. Again, as Nancy relates:

> We had just begun to settle into a routine and were happily learning how to let Ishmael learn when we heard, once again from a relative of a school board member, that our curriculum had been rejected: "Mrs. A. took one look at your first line, 'For reading we will let Ishmael pick his own books from the library,' and said, 'You can't call that education!' "
>
> Sure enough, about a week later we received a letter from our superintendent explaining that we must provide curriculum instruction in mathematics,

> science, language arts, reading, social studies, fine arts, and socialization."

So the Wallaces girded up their intellectual loins, learned the bureaucratic jargon known to administrators but laughed at or ignored by real teachers, and began winning argument after argument with an increasingly timid school board. . . . Enough of that, even though the family had to go through the whole routine again when it came time for their little girl to go to school.

The other side of the story shows how parents who start out teaching their children at home gain confidence, expand their abilities, learn new things themselves along with the children—music, in the case of the Wallaces—and restore for themselves and others the rich meaning of self-reliance. Not without reason Nancy's book is subtitled "One family's declaration of independence."

What about the capacities of these children? John Holt, who wrote the Introduction to *Better Than School*, says of Ishmael and Vita that "many far more advanced and much older musicians, even students in top conservatories, do not play with the freedom, expressiveness, and conviction that these children show." After speaking of their individual musicianship, he says:

> What all this is leading up to is that, as musicians usually judge the talent of young beginners, these children were not at the start unusually talented. I know some of the tests by which musicians try (to no useful purpose) to measure and judge musical talent in young children, and by these tests and measures I don't think either of the Wallace children would have been called more than average. They have gone as far as they have not because they began with unusual talents but because they have the good luck to have parents who love and make music, because their mother is herself a very sensitive, understanding; patient, and skillful teacher, because they have been much encouraged without being in the least pressured, and because—since they don't go to school—they have time to work on music as much as they like.

Mrs. Wallace tells how she worked with Vita's piano playing (Vita later took up the violin and even played duets with John Holt on the cello), after reluctantly adopting a piano teacher's suggestion of rewarding Vita's practice with goodies (healthful) called "snacks":

> As she began to play regularly and to enjoy her playing, she gradually began to forget about her snacks. After perhaps four or five months, she only used them if she was feeling particularly grumpy. Best of all, she also began using me as a resource, and I soon found that we could work well together for about half an hour or forty-five minutes a day. I had to be very careful, though, not to push her too far. It was better to let her work through as much as she wanted to on her own, even though it was occasionally frustrating for me to wait when I could show her how to play a difficult passage much faster than she could figure it out by herself. I found, too, that it generally seemed best to stop a practice session too soon, before she became tired and while she was still eager to play. Then she looked forward to the next day's practicing much more, and she also spent more time improvising and playing old pieces for pleasure on her own at the piano.

Nancy also took Holt's advice: "Don't talk about practicing—talk about playing." This worked. One more quotation:

> Vita and Ishmael were also obsessed with composing music. Ishmael even composed a series of short operettas that he and Vita performed. We could never figure out how Vita began writing music, since when she started she only had a glimmer of how to read it. I *think* that what happened was that Ishmael showed her how to write a middle C and then she wrote the rest of the notes by interval. Through the process of writing music, she taught herself, with only a minimum of help, many of the fundamentals of reading music. While Bob and I were amazed at this seemingly backwards approach to music reading, Vita took it for granted. Once, when she had sight-read several pieces from her *Look and Listen Reader*, Bob congratulated her heartily. All she said in response was, "I write music, so of course I can read it!"

FRONTIERS

Restoring Activities

IS having "one world" a good thing, or are its effects sometimes the opposite of what the often slogan-like rhetoric of world unity implies? To the extent that the "unity" has resulted from the spread around the world of exploitive and acquisitive activity by the "advanced" industrial powers, destroying, in time, both the cultures and economies of peoples who have simple, traditional ways, the unity has proved a degradation of human life. There is, however, another kind of unity emerging among people who feel themselves to be "on the side of life," and who are working for the restoration of local and natural relationships with the environment. The magazines issued by these groups are filled with material on the kind of unities that we will have in the future—if, indeed, there is to be a future.

We have two examples. One is a back issue of *Permaculture* (May, 1983), published quarterly in Australia for the world-wide membership of the National Permaculture Association, outcome of the work of Bill Mollison. What is Permaculture? Mollison answers:

> Permaculture is not gardening, it is design. It does not espouse a particular technique whether organic, inorganic, or biodynamic, etc. I personally espouse the organic or natural gardening approach. I talk and write about it, not about pesticides or herbicides. Permaculture is not confined to gardening, or plant growing; it is a design system involving the placement of all the elements of the landscape of the living system, in the right relationship to each other. . . .
>
> I started an organic gardening society as an innocent in 1972 because I believed in clean food. I've migrated from that to a study of what is really happening in the world and realizing that being a good gardener can be like being an ostrich with your head in the sand. You will inevitably die in your own good garden if you don't put your head out and see what is happening in the real world. You can't garden under the above conditions [the various pollutions which are killing forests, poisoning air and waters, and killing fish]. Soils cannot be created under those conditions. Life cannot continue under those conditions. Everything we say about the soil is meaningless under those conditions. Therefore for us to continue to live on the earth, stop for a while from just being gardeners, and look at what is happening, and try to stop it. And to a large extent this is why the Permaculture associations are formed, and forming rapidly across Europe, the U.K., throughout all American states, and all Australian states, to tell people what is happening, to help them to design out of it.

Another article—not so much an article as a climate map of the world, with numerous captions—identifies one of the threads which unite people in a new way:

> What does Alice Springs, Australia, have in common with Karachi in Pakistan and Khartoum in the Sudan? Why do gardeners from San Francisco, U.S.A., Capetown, South Africa, and Marfakech, Morocco, seek one another out at garden parties? Why is there a sudden spate of mail between Mexico City and Addis Ababa?
>
> The answer? Climate.
>
> Climate is the major factor determining what grows where on the planet—find someone with the same climate and in permacultural terms you're automatically speaking the same language.

An article on edible plants that do well in deserts—which the Australian Aborigines once knew how to grow for food—begins with a quotation from one of them:

> "Our country has been turned into a desert by the senseless whites . . . The old men who knew how to summon the rain clouds, how to create the animals, and how to keep the country green are dead now; and our land is dying too."

Seventy per cent of Australia is either arid or semi-arid, and 34% of the continent's cattle and sheep production is on this land. As a result of removal of the vegetative cover and clearing of woodland country, there has been soil erosion and the extinction of animals hunted for food by aborigines. Over-grazing has meant a two thirds loss of plant abundance and diversity. Increase in stock comes about in years of ample rainfall. Then there may be a drought, placing the stockmen in a damned-if-you-do and damned-if-

you-don't situation. The drought of 1958-64 denuded large areas of cattle, but when rain finally brought vegetative recovery, the livestock again multiplied. There were good years until 1981, followed by two dry seasons, and an owner-manager northwest of Alice Springs said, "if it stays dry we are overstocked, but we can't afford to run any less."

Meanwhile botanists are endeavoring to recover knowledge of ancient plants once used as food by the natives, in behalf of self-reliance for the aboriginal communities in Central Australia. Permaculture designers are now in a program to get gardens and nurseries going in behalf of aboriginal settlements in South Australia, and have already demonstrated that good gardens can be created "in the worst of conditions."

In last year's September-October *Resurgence* Mark Kidel tells about the strengthening movement for self-reliance and independence among the Celtic inhabitants of Brittany who live in the westernmost part of France, across the channel from Devon and Cornwall in England where the Bretons had once lived until they fled to France to avoid Saxon encroachments. Since the French revolution the Bretons have had a hard time at the hands of the highly centralized French government (the Bretons backed the wrong side in the revolution), even their ancestral language being made illegal in the schools. Now, however, the Bretons, through their cultural movement, *Diwan* ("young green shoot"), have started their own schools—eighteen kindergartens and two primary schools—and are deliberately restoring their folk dances and ballad singing. Breton is mainly an oral language and in Lanrivain a former radio journalist has developed the *Journal Parlé*—an oral newspaper which circulates tapes among an audience of Bretons who have cassette players. The Bretons have also organized their own bank to finance local enterprises, one of which is "a scheme to save something of Brittany's floundering fishing economy."

> In 1981, two sail-powered fishing boats were launched at Lorient. . . . Sails had not been used in French fishing for over 20 years. The situation, however, changed radically when the price of a litre of petrol rose from 12 centimes in 1972 to around 1.30 francs in 1981. The price of fish has not risen by anything like the same amount. . . .
>
> These boats have very little in common with traditional sailing craft. The sails are made of tergal, the masts of aluminum, the rigging of nylon and the hull of polyester. Only one is necessary to maneuver the boat. The rest of the six-man crew are free to look after the fishing.

They have two back-up engines, the largest of only 150 horsepower. Boats of comparable size require 400 to 500 horsepower. The boats are not for trawling but use a range of other fishing techniques. The Breton fishermen are interested in "the stock of fish off the coast of Brittany and the use of renewable resources." Their methods spare young fish.

The address of *Permaculture* is 37 Goldsmith Street Maryborough 3465, Australia; of *Resurgence*—Worthyvale Manor Farm, Camelford, Cornwall, PL 32 9TT, UK.