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A LONG WAY TO GO

IT is somewhat bewildering to realize that what we call knowledge or Truth may have little or no existence for us until troubles and dissatisfactions overtake our lives. What need is there for knowledge when everything is going well? We think of knowledge as a resource only when there are difficult decisions to make, or when changing circumstances make it appear likely that we will not be able to do tomorrow what we have done today. The very idea of knowledge, in other words, is symptomatic of obstacles or disorder. It is joined to ignorance as to a Siamese twin.

A world of happy, harmonious relationships, with no problems to solve, is now difficult for us to imagine. Yet myth and universal tradition speak of the childhood of mankind as a time of glorious innocence. Hesiod tells of a Golden Age when everything good happened naturally, without either knowledge or ignorance playing a part. It was, we might say, a rapturous sort of existence, except for the fact that in those days people had no experience of pain, while we hardly know what uninterrupted harmony would be like, since we identify pleasurable and desirable conditions by comparing them with their opposites. In such a period, we are obliged to conclude, men must have been happy without "knowing" it!

In what seems a partly imaginative reconstruction of this human past, Trigant Burrow (in *Preconscious Foundations of Human Experience,* Basic Books, 1964) writes of this Edenic condition:

> In the early life of the race, the impressions that came from the environment were common to all individuals. They were generic impressions or impressions affecting the species throughout. Among these common impressions were sunshine and darkness, the color and stir of day, the stillness of night; skies, clear or clouded; the sun's rising and setting; starlight; the smell of earth; the flow of rivers, the wide expanse of oceans, forests, plains, lakes, and mountains. There were rain and wind, snow and mist, days of calm and of tempest. These phenomena of nature were a part of man's forebears. They did not *think* of them. There had not yet evolved the instrument of thinking that made possible the use of symbol language. There was not yet full development of the special mechanism within the head of each individual that gave names to these outer manifestations common to generic experience.

Well, that is one side of the picture, an account of man's objective relationships. Were there no subjective feelings about all this? Again, we have what seems a likely reconstruction, perhaps of a somewhat later time. In *The Primitive World and its Transformations* (1953), Robert Redfield says:

> Primitive man is at once in nature and yet acting on it, getting his living, taking from it food and shelter. But as that nature is part of the same moral system in which man and the affairs between men also find themselves, man's actions with regard to nature are limited by notions of inherent, not expediential rightness. . . . "All economic activities, such as hunting, gathering fuel, cultivating the land, storing food, assume a relatedness to the encompassing universe." And the relatedness is moral or religious.

This can hardly mean that these people had a "religion," although we might say that in their lives there were feelings and actions which later, after being abstracted and named, became a part of what we call religion. There was no questioning, no doubt, and therefore no "thinking" about such things. Speaking of the inhabitants of *Typee,* Melville said that above all he admired the "unanimity of feeling they displayed on every occasion." Conformity was not resisted because, being also the condition of perfect freedom, no one felt oppressed:

> With them there hardly appeared to be any difference of opinion upon any subject whatever. They all thought and acted alike. I do not conceive that they could support a debating society for a single night: there would be nothing to dispute about; and

> were they to call a convention to take into consideration the state of the tribe, its session would be a remarkably short one. They showed this spirit of unanimity in every action of life: everything was done in concert and good fellowship.

Had the Typees words for joy, harmony, and truth? One hardly thinks so. Possessing or being in themselves so much of what lies behind these qualities, they did not think of naming them. If the ancient Greeks, whom we regard as consummate artists, had no word for "art," it seems logical to assume that people name only what they lack or want to be or possess.

Knowledge, then, is something that is accumulated by deliberate effort, and only in the directions where deprivation is felt.

In the *Symposium*, Socrates somewhat shocks his listeners by declaring that "Love" arises only under similar conditions. Those who spoke before him on this convivial occasion had celebrated Love as the most wonderful and perfect thing in life. Socrates dissented. No one, he argued, who is complete feels love. The beautiful do not seek beauty. The wise hunger not for wisdom. Only the inadequate and incomplete, he insisted, can be animated by love. And loves, moreover, are various—they come at different levels. The highest and best love is the love of Truth, which is the occupation of the philosopher. Philosophy is pursuit, not possession, of the truth. Yet love, however it occurs, is what holds the universe—"heaven and earth and gods and men"—together. The universe is the pursuit of fulfillment not yet achieved.

For Socrates, this defines the human condition. Men are incomplete beings who long for fulfillment, hence they love. Not only is this true of love, but also of what we call "knowledge." Our knowledge, which is obviously incomplete, Socrates identifies as true opinion, only an anticipation of knowledge, not knowledge itself. True opinion gives direction to human striving and search, pressed on by love of truth. Real knowing is virtually wordless, being the union of truth and reality. Such knowledge is not transferable.

What *is* transferable? Only opinion, a mix of knowledge and ignorance. But there is at the same time a communicable enthusiasm, a fortunate infection which may inspire men to search. Those who devote their lives to the quest for knowledge stir others by their ardor. Their lack of pretense to knowledge is a factor in this inspiration, suggesting that the common condition of ignorance can be overcome.

In ancient times the hunger for restoration, for renewing the primeval harmony, was acted out in ceremonies which stood for the rebirth of the world. This, it seems certain, was very largely the origin of art. Art invokes regeneration by representing it. As Mercea Eliade (*Diog*enes, Fall, 1958) has said:

> Why did men from traditional societies feel the need to relive the cosmogony annually? In order to regenerate the world by reintegrating original sacred time, the time when the creation of the world occurred. . . . All creations—divine or human—are definitely dependent upon the model which constitutes the cosmogony. To create is, after all, to remake the world—whether the "world" happens to be a modest cabin, a tool, or a poem.

This was not a "naming" of things but symbolic performance of the world's process. It was being the world's being, not making a scientific description. In our time, the idea of "objective knowledge" has replaced this traditional wisdom. As Redfield says in his book:

> If we compare the primary world view . . . with that which comes to prevail in modern times, especially in the West where science has been so influential, we may recognize one of the great transformations of the human mind. It is that transformation by which the primitive world has been overturned. . . . Man comes out of the unity of the universe within which he is oriented now as something separate from nature and comes to confront nature as something with physical qualities only, upon which he may work his will.

Speaking of that transformation, which for human beings put an end to "oneness and

participation with nature and with the beautiful," Trigant Burrow describes what we have in its place:

> The psychology of "normality" is the precise opposite, characterized as it is by objectivation, difference, contrast. It is represented in the exclusion or withholding of the inherent personality from the presenting object or occasion. Separateness, withdrawal, rumination, constitute the dynamics of the normal adaptation. It looks out on the world with an eye to its own security. It measures opportunities, weighs values, considers advantage. Its aim is personal convenience, egoistic comfort, temporary expediency. Its motive is not disinterested, its purpose not simple and clear.

This applies to individuals. The social substitutions are these:

> In place of man's innate reverence before the Unknown, we substitute the divisive symbol of church and creed. In place of inherent social fellowship, we substitute the symbol of forms, customs, and outward amenities. Love replaced by sexuality; self-possession, by the possession of property. For the wealth of our own spirits, we exchange an anxious greed for money, name, and position. For life, we substitute "making a living." Rather than cultivate the natural beauty of our own persons, we decorate our bodies with the cheap artifacts of external adornment. Rather than the quiet communion of the home, we seek the restless enterprise of a household. In place of a united brotherhood of man, we prefer an armed league of mutually distrustful persons to enforce an implicitly irksome peace. Everywhere the expression we see in the world of so-called actuality is a symbolic expression. Such is the inherent psychology of the social reaction we call normal adaptation. Its essence is substitution, insinuation, displacement. Just so far as consciousness, whether social or individual, deals in symbolic substitution, precisely so far does it deal with evasion and untruth.

The difficulty we have with all this—with both Redfield's and Burrow's account of the great "transformation" which produced the modern mind—is that it is made to sound so utterly sinful! Everything that, a few years ago, was regarded as evidence of the remarkable progress of the modern world is now identified as loss, self-deprivation, and corruption. We have undoubtedly made terrible mistakes, but surely the awakening of modern intellectuality was more than Faustian crime! And the emergence of scientific dispassion had roots deeper than a profane disregard of holy awe and ancient piety. The works of the mind have undeniable rapture of their own. We learn from the most distinguished scientists that in climactic moments of discovery, the splendor of cosmic symmetries comes over them as high and ennobling emotion. Perhaps Dr. Burrow hints at this when he says: "But, in the conscious scheme of life, there appears to be a characterological type whose subjective inner perception inevitably pierces the gossamer of symbol and substitution, rendering life untenable except under terms of conscious unity and understanding."

We may know little of this side of the life of great scientists for the reason that they seldom write the textbooks on which modern education is based. "Science at its highest level," A. H. Maslow remarked in one of his books, "is ultimately the organization of, the systematic pursuit of, and the enjoyment of wonder, awe, and mystery." People commonly think of science as the pursuit of knowledge in order to obtain power over nature. This was Bacon's definition, and it has been endlessly repeated. But the Baconian formula may be only the vulgarization of science. As Maslow says:

> Many people still think that scientific study or detailed knowing is the opposite and the contradiction of the sense of mystery. But this need not be the case. Studying the mystery does not necessarily profane it. Indeed, this is the best way toward greater respect, richer understanding, and greater sacralization and sanctification at a much higher level of richness. . . . Not only does science begin in wonder, it also ends in wonder. (*The Psychology of Science.*)

What, actually, happened to human beings in the mass as the result of the great transformation of mind? We were transported from a life in natural—unthinking—harmony with the world around us to a life which makes its way through a sea of opinion. Ernst Cassirer gave this precise description (in his *Essay on Man*)*:*

> No longer can man confront reality immediately, he cannot see it, as it were, face to face. Physical reality seems to recede in proportion as man's symbolic activity advances. Instead of dealing with the things themselves man is in a sense conversing with himself. He has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium. His situation is the same in the theoretical as in the practical sphere. Even here man does not live in a world of hard facts or according to his immediate needs and desires. He lives rather in the midst of imaginary emotions, in hopes and fears, in illusions and disillusions, in his fantasies and dreams.

This suggests that the faith—if it can be called faith—of ancient man in the order of the natural world has been transferred to a substitute world of opinion. What was once spontaneous response and collaboration has become an acquired habit of acting on belief, on attitudes and opinions which each child absorbs in his early years. These primary beliefs are not "thought about," but rather control and determine all the thinking people do. They are the assumptions of the age. However, unlike the "laws of nature" or actual rhythms of the cosmos, these assumptions change.

So, as we said at the beginning, the question of truth or knowledge seldom arises for us until our beliefs no longer correspond with the world of experience. Beliefs are the ground of action, and when the action fails of its ends, beliefs are forced into question. It is then that we are made to expose our beliefs for interrogation—to attempt to lead an examined life. This was the role assumed by Socrates. He went about Athens exposing the inadequacy of the prevailing beliefs.

A modern Socrates—Ortega y Gasset—carried on a similar dialogue with his times. In one of his last-published books, *The Idea of Principle in Leibnitz,* Ortega considered how men come to look for truth:

> Only when man realizes to what extent other beliefs exist vis-à-vis his own beliefs which, once he is acquainted with them, seem to him more or less as worthy of credence as his own—only then does there arise in man a new need: the ability to discern which of the two complexes of belief is the one that *ultimately* merits being believed. That need, necessity or necessitousness for deciding between two beliefs is what we call "truth." Now, I think, it is obvious why, while one lives fully in belief, it is impossible to feel or even to understand what sort of thing Truth is. . . . the characteristic thing about "beliefs" when contrasted with "ideas" or opinions—including in these the most strictly scientific doctrines—is that reality, complete and genuine reality, is for us simply what we believe and never what we think. It is the same thing in reverse to say that our "beliefs" never appear to us as opinions, personal or collective or universal, but as "reality itself." Furthermore, we are not even conscious of a good part of our beliefs. They take form within us from behind our mental lucidity, and in order to find them we must search among "the things on which we count" and not among the "ideas we have." . . .
>
> To count on a thing without thinking of it, without taking account of it—as happens to us with the solidity of the earth on which we are going to take the next step, or with the sun, which is going to rise tomorrow—that is a "belief." From this it follows that *we never believe in an idea,* and as theory—science, philosophy, and so on—is nothing but "ideas," it makes no sense to pretend that man believes in theory. . . .
>
> Thus it is that theory and ideas, even the most consistent and proven ones, have in our lives a spectral, unreal, and imaginary character, not really *serious.* I say this because *we are* never our ideas, we never confuse them with ourselves but we merely think of them, and all thinking, to put it in concrete terms, is only fantasy.

Allowing for Ortega's vocabulary and for his style of emphasis to drive points home, we see the crucial importance of this difference between what we think—our opinions—and what we are. We are what we *act upon.* Nor do we often know a great deal about what we act upon, since for the most part we "feel" our way through life.

It is no doubt very fortunate that we are able to do this with some success, since our "ideas" would be quite inadequate as guides. Yet, at the same time, to discover what our beliefs are—

which we begin to do when they no longer support our lives—is to realize that, all too often, our beliefs are themselves mere "ideas." Then the confident life of the past melts into flux, and a new and usually painful freedom is born.

It is natural, in these circumstances, to long for the intuitive certainties of primitive life and its enfolding reliance on the natural world. But the natural world is no longer there. The world has been remade in the image of man's beliefs and ideas, and we are confronted, instead, with a world denatured in complex ways by the devices of science and technology, and obliged to adapt to the social structures reflecting the systems of belief called ideologies. Eden is only a memory, and Athens is not reproducible in modern times.

We cannot, it seems, ever be children or innocent again. Why has growing to adulthood brought so many disasters? This is the question that seems to have no answer.

Our troubles, we are told, are come from the Promethean offense of thinking, inventing, creating. We should have let things alone, trusting in nature's ways. Our "knowledge," when put in the place of reality, fills the world with monsters. This is what we find so difficult to understand.

Conceivably, there is nothing wrong with our knowledge, but only in the exaggerated confidence we have placed in it. It is meant for modest undertakings, little things, like getting ourselves clothed and fed. It is not and cannot be the means of conquering the world.

Our knowledge, in short, is merely *intermediate,* good only for intermediate uses. We are still only halfway, as Plato maintains, between knowledge and ignorance, and we have a long way to go.

REVIEW
CHEKHOV: A GENTLE SUBVERSIVE

IN his epilogue to *Anton Chekhov's Life and Thought: Selected Letters and Commentary* (University of California Press paperback, 1975, $6.95), Simon Karlinsky lets the response of Alexander Blok to a Chekhov play embody a summation of the playwright's greatness and provide, at the same time, the reason for this book:

> After seeing the Moscow Art Theater perform *Three Sisters,* Alexander Blok wrote an ecstatic and penitent letter to his mother in which he swore that the play made him revise many of his views and attitudes: "We are all unfortunate that our native land prepared for us this soil, fertile in anger and mutual quarrels. All of us live behind Chinese walls, half despising each other, while our sole mutual enemy—Russian state institutions, church institutions, gin mills, fiscal and government officials—do not show their face but sic us on each other.
>
> "I shall strive with all my strength to forget all Russian politics, all Russian amateurishness, all this morass, in order to become a human being and not a machine for manufacturing anger and hatred."
>
> No, Blok was not promising to become apolitical and uninvolved. He was merely reminding himself, under the impact of seeing Chekhov's play, of the essence of his own humanity, which the political passions of a polarized society tend to obscure and obliterate. This reaction to *Three Sisters* would have pleased Chekhov; but until about ten years ago it would have seemed incomprehensible to any Western reader or admirer of Chekhov. Now, however, those who lived through these past ten years in the West should have no trouble understanding what Blok was talking about. This is significant. With his unbelievably sensitive antennae Blok caught the very gist of Checkhov's message. Most of his countrymen, of whatever persuasion, did not. It is now our turn. We are aware of Chekhov's miraculous art. It would be a tragedy if we too failed to become attuned to the lucid humanity and reasoned compassion which this art embodies.

People put on blinders in their righteous quarrels, and are then swept into madness by their good intentions, or by what started out as good intentions, and if we cannot do without good intentions, how can we protect ourselves from the blindness they seem to invite? Chekhov, Mr. Karlinsky suggests, was such a protection. His stories and plays took his audience behind the façades of popular prejudice of every sort; people were haying their humanity restored, but so delicately and gently that they hardly realized why Chekhov became dear to them.

Chekhov did not berate or exhort, he simply revealed, going behind labels and slogans to the grain of human nature as he found it in life. He was a "radical" in the sense that, as an artist, he refused to submit to the wave of ideological thinking that characterized the intellectuals of his time. As Prof. Karlinsky says: "Chekhov's repeated insistence that 'labels' and 'trademarks' such as 'liberal,' 'conservative,' 'Populist' or 'neurotic,' when used as a total description of any one person are nothing but superstitions which keep people from perceiving the deeper moral and human realities implies a reasoned rejection of the political thinking that had been one of the mainstays of Russian literature and literary criticism from the 1840's on."

The atmosphere in which Chekhov, born in 1860, came to maturity as a writer is described in Prof Karlinsky's introduction. After speaking of the Tsarist censorship which sought to eliminate criticism of government and religion, he says:

> Far more powerful and, in the long run, even more oppressive was the *de facto* unofficial censorship by the anti-government literary critics, who not only ceaselessly demanded that all writers be topical, obviously relevant and socially critical, but also prescribed rigid formal and aesthetic criteria to which all literature was supposed to conform. Because a soberly realistic depiction of Russian life had been assumed since the days of Belinsky to be the most effective way of exposing social shortcomings, the critics of the 1860's, '70's and '80's fought an unending battle against fantasy, imagination, poetry, mysticism, against excessive depth in psychological perception, against all joy and humor that was not topical or satyrical, and above all against any formal or stylistic innovations in literature and literary craftsmanship in general. Their rationale was that all

these things could detract from the ideological message which was the sole aim of literature.

From his youth, Chekhov went against the momentum of these tendencies, and since the quality of his stories and plays was stronger than ideological stereotypes, his fame as a writer and playwright grew despite the sneers of critics. It was not that he lacked sympathy for the movements dedicated to liberation from political and economic oppression, but that his sympathy and understanding ran deeper than the literary pundits of the time. He understood them, but they did not understand him. The leading contemporary critic, Nikolai Mikhailovsky, did everything he could to discredit Chekhov's work, and his failure in this, Mr. Karlinsky says, was probably the beginning of the emancipation of Russian literature from the dictatorship of the utilitarians. We have insight into Chekhov's character from the fact that, despite Mikhailovsky's slights, Chekhov maintained cordial relations with the critic. He knew his limitations. In *August 1914* Solzhenitsyn relates that Chekhov said in conversation with a student: "Mikhailovsky is an important sociologist and a failed critic; by his very nature he is incapable of understanding what imaginative literature is." Karlinsky calls this the truest possible characterization. Of Chekhov's own outlook he says:

> While Chekhov valued and appreciated the many genuinely liberating and democratic trends that the enlightened anti-government intelligentsia of his time was helping to further, his idea of social involvement and of activism was basically different from theirs. For Chekhov's contemporaries as for many Western commentators on Russian literature today, the standard examples of socially involved turn-of-the-century writers are Tolstoy with his defiance of the government, his excommunication from the Orthodox Church and defense of persecuted religious sects, and the young Maxim Gorky, with his support of the revolutionary movement and his fund-raising campaigns for outlawed political parties. Such actions are remembered because they are dramatic; their effect depends on dramatizing current political issues by deliberately attracting public attention to them. But in its own way Anton Chekhov's life was probably more filled with direct involvement in valid social and humanitarian activity than that of any other writer one could name. His life was one continuous round of alleviating famine, fighting epidemics [he was a physician], building schools and public roads, endowing libraries, helping organize marine biology laboratories, giving thousands of needy peasants free medical treatment, planting gardens, helping fledgling writers get published, raising funds for worthwhile causes, and hundreds of other pursuits designed to help his fellow man and improve the general quality of life around him. If Chekhov's foreign admirers usually think of his trip to the penal colony on the island of Sakhalin as the one exceptional humanitarian act of his life, it is because this trip has been misrepresented by commentators to look like an act of open political defiance, such as Western readers have traditionally come to expect of Russian writers.

The following explanation (in a letter to Alexei Suvorin, (another playwright, like Chekhov, of peasant origin) of one of the characters in Chekhov's play, *Ivanov*, illustrates his capacity, as Karlinsky says, to detect ideologues and authoritarians "in their embryonic stage and to show that they were present not only in the official regime of his country, but in the revolutionary movement as well":

> I will turn now to Doctor Lvov. Lvov is the model of an honest, straightforward, hot-headed, but narrow-minded and limited man. It is about his kind that intelligent people say: "He's stupid, but his heart is in the right place." Everything resembling breadth of vision or spontaneity of feeling is alien to Lvov. He's a stereotype personified, a walking ideology. He looks at every phenomenon and person through a narrow frame and judges everything by his prejudices. He's ready to worship anyone who shouts, "Make way for honest labor!" and anyone who doesn't is a blackguard and kulak. There is nothing in between. He grew up on the novels of Mikhailov [widely read novels which were "artistically hopeless but ideologically progressive"] and on the stage saw the "new people," namely kulaks and sons of this age as depicted by the new playwrights, such "money grubbers" as [familiar capitalist villains] and so on. He mastered what they had to teach, mastered it so well that while reading *Rudin* he never fails to wonder whether Rudin is or is not a blackguard. Literature and the stage have brought him up to

> approach every individual in life and in literature with this question. If he'd had the chance to see your play, he would have taken you to task for not making it clear whether Messrs. Kotelnikov, Sabinin, Adashev and Matveyev are or are not blackguards. This is an important matter for him. He wants either saints or blackguards.

The real Chekhov, Prof. Karlinsky shows, has long been hidden from view by ideological interpreters, who have distorted his work in order to claim him as an ally. "Chekhov almost alone," he says, "seemed to realize that men who fight tyranny and oppression by using tyrannical and oppressive means and who pursue their goals with ruthless and single-minded fanaticism are not likely to further the cause of freedom and bring about democracy in literature or any other area." Yet he fought the presuppositions of his epoch "in subdued and civilized tones, without ranting and without proselytizing." In consequence he was often misunderstood. The present book of letters, translated by Michael Henry Heim and Karlinsky, is a delighting corrective of all such misconceptions.

COMMENTARY
SAFEGUARDS OF THOUGHT

CHEKHOV rejected the labels commonly applied to people in order to drop them into some ideological category (see Review), and Burrow regarded the human capacity for symbolic expression, putting abstraction in the place of reality, as very close to original sin. Yet what is insight, what is science, but the application, at different levels, of the abstracting and symbolizing capacity? All our knowledge, all our ordering of experience is dependent on this power of generalization, through which we identify the unities which pervade the chaotic diversities of sense perception.

The intellect, quite evidently, anon saves and anon damns. The shallow generalizations condemned by Chekhov, classifying men as either "saints" or "blackguards," translate the account of human affairs into a simplistic, self-righteous jargon which hides the underlying moral realities of human life. Yet we are obliged to admit that this very power of generalization enabled Chekhov to point out these pitfalls and to give them dramatic representation by a symbology of human types:

> It is about his kind that intelligent people say: "He's stupid, but his heart is in the right place." . . . He's a stereotype personified, a walking ideology. He looks at every phenomenon and person through a narrow frame and judges everything by his prejudices.

What, then, will widen the frame of our understanding, making it possible to shape our thought in generalizations which correspond to what is really happening in the world? Which are the symbols which fit the hidden unities of experience? Is it possible to say *anything* that, despite all it omits, does not make only a fragile, perilous bridge across chasms of misconception and distortion?

Drama, myth, and metaphor illustrate one means of self-protection: these forms of generalization hold in suspension other octaves of meaning: they veil but do not shut out the gleam of symmetries belonging to yesterday and tomorrow. A surer safeguard was practiced by the Buddha, who restrained the explorations of the mind within the ranges of compassion, binding the two in indistinguishable unity.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
ACORNS GALORE

IN telling about *The Acorn People,* a new story by Ron Jones (Zephyros, 1201 Stanyan Street, San Francisco, Calif. 94117, $2.50), there isn't any acceptable way to start at the beginning. The middle seems the only place. Jones and another teacher took on the job of being counselors at a Boy Scout camp, then found that they were to care for a group of seriously handicapped children. As it turns out, the story records a triumph of the spirit of several remarkable youngsters in collaboration with the active imagination of the leaders. The counselors helped to make a setting in which the children could feel that they were doing things that other children do—not doing them in the same way, but *doing* them. After a few days Ron Jones was able to say:

> The children were learning, growing, and most important of all, they were happy. (I gauged my own change in these days by realizing what a benefit it was to be in this Boy Scout camp.) I walked around thanking stairs, bunk beds, and hills, because they made all of us behave a little more normally. The camp was not a place for handicapped children and the kids knew it. Camp Wiggin was a summer camp for children who could shoot arrows, cook goulash, take hikes and sing songs. It wasn't a place for ramps, sanitized medical facilities, swimming pool rails, or activity schedules. It was a place for children and the expectations and fantasies for life.

The project, for Ron Jones and his colleagues, was to help the children believe that they could do just about anything, and then help them to do it. As you read, you forget about the twisted bodies, the paralyzed limbs, the half-functioning digestive systems. Pictures begin to form of youngsters deliriously happy, going swimming (suspended by inner tubes), dancing in wheel chairs, and climbing mountains (on the backs of counselors). Whatever there was to do at that camp, they found a way to do it. There were some bad times, as when an officious administrator decided it would be a good idea to show a film on "water safety," with a lot of healthy, "normal" youngsters cavorting without inhibition. "I hated these blonde-headed kids and their smugness," Jones remembers. But mostly it was the thoughtlessness of the administrator that annoyed him:

> The film ended with a Red Cross demonstration of water ballet. Graceful legs poising above the water then darting beneath its surface. Children kicking in unison toward the center of the pool to form symmetrical stars and flowers with their arms and legs. The film ended without applause.

Well, the counselors worked out strong antidotes to such discouragements. Benny B., a black boy whose legs were lifeless from polio, heard about the merit badges earned by campers who reached the top of Lookout Mountain. "If the Boy Scouts can climb that mountain, can we?" Benny asked. It was three miles up and three miles down, so, banishing anxiety, they set out.

> We looked and sounded like a wagon train. . . . Our greatest hardship was trailside bushes and branches. They slashed against the wheels and, if we were not careful, entwined themselves like tentacles around the spokes and footrests. . . . The trail kept getting narrower. It went from a walkway to a skinny trail. As the trail narrowed, our effort to push the chairs increased tremendously. In methodic lunges we crossed fields and cut into a dark wood. For the first time in my experience of pushing a wheelchair I felt Thomas shift and lift his weight in an effort to ease the strain of movement. It was a slight adjustment but it meant he was pulling his body as hard as I was pushing.

Thomas was sixteen. His muscular sclerosis had robbed him of the fiber and muscle that held his body together. He weighed thirty-five pounds and seemed to collapse like a tent when picked up for carrying. Martin, the only able-bodied child in the cabin group, was blind. When the climbing got rough, Martin sat on the ground and worked his way with an energetic upward slide. For the last half-mile there was no trail, just a hillside of slate and gravel, but they kept on going.

> Martin's invention was marvelous. Who would have thought of going up hill backwards, sitting on our bottoms? We moved in a syncopated rhythm.

> First the legs pushing against the hill, followed quickly by a push with both hands. We would stop to rest and then continue. . . . At two o'clock, according to Spider, we reached the top of Lookout Mountain. . . .
>
> We grabbed for a mountain and found the sky. I don't think any of us had ever seen the sky in quite this way. The wheelchair and city life we all knew just didn't give us a chance to face the sky. It was wonderful. This must be the exhilaration that drives explorers.

Who was Spider? Spider had no legs or arms, just stumps that "stuck out from his short frame like broken branches out of a tree." But he was alert and perceptive, and he loved to talk.

What else could Spider do? He could swim.

> I propped him up at the edge of the pool as he instructed and then waited in the water to catch him. With a head-first plunge he was in the water and pulling himself through it like a dolphin. His body seemed to lengthen out and undulate. First the head would surface, take a breath, then shoot downward, only to arc back to the surface and dive again. With this repeated whip-like motion Spider could swim. In watching Spider move with the water and use its turbulence I thought of the fear he must have faced the first time in the water and the endurance that allowed him to come to terms with his fear.

He swam the length of the pool, perhaps the first time in his life he had gone this distance.

> When I lifted him out of the water his entire face broke into a grin. There were whoops and smiles from everyone. It was not a smile I was familiar with. Not the smile of a raucous ego or aggressive threat, but the smile of knowing. The blind children show this emotion best of all. It's as if their whole face lights up. Everyone was smiling with Spider. Me too.

A climax of the camp experience was a dance organized by some of the girls at the camp. Even the blind could dance a folk dance holding hands in a line. "I grabbed Martin and some kids in chairs and we followed Janie's [a girl counselor's] call."

> I don't think you could call what we did a classic Virginia Reel. What took place reminded me of kids on "Bandstand" doing that jive stroll as others stood applauding and moving up the line for their turn. For our kids the slightest turn of the shoulder or turn of the wheelchair was rewarded. Every dancer has his own style. They slipped, slid, and just had fun. . . .
>
> If the stroll was for the big kids, the bunny hop was for the kid in all of us. Everyone could do it. This was Benny's favorite. We formed a big Congo line of wheelchairs and weaving bodies. With a hop hop hop or its equivalent the Bunny Hop began. Closing your eyes and listening to the screams of delight and exhilaration you might imagine yourself in the heart of the old fun house at the beach in San Francisco.

Aaron, another boy in Ron Jones' cabin, was crowned King of the Camp as the climax of the dance. The Queen, everyone agreed, should be the camp nurse, who had done so much to liberate everyone's capacities for enjoyment. It was very hard for Aaron to be happy. He lacked equipment for normal elimination and had to have a bag strapped to his leg for this purpose, like a colostomy pouch. But Aaron, as the best cook among the campers, was chosen as King.

> "Aaron, you're just neat." That last comment caught Aaron's need. He turned and smiled in the direction of the comment. His expression ignited the crowd into three cheers. . . .
>
> It's not easy being a king one moment and a child the next. Wheeling Aaron back to our cabin I couldn't see his face for the evening shadows. . . . Tears were streaming down his face as he turned in embarrassment from the other campers. "I've never been a king before." Still pushing him slowly I responded, "Most of us will never be kings." Aaron continued, "But I'm so happy, why am I crying?" Before I could think of an answer he had another question. "Do kings cry?" I had an answer, "Yes."

Why were these children known as the Acorn People? Because, on their first day at camp they found Ron Jones making a necklace out of acorns he had collected. The boys wanted to make them too, and did. After a day or two, there wasn't an acorn in sight. Everybody in camp wore a necklace, and Benny took home a suitcase of them. After Benny died, his mother gave Ron Jones a white envelope. "Inside was a crumpled acorn necklace. She said he gave them to everyone he met."

FRONTIERS

The Catering of Cars

WE have a letter from a reader who charges that in our (Dec. 22) discussion of the strike at the General Motors Vega plant in Lordstown, Ohio, we listed "all the General Motors executives' motivations except the dominant one, satisfying the customer." Our article ("Nature's Bureaucracy") was on the problems inherent in big organization, and in the passage under criticism we attempted to explain why General Motors retained the assembly line system that the workers found so monotonous. The Vega plant was then able to claim that it had "the fastest assembly line in the world," and the MANAS writer suggested that this was bound to please GM stockholders, making it difficult for the management to change a system with record-breaking efficiency. "Think," our article said, "of the executives of General Motors who want to make the stockholders happy so they can keep their high-paying jobs!"

This sounds like pure self-interest, and our reader apparently feels that it is grossly unjust to ignore the desire of corporate executives to give the customers what they want.

It is certainly true that no big business can survive without pleasing its customers, and true, also, that General Motors attributes its success to the policy of giving the public what it wants. As Thomas A. Murphy, chairman of the General Motors Corporation, said in an interview (*Living Wilderness*, July/September, 1975), "We have never been able, in spite of the myth that has grown, to sell the public what we wanted to make." General Motors, he suggested, took a lot of business away from the first Henry Ford simply by pleasing the buyers of cars. When the interviewer, Charles N. Conconi, proposed that Alfred Sloan of General Motors accomplished this by introducing annual style changes, Mr. Murphy replied:

> It wasn't Mr. Sloan that did it. It was the American public that did it. The public started the change. The public said to Mr. Ford, "I want something different. Make it in different colors and make it in different shapes." . . . When the public began to turn from Mr. Ford and indicate that they were interested in more variety than Mr. Ford was willing to give them, General Motors was there to give them that option.

The interviewer then suggested that the auto industry went too far from Ford's common-sense idea of an automobile:

> They went so far the other way, away from the economical, monocolor model T Ford that they left a big gap so that Europe, with economy cars like Volkswagen and Fiat could come in and take a significant part of the American market. . . . is there any American car that was being made at that time that was comparable to the VW in gasoline mileage efficiency, price, and just less complexity?

The General Motors executive responded:

> There have been cars like it. The Henry J., if you remember, that and the Willys of that generation, were Plain Jane types of vehicles, no-nonsense vehicles. They were fuel-efficient. And they didn't sell very well.

The interviewer concluded this part of the dialogue by saying:

> What the American public wants and the wants automotive advertising creates is probably something you and I could argue all day.

Mr. Conconi's meaning is obvious. He is suggesting that manufacturers are able, up to a point, to define the terms of customer satisfaction. He is implying that nobody knows how much latitude they have in this. Nor would it be easy to objectify the mix of motives that animates the devious arts of sales promotion. On the other hand, it must be admitted that any manufacturer required to sell in large quantity a costly product like an automobile will have to adapt his sales effort to the habits and tendencies of the mass market. There may be times when a sweep of common sense seems to dominate—when Plain Jane, no-nonsense vehicles will sell better than anything else—and then manufacturers can be expected to fall in line. But by definition mass consumer demand is filled with practical

contradictions, resulting in a considerable difference between commercial "sales appeal" and well-considered public service. Closing that gap is likely to be much easier for small manufacturing enterprises able to sell to a limited market.

One view of the spread of possibilities is given by Ivan Illich in *Energy and Equity*, in his last chapter, where he discusses transport from the viewpoint of long-term social benefit. A country, he says, is "under-equipped" if the people don't have even enough bicycles. It is over-industrialized when the transportation industry determines the structure and style of both individual and social life. Somewhere between these extremes lies the balance that Illich calls "technological maturity"—a condition which can hardly be achieved until both industrialists and buyers or users of vehicles acquire similar and sound ideas of what is desirable and good. Critical analysis can provide a range of options, but it cannot determine what people generally will agree upon as "good." Illich says:

> Under-equipment keeps people enslaved to primordial nature and limits their freedom. Over-industrialization does not admit of differences in production. . . . It imposes technical characteristics on social relations. The world of technological maturity permits a variety of political choices and cultures. The variety diminishes, of course, as a community allows industry to grow at the cost of autonomous production. Reasoning alone can offer no precise measure for the level of post-industrial effectiveness and technological maturity appropriate to a concrete society. It can only indicate in dimensional terms the range into which these technological characteristics must fit. It must be left to a historical community engaged in its own political process to decide when programming, space distortion, time scarcity and inequality cease to be worth its while. Reasoning can identify speed as the critical factor in traffic. It cannot set politically feasible limits.

Which is to say that only the good sense of the people can pattern the manufacturing, sales, and use of vehicles for transport according to specifications which actually serve the common good.

Our Dec. 22 article was not about this general question, but about the unavoidable evils of *bigness* in industry (and government), as made evident in the extreme confinements of bureaucratic organization. We gave no attention to the ambiguous question of customer satisfaction, first, because it seemed to have no direct relation to the deadly boredom of assembly line jobs; and, second, because, in a semi-monopolistic situation, no one really knows what the customers might choose if wider ranges of choice were available. Some people, at least, might choose to ride street cars a lot more than they do, if most of the local transit lines on tracks had not been put out of business, mainly by General Motors, during the past fifty years, in order to sell more buses.