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WIDE, UNOPENED SPACES

THERE are many good reasons for rejecting the struggle for power, for living outside of it, for not being interested in it and ignoring it as far as possible, but the most persuasive one, today, is that even those who gain power are seldom able to do much that is humanly useful with it—first, because power applies only to things and the "thing" component in men, second, because seeking power tends to have a dehumanizing effect on those who are determined to get it. However, a difficulty in accepting this view comes from the manifest effects of power on our lives. It is argued—with some reason—that there wouldn't have been any American Revolution unless good men had concerned themselves with power, or at least with trying to see that only responsible people use it, and hardly anyone can be immune to the appeal of this claim. But it is equally evident that in our time a kind of moral impotence afflicts virtually all the centers of political power. The conditions of its use are—or have become prejudicial. Recognizing this, men say that you can't win the hearts and minds of people with guns—that the battle of ideas must be conducted on another plane—but at the same time they don't put down the guns unless practically compelled to by a combination of socio-psychological pressures, and they still insist on attempting to accumulate an arsenal of weapons more threatening than that of other nations. . . . Because, you never know. . . .

Having more armament than anyone else, or as much as you can afford, consumes an enormous proportion of the available human energy. But even more important than this loss of energy is the exclusive focus of the ranges of human intelligence on the working of the mechanisms of power. Little else obtains serious consideration and discussion. Evidently, power is functionally esteemed as the highest good. The necessity of the power is not questioned, but only the endless relativities of winning and using it. The practical realm of inquiry devoted to these problems extends all the way from debates about what should be taught in the public schools to the latest revelations of the Watergate scandal. Getting power—power and money, which are almost interchangeable values—is the major preoccupation of the age.

We have not far to look for evidence of this, since it is massively omnipresent. Take for example the review of Ernest Fitzgerald's *The High Priests of Waste* (Norton) by James M. Cypher in the *Nation* for Sept. 17. Mr. Fitzgerald has worked for the Pentagon; his job was to reduce the inefficiency of government procurement, to curb the waste in the way the military buys what it thinks is required to sustain and increase the nation's might. He was fired, Cypher says, for telling the truth in two Congressional hearings. "Senators and Congressmen are reluctant to embarrass the military bureaucrats by forcing them to acknowledge their incompetence." But neither these bureaucrats nor the industrialist suppliers are the "high priests of waste." According to Fitzgerald, these are the economists, the Keynesians who avow that "waste is good for the economy." A bright young Ph.D. economist tried to convince Fitzgerald that "our bombing program in Southeast Asia contributed to the nation's prosperity." It made some jobs, no doubt of that. The Pentagon economists were Keynesian to the extent that they were following Keynes in maintaining "that mature capitalist economies need a strong form of government demand to offset the tendency toward perpetual unemployment." Certainly the $1.7 trillion spent by the federal government on military matters in the "post-war" years of 1947-71 can be called a

strong form of demand. But as the *Nation* reviewer points out, while the spending for this vast military program did keep the economy going, its real cost was not the money so much as "the material objects which this country could have had if billions upon billions of dollars had not been spent on useless weapons systems." Cypher quotes the following from Fitzgerald:

> The spending for blowing holes in the ground in Asia, for overruns on flimsy C-5As, and for cutting off legs in Army hospitals all adds to the gross national product (GNP) as conceived by the economists. Such spending increases something called "gross aggregate demand" which, in turn, is said to "make jobs."
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> The very phrase "make jobs" convicts the concepts and shows the shockingly shallow nature of modern economic mechanics. Obviously the nation is poorer, not richer, by the cost of waste in nonproductive activities, not to mention the human loss in the warfare so highly esteemed as an economic spur. The employment generated by wasteful spending is nothing more than a restatement of the cost in different terms. Many, if not most, of our economists seem to have lost sight of the importance of end products. It is only in terms of the useful products of labor, capital, equipment, land, and natural processes that true economic output can be measured.

After using this argument to a major-general in charge of the F-III program—the F-III, an airplane called an "obvious failure," costs the public $16 million every time one crashes—Fitzgerald was told that "inefficiency is national policy." While high officials never admit things like this, but declare for economy and efficiency, actual practice, Fitzgerald says, confirmed the major-general. No one was ever fired for over-runs, and the greatest offenders seemed to be promoted fastest. "Defenders of wasteful procurement practices and sloppy, deceitful financial management were richly rewarded, while economy advocates were ignored, shunted aside, or put out of business and destroyed professionally if they became too bothersome or persistent."

The typical reaction to such revelations is that we need to "dean house" and put people like Fitzgerald in charge of procurement, but we have been reacting that way for so long without any noticeable change that it should have become evident that the trouble lies, not in a choice of major-generals, but in the level of thinking involved. And this thinking is found everywhere. Not long ago a reporter, talking to working men around the country, heard it said that the country would need "a good war" to keep everybody busy. What one is busy at is given little importance, and it has none in terms of Keynesian formula. This indifference is certainly characteristic of union leaders, who don't seem to care what their members manufacture, so long as wages, hours, working conditions, fringe benefits, and union jurisdiction are sufficient and secure. Wherever you turn in our society, "relevance" means, related to the struggle for power.

Even idealistic social movements submit to this tendency, until it monopolizes their energies, identifies their morals, and defines their dreams. Erich Fromm, a socialist, made this clear in *Let Men Prevail:*

> The idea that history has a goal, and the faith in man's perfectibility within the historical process has been the most specific element of Occidental thought. It is the soil in which the American tradition is rooted, and from which it draws its strength and vitality. What has happened to the ideas of the perfectibility of man and of society? They have deteriorated into a flat concept of "progress," into a vision of production of more and better *things,* rather than standing for the birth of the fully alive and productive *man*. Our political concepts have today lost their spiritual roots. . . .
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> Socialism, in the nineteenth century, and until the beginning of the First World War, was the most significant humanistic and spiritual movement in Europe and America.
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> What happened to socialism?
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> It succumbed to the spirit of capitalism which it had wanted to replace. Instead of understanding it as a movement for the liberation of man, many of its adherents and its enemies alike understood it as being exclusively a movement for the *economic* improvement of the working class. The humanistic aims of socialism were forgotten, or only paid lip service to, while, as in capitalism, all the emphasis was laid on the aims of economic gain. . . . Thus socialism became the vehicle for the workers to gain their place *within* the capitalistic structure rather than transcending it; instead of changing

> capitalism, socialism was absorbed by its spirit. . . . Capitalism and a vulgarized, distorted socialism have brought man to the point where he is in danger of becoming a dehumanized automaton, he is losing his sanity and stands at the point of total self-destruction.

Let it be stipulated, then, that the focus of human effort and attention on power is a corruption of authentic human ends. Good. But we must add that this has been said before. It has been agreed to before. The problem, then, is not merely to admit the evil of power-seeking, but to start seeking something else something so engrossing that it can actually displace the goal of power and provide a natural immunity to both its temptations and its threats.

Our difficulty, in social terms, lies exactly here. For while all men, or nearly all, are moved by desire and restrained by fear—the motivations which make power a goal—few men animate their lives with vision and aspiration. Yet if these qualities of the distinguished and the great were evenly distributed throughout mankind, there would be no basis for divisive social formations, no groupings created by self-interest, and no human susceptibility to sectarianism, even in religion, for each would have a religion of his own, sufficient unto his needs. He would have found or made it for himself and have his own, unique security.

What can we say about these rare and courageous men, who cannot be awed by ruthless brutality or impersonal compulsion; who could be models for all men to follow, to create a free society, if men had sufficient moral resolve; and who keep alive the very idea of the dignity of man and the hope for general human growth into a better condition? They live and work always above their times. They do not consult national averages for norms of behavior. They have in their hearts some self-developed goal, some ideal to translate into practice where they can. Often they do not or can not explain their intentions clearly. They may not be entirely sure of their reasons themselves. Yet one might say that the creeds of religion represent inadequate versions or recollections of what some of these men were working toward. A Christ or a Buddha lives a pretty untranslatable life, and when the vernacular of an age has no nouns for its quality and no verbs for its intentions, the Word is communicated only in cipher. Yet, poorly or well, ideals get etched on the horizon of man's consciousness, and good men strive to apply them in action. We probably need both—the human example as well as the conceptualized and verbalized ideal. Americans, who seldom give collective assent to any ideals higher than their historic political decencies, had great need of the self-sacrificing examples of our truly great men, and of the sagacity they practiced in behalf of the entire community. How else could the quality of transcendence have any part in their lives? Actually, we have been living on the moral capital of the eighteenth-century embodiments of the republican ideal for a long, long time, and the substance of their generous investment for the common good is about used up. Where did those men get their capital? They got it out of themselves, by thinking thoughts which reached beyond themselves, beyond the circumscribing immediacies of their time—and that is how we shall have to get it, too, if the investment is to be renewed.

There is nothing mysterious about such processes, except, perhaps, that they happen at all. For every flowering of civilization, whether in Periclean Athens, fifteenth-century Florence, or Elizabethan England, has risen from the seeding of a handful of men of great ability and natural generosity. There is a *noblesse oblige* in the excellences of the best of human beings, and we should have little to work with, in terms of visions to work toward, without the imaginative projections of this creative rank in humanity. It is exactly as Lewis Mumford said—"had Whitman died in the cradle, . . . the possibilities of American life would have been definitely impoverished."

Add to Whitman that majestic nonconformist, Thoreau, who speaks to us with a penetration more pertinent and recognizable with each day—

> I do not know but it is too much to read one newspaper a week. I have tried it recently, and for so long it seems to me I have not dwelt in my native region. The sun, the clouds, the snow, the trees say not so much to me. You cannot serve two masters. It requires more than a day's devotion to know and to possess the wealth of a day. . . .
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> Think of admitting the details of a single case of the criminal court into our thoughts, to stalk profanely through their very *sanctum sanctornm* for an hour, ay, for many hours! to make a very bar-room of the mind's inmost apartment, as if for so long the dust of the street had occupied us,—the very street itself, with all its travel, its bustle, and filth, had passed through our thoughts' shrine! Would it not be an intellectual and moral suicide? . . .
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> If we have thus desecrated ourselves,—as who has not?—remedy will be by wariness and devotion to reconsecrate ourselves, and make once more a fane of the mind. We should treat our minds, that is, ourselves, as innocent and ingenuous children, whose guardians we are, and be careful what objects and what subjects we thrust on their attention. Read not the Times. Read the Eternities. Conventionalities are as bad as impurities. Even the facts of science may dust the mind by their dryness, unless they are in a sense effaced each morning, or rather rendered fertile by the dews of fresh and living truth. Knowledge does not come to us by details, but in flashes of light from heaven. . . .
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> Have we no culture, no refinement,—but skill only to live coarsely and serve the Devil?—to acquire a little worldly wealth, or fame, or liberty, and to make a false show with it, as if we were all husk and shell, with no tender and living kernel to us? Shall our institutions be like those chestnut burrs which contain abortive nuts, perfect only to prick the fingers?
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> America is said to be the arena on which the battle of freedom is to be fought; but surely it cannot be freedom in a merely political sense that is meant. Even if we grant that the American has freed himself from a political tyrant, he is still the slave of an economical and moral tyrant. . . . What is it to be born free and not to live free? What is the value of any political freedom, but as a means to moral freedom. . . . We are a nation of politicians, concerned about the outmost defences only of freedom. It is our children's children who may perchance be really free. We tax ourselves unjustly. There is a part of us which is not represented. It is taxation without representation. We quarter troops, we quarter fools and cattle of all sorts upon ourselves. We quarter our gross bodies on our poor souls, till the former eat up all the latter's substance.

We know so little about Thoreau—that he wrote "Walden," that he liked to walk alone in the woods, that he was a strange man but that Emerson loved him; that he abhorred slavery, worked little, and died young. But his thoughts grow up in our minds like great vines that push away the pith and dry rot of timbers that can no longer support anything of value. To read Thoreau and try his experiments—in the spirit, not the letter, for following the letter is no longer possible and probably never was—might bring an answer to the question: With what could men fill their minds in order to eliminate and replace the longings and the fears of power? Is it possible to believe that knowledge comes in flashes of light from heaven? Did Thoreau know the "truth" of the matter? Well—

> I cannot take up a newspaper but I find some wretched government or other, hard pushed, and on its last legs, is interceding with me, the reader, to vote for it,—more importunate than an Italian beggar; and if I have a mind to look at its certificate, made, perchance, by some benevolent merchant's clerk, or the skipper that brought it over, for it cannot speak a word of English itself, I shall probably read of the eruption of some Vesuvius, or the overflowing of some Po, true or forged, which brought it to this condition. I do not hesitate, in such a case, to suggest work, or the almshouse; or why not keep its castle in silence, as I do commonly. The poor President, what with preserving his popularity and doing his duty, is completely bewildered. The newspapers are the ruling power. Any other government is reduced to a few Marines at Fort Independence. If a man neglects to read the Daily Times, government will go down on its knees to him, for this is the only treason in these days.
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> Those things which now most engage the attention of men, as politics and the daily routine, are, it is true, vital functions of human society, but should be unconsciously performed, like the corresponding functions of the physical body. They are *infra*-human, a kind of vegetation. . . .

Thoreau has it just right. Politics is, or should be, the mere metabolism of the social organism—a necessary but wholly insufficient part of human existence. Yet it now enjoys a virtual monopoly of our time.

Well, are there other examples—living ones? Emile Capouya, literary editor of the *Nation,* names two in the *Nation* for June 25, and remembers a third of nearly two hundred years

ago. Honoring Solzhenitsyn, he compares him with Ignazio Silone. Silone exhausted the possibilities of Western political radicalism and ended with long thoughts about "the religious spirit at odds with institutionalized religion" and "the revolutionary power of honesty, humility and manliness." But the radical strength in his ideas is not recognized, because, Capouya thinks, Silone has been sainted for American readers ever since he rejected Communism and said so in *The God that Failed.* No one has to take saints seriously. Likewise Solzhenitsyn, who is a great writer and thinks and lives according to the measures and bounds known to citizens of the republic of moral intelligence. He is feted by the American press, but not because he is understood. Capouya thinks it is because he is misunderstood. Solzhenitsyn has said that "a great writer" is like a "second government," meaning that he lays the foundation of a social order based upon the spontaneities of self-respect and the respect of men for one another. But we do not, in America, think of writers in this way:

> Some months ago, an interview with Solzhenitsyn appeared in one of our great newspapers, and the reporter wrote that at one point a photograph was proposed, and Solzhenitsyn assented. He had been smiling but now he turned grave. In response to the suggestion that he assume a little decent hilarity for the camera, he made an astounding statement: "A writer should look serious when being photographed." The remark annihilated journalism as we practice it, and extinguished contemporary American literature, though our newspapers and novelists have not found it out yet. Who does he think he is? Solzhenitsyn, apparently. Doesn't he understand that his life has no real connection with him, but is taking place somewhere else, possibly on television? No, he does not. He once said that a man who had been abused as he had been no longer had anything to fear from the state, it had done its worst against him. That was a brave lie—he has a wife and two sons. Except that he was not making a sociological observation. He was announcing his program. . . .
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> At bottom we have misunderstood Solzhenitsyn because the assertion that a great writer is a second government is at odds with our conception of art. He is echoing a sentiment that has become unintelligible to us since the time Shelley uttered it: Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind. That is, literature convicts the law of bias, statesmen of greed and self-aggrandizement, government—any government—of being the machinery of oppression, invest it with what mystical trappings we will.

These men of the second government exist. Their vision is without dull monotony and does not submit to mutilation by slogans. It is never second-hand, although there is endless cross-fertilization and blending of ideas in its composition. In times of great beginnings, at the birth of civilizations, the vision attains to clear generality and rich substance for the men who participate, who have the courage and the tenacity to give life to new forms. But these qualities cannot be inherited. They are intrinsically self-created. They are not "transmitted," although their seminal essences flow wherever real education goes on.

It seems quite apparent that any new beginnings that are to be made, now or in the future, will be accomplished by persons who have outgrown the uses of power, and to whom ordinary politics will be what it was to Thoreau. The wide spaces of other fields of reality now need to be colonized by human beings. We see what happens to us when the access to those fields is hidden by the false fronts of power and the market's crude displays.

REVIEW
NOT THAT, BUT THIS

SOME of the books which come in for review are books which could have been left unpublished, and can certainly be left unread. They make you think of what Ortega said about the sciences—that their purpose is not the vital purpose of living a human life, but develops out of the peculiar needs or direction of some scientific specialty, so that the reader, unless he is a practitioner of that science, remains unable to find much of value in its reports. We are speaking of books which deal with literary specialties—books about the lives, loves, and personal oddities of writers. Sometimes, no doubt, such material throws light on a writer's intentions or meanings, but as often as not they seem an unnecessary exhumation we can do very well without. Why plumb depths which stay shallow all the way down?

A case in point is the volume, *Letters to Felice,* by Franz Kafka, edited by two persons and translated by two more, making 620 pages in a book that costs $17.50. The book will be valued by Kafka scholars, but must there be Kafka scholars? Should the Humanities be cut up into specialties for *any* reason?

A review of Kafka's ambivalence about marriage occupies what is left of two full pages in the *Saturday Review World* after the advertising space has been subtracted. Must we have the last word on this? Rather good books are ignored by the magazines, these days, mostly because the authors and/or publishers are unknown, or because the publishers don't advertise or are not located in New York or Boston. Meanwhile, as the *SR* reviewer concludes: "That the collected letters will add to our self-understanding is doubtful."

Other things in the *SR* (for Sept. 11) are much more interesting—Norman Cousin's long editorial, for one, in which he says that the new combined paper (*SR* and *World*) will be edited out of "the personal enchantments and desperations of the editors," and not "surveys of readers' 'attitudes and tastes'." Mr. Cousins also tells a little of the early history of the *Saturday Review* when it began back in 1924, briefly sharing quarters with—of all people the publishers and staff of *Time,* then also a new magazine.

His closing remarks are worthy of note. "We live," he says, "in an age without heroes," continuing:

> Skepticism is no longer a philosophical adornment but a matter almost of intellectual self-preservation. People feel they have to expect the worst just to survive the next surprise. Watergate is more than a few burglars stealing for political advantage. It is a specific manifestation of a monstrously dangerous lifestyle that has been growing into the national life, a lifestyle alien to the nation's history and contemptuous of people. Contemptuous not just of Americans as political animals but of people in general. The effect has been a suspension of energizing thought in the society and an oppressive sense of a lowering ceiling over our national prospects.
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> The nation's credentials for its leadership role in the world are being shredded. At precisely the time when new global approaches have to be fashioned for global problems, the United States is losing moral tone and therefore rallying power. More serious even than Watergate, in its impact on world opinion, has been the special dispensation asked by the government to continue to drop bombs on human beings for a specified period of time. It is almost made to seem as though we were enroute to the promised land needing only forty-five days of unobstructed bombing of human beings to get there. Can anyone imagine the feelings of Cambodians on learning that the rain of death would be prolonged for a magic number of days according to a formula worked out between the President and the Congress?

Mr. Cousins does not think like a "nation"; he thinks like a civilized man.

It was while working, not very successfully, as a freelance porter in the railway station at Nice that Maurice Mességué, herbalist and son of a herbalist, encountered his first patient, whom he had to bribe to accept treatment. Mességué was twenty-four years old, the time was a year after the ending of the war, and he had migrated from

his home village in Gascony to set up as a healer in Nice, hoping to make a living at it. He had a stock of plants he had collected, printed cards, and a place to see people, but no patients came—not one. So he tried portering. Near the station he met a beggar named Schoum the Tramp, "Schoum" being the name of a patent medicine for biliousness, in this case signifying the red wine to which the elderly beggar was addicted. The two became friends, but Schoum was covered with dry eczema and kept scratching off the scabs, which bothered Mességué. After much persuasion and the promise of a bottle of wine, Schoum allowed the young herbalist to give him foot-baths in a decoction of selected herbs, a combination designed to help the beggar's liver and bowels, his nerves, and his skin condition. Into the brew went artichoke leaves, milfoil, cabbage, thyme, bindweed, whitethorn, broom, sage flower, and burdock leaf. After a month of two foot-baths administered daily, the eczema disappeared. Other of Schoum's benefactors noticed his baby-like skin and learned who had cured him. Impressed, a local Mother Superior became Mességué's next patient.

But he had no immediate rise to fame. A trickle of patients came, were helped, one being a doctor's wife, and the doctor, an unusual M.D., began to send him more patients. Fame was in the making only after he cured the celebrated entertainer, Mistinguett, then somewhere between "sixty, maybe eighty," of rheumatic pains in her beautiful legs. He had applied a poultice to her kidney region and prescribed foot-baths. Grateful, she paid him with sage advice and sent him patients, one a young star from the Casino de Paris. He had little trouble with doctors at first, since his patients were increasingly people whom the doctors had given up. A journalist reported his cures and the young man became known as a miracle-worker. By 1948 he was treating President Herriot for rheumatism, using foot-baths and putting him on a diet. But Herriot would not keep to the diet. But now, by reason of his growing reputation, Mességué had the enmity of the doctors. He was prosecuted for practicing medicine without a license, of which he was, of course, profoundly guilty. But his lawyer found 228 witnesses to testify that they were nonetheless cured. Some of these patients brought high drama to the stand, and women in the audience wept in sympathy. After the head of the local medical association testified for him, saying that he knew the herbalist had cured incurable people, among them his own wife, the court found him guilty and fined him fifty dollars. All of Mességué's trials—there were several—went that way, with the fines nominal, the witnesses for him ever increasing in number and prestige.

Mességué's book, *Of Men and Plants* (Macmillan), is largely a recital of anecdotes concerning the treatment of the famous and notorious. Anonymous lords and ladies came to him from England, Winston Churchill took some of the herbalist's advice, and Konrad Adenauer, himself a herbalist, swapped remedies with the French healer. Ali Khan retained his services and King Farouk of Egypt revealed himself as "the most spoiled and indulged man in the world." In all these cases, Mességué would never treat anyone with an ill which, in his knowledge and experience, herbs and diet and foot-baths could not help. He does not attempt cancer cures, although he has some ideas on the subject. A surgeon friend who had been in Morocco said to him:

> "In 40 years' practice I operated almost exclusively on Bedouins, in all that time I came across only two cases of cancer. Then ships started to bring cargoes of European food, and as these foodstuffs became more and more widely adopted, I found myself operating on more and more cancers. I am not drawing any conclusion, simply stating the facts."
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> Evidence like this has led me to ponder the whole question a great deal. I am quite aware that famous authorities on cancer accord little importance to the role played by diet, but I would still like someone to explain to me why the mortality rate goes up when a country industrializes its food products. I am not saying this is the sole cause. I am simply

worried by the evidence. In countries noted for good food habits, such as Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands, the mortality rate from cancer is very much lower, as it is also in a country like Italy, where the people's diet consists largely of pasta and vegetables.

There follows what seems good advice about diet.

On the whole, *Of Men and Plants* is enjoyable and useful reading. The author seems a kind of herbalist-about-town, unpretentious, pious, and not a maker of claims. The nicest thing in the book is his memory of his father, from whom he learned so much.

There is space to add a mini review of Ruth Stout's *How to Have a Green Thumb Without an Aching Back* (Cornerstone Library, distributed by Simon & Schuster, 1972, $1.45), a paperback on growing vegetables likely to interest even people whose backs ache before they start. Ruth Stout is Rex Stout's sister, and Rex (known to most readers by his gourmet detective, Nero Wolf) has a small part to play in this book as a maker of comment and suggestion. Miss Stout writes persuasively. She has a feud with all theory and testifies mostly concerning her own practice, which is to mulch instead of plow. She started her gardening experiments in 1930 when she and her husband moved to an old farm with fifty-five acres in a place called Poverty Hollow in Connecticut. Her two major advisers were Rex and a neighbor, Scott Nearing. For a while she plowed—got a nearby farmer to do it—but by chapter six, which was years later, the neighbor wasn't available because his tractor wouldn't go.

I wandered over to the asparagus bed and said to it affectionately: "Bless your heart, you don't have to wait for anyone to plow you. You merely—"

I stopped short as a thought struck me like a blow. One never plows asparagus and it gets along fine. Except for new sod, why plow anything, ever?

Why plow? Why turn the soil upside down? Why plow? I AM NOT GOING TO. I AM GOING TO PLANT!

It was my good fortune that, in spite of all the warnings against it, I had formed the habit of leaving all the vegetable waste, such as corn stalks, right there in the garden and had spread leaves all over it in the fall and vegetable garbage all winter long. Now, when I raked this mass of stuff aside to make a row for the spinach I found the ground so soft and moist that I made a tiny drill with my finger. . . .

It really worked, in May and June the ground would surely be soft enough to put in corn, beans and other late things. With all those leaves no weeds would come through. Some did however, the mulch wasn't thick enough.

Don't plow, mulch, was her secret, later confirmed by reading Faulkner's *Plowman's Folly.* The book goes on like this for 160 pages, from victory to victory.

COMMENTARY
THE POWER OF GENERALIZATION

SOMETHING ought to be added to what is said in "Children" about the value of generalized ideas.

Abstractions provide a *leverage* never possible in discourse which fails to rise above the empirical level. (Whitehead would have said that there can't be *any* discourse at a strictly empirical level.) Take Illich's conception of "radical monopoly." This is a generalization with a particular meaning. The Detroit automobile manufacturers, for example, compete with one another, even though they manage to shut out newcomers with limited capital from the field. And the foreign cars, German, Swedish, and Japanese, have invaded the American market to claim an increasingly large proportion of the sales. Yet *radical* monopoly nonetheless prevails when people everywhere become convinced that they *have to have* automobiles—that there is really no other way to live and get about. Radical monopoly also exists when parents believe that their sons and daughters *must go to college* in order to be complete human beings. It is difficult to imagine how empirical data could ever point to this revealing generalization.

Schools, Illich maintains, have long enjoyed a radical monopoly. They have the authority once enjoyed by the medieval Church. "De-schooling" is a dramatic idea conceived to end the monopoly. Illich seems to think that we have to pass some kind of law to de-school society, although, paradoxically, he also says that the schools don't need to be attacked because they are already falling apart. But his idea of "networks" of educational opportunity, involving skill-swapping, etc., is now taking shape in the form of voluntarist efforts of diverse character and origin. (See *Somewhere Else,* just published by Swallow Press in Chicago.) Actually, the "abolition" of schools hardly seems desirable or necessary. If their radical monopoly can be destroyed, there will then be free use of the schools, along with any other vehicle or tool embodying educational possibility. If children and adults had a non-compulsive relation to schools, that would probably, of itself, make them much better places. And if this is the case, why shouldn't John Holt meanwhile take a job at Harvard? He might improve it some by being there. Who can be pure, these days, when there's so much good in people who are wrong, and so much ignorance in people who are right? In a time of moral confusion, purity becomes very subjective and responsible moralists can have only abstract targets to shoot at.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
AN ENVIRONMENT TO RECOVER IN

IT sometimes happens that the first one or two pages of a new book seem so good—so fresh and interesting—that you look at the remaining breadth of pages and wonder if it would be better if they weren't there. The initial excellence is likely to be blurred by adding all the rest! This first impression is sometimes correct, and even if it isn't, there is still the probability that lots of books could be much shorter—with more distillation instead of going on and on.

Of course, there are books which are excellent all the way through—wonderful sets of dramatic unities—somewhat connected, but also able to stand alone. We have an example of this now—*The Zen of Seeing,* by Frederick Franck, and we borrow from his second page some material which belongs in "Children," although the book will have notice elsewhere later on. Dr. Franck is an artist who works in pen and ink. He did *My Eye Is in Love* a few years ago. The present book has drawings and a hand-written text (published as a Vintage book by Random House—$3.45). "It may," Dr. Franck says, "be a little slower to read, but there is no hurry, for what I want to share with you took a long time to experience."

He starts by telling about some sixty people, between eighteen and sixty-four years old, who came to a "workshop" he had been asked to do on "Creativity in a Non-Creative Environment." Never having tried anything like this, he was nervous. He made elaborate plans and then, as it happened, didn't use them. First off—

> I asked the rhetorical question WHO IS MAN, THE ARTTST? and answered it by saying: HE IS THE UNSPOILED CORE OF EVERYMAN, BEFORE HE IS CHOKED BY SCHOOLING, TRAINING, CONDITIONING UNTIL THE ARTIST-WITHIN SHRIVELS UP AND IS FORGOTTEN. Even in the artist who is professionally trained to be consciously "creative" this unspoiled core shrivels up in the rush toward a "personal style," in the heat of competition to be "in."
>
> And yet, I added, that core is never killed completely. At times it responds to Nature, to beauty, to Life, suddenly aware again of being in the presence of a Mystery that baffles understanding and which only has to be glimpsed to renew our Spirit and to make us feel that life is a supreme gift. Many years of preoccupation with Zen have kept me awake to the experience of this opening up of life.
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> Suddenly I noticed that the strangers' faces in front of me began to look less strange. I was making contact, and encouraged by this rapport, I forgot my carefully hatched lecture and started to talk freely about seeing, about drawing as "The Way of Seeing, about something I called SEEING/DRAWING as a way of meditation, a way of getting into intimate touch with the visible world around us, and through it . . . with ourselves.
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> A "non-creative environment" is one that constantly bombards us, I said, overloads our switchboard with noise, with agitation and visual stimuli. Once we can detach ourselves from all these distractions, find a way of "inscape," of "centering," the same environment becomes "creative" again. It establishes an island of silence, an oasis of undivided attention, an environment to recover in . . .

There were no professional artists in the audience. A teacher said, I'd love to try your SEEING/DRAWING, but how on earth do I start? I can't even draw a straight line!" Dr. Franck said, "I'll show you tomorrow morning." What happened became the material for this book. It's a big book (8¼" x 10¾"), filled with Dr. Franck's drawings.

Various things are to be learned from such books, but most important, we think, is the rule—practically a "law"—which says that people don't learn anything important from others unless they take fire a little, are able to *feel* the value of what is to be known. You can't really tell about a work of art without making another work of art of the telling, however unpretentious. An anatomy class is not a life class. There are all those words we have for naming what is not communicated by words—"creative" being one of them.

We have a letter of comment from a reader who takes up the use of words at another level. This reader wrote in response to the review (in MANAS for Sept. 5) of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* He says:

During the past year I spent some time at CIDOC in Cuernavaca, Mexico, mostly to learn Spanish, but I also listened in on and took part in some of the discussions going on.

One man who had studied Freire quite a bit was critical of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* for some of the same reasons you mention in your article. He said that Freire's weaknesses in the book were probably due to the corrupting influences of Harvard University. (I understand that Freire was a member of the faculty of Harvard when he wrote the book.) The man felt that some of the arid intellectualism of Harvard might well have been influencing Freire when he wrote it. However, I understand that there are earlier works of Freire which may contain more of that "vital content" which you said was lacking in the book.

Shortly after I returned from Cuernavaca I read William Irwin Thompson's article in *Harper's* (September, 1972) and was amused at his calling Illich a modern-day Tolstoy in search of his long-lost peasants. Because Illich is a charismatic man who attracts many people from around the world to CIDOC, I was curious to see how people reacted to him. From what I observed, it was mostly older, highly schooled people who were interested in him and his ideas. Many younger people who came to CIDOC expecting to become disciples seemed turned off pretty quick. The older, schooled people seemed to like discussing abstract theory and young people rated concrete experience much more important. Does it take a highly schooled person to come up with an idea like de-schooling?

Also, while I was browsing through the library at CIDOC I found a letter written by John Holt to some people there. Holt said that when he had first come to CIDOC he could not really accept the radical educational ideas of Illich and others. However, he said that further thought led him to the conclusion that schools should be abolished. It seemed sort of ironic to me that Holt then got a job at Harvard. I began to wonder if lots of people in the de-schooling crowd were down there for some education, radical chic.

I discovered that the blue sky, sunshine, flowers, and people were reason enough to be in Cuernavaca. Here in Minnesota where the birds are beginning to gather for their flight southward, I, too, am feeling restless.

Letting go the question of old Harvard's guilt in the matter of Freire's abstractions, we can agree that some "schooling"—whether in an institution or as a private pursuit—is needed to obtain a sense of reality for abstract ideas. For the reality of abstract ideas is *not material,* and no picture can be drawn of it. Actually, the more mature or developed a field of knowledge becomes, the more its content can be expressed in terms of general principles, with fewer and fewer references needed to the world of concrete experience. This sort of development makes possible the exercise of the genius possessed by an Einstein. Discussing this question, Jerome Bruner once remarked: "A good field is one where one doesn't have to go about making empirical determinations very often, and we know that such things are getting better when we can reconstruct how something should be from what is already known rather than being a brave and naked empiricist."

This has to do, of course, with physical things, forces, and laws. We don't yet have much of that kind of knowledge about human beings, although there are doubtless metaphysical principles which would have appropriate application to conscious moral agents, permitting abstract thought about them.

Unfortunately, it is a human tendency to discuss methods and tendencies in terms of their abuse, as though the malpractice were the essential characteristic to be recognized and dealt with. So, when we say that people talk in abstractions, we mean that they wish to avoid actual experience and to escape from responsibility in a fog of generalities. That people do this does not make generalities useless, but means only that these uniquely human tools are being misused. Illich's unusual capacity for generalization, for example, makes his thought penetrating, his criticism sometimes brilliant.

FRONTIERS

In The News

SOME puzzling differences in attitude among the young have become evident to the Japanese fishermen of the island of Rebun, seven hundred miles north of Tokyo. A report in *Newsweek* for Sept. 10 tells of a two-way migration of youth, in which "148 of the island's 166 15-year-olds moved away," while others have come to Rebun from the cities, "clutching their guitars and wearing their backpacks, lured by the outdoor life and the people's gentle ways." The newcomers don't by any means equal in number the migrants to the cities—Tokyo, Osaka, and Saporo—where jobs are plentiful and pay high, and only a few dozen, after they arrive on the island, decide to stay and learn to be fishermen, but they are no longer attracted by urban industry. There are more and more of these every year, and the pleased Rebun government now gives a fishing boat to any promising Rebun youngster who is serious about returning. The islanders also sent teams to the cities to invite the youth that have left to come home. Population decline on the prosperous island has been serious, with 10,000 inhabitants in 1956, but only about 6,000 today. The mayor is talking about devoting the island's grassy interior to beef- and dairy-cattle ranching, although fishing is what the islanders want the young to come home to do. The waters along the shore are rich in squid and abalone, and there is edible seaweed to gather.

The experience on Rebun may be symptomatic of a general change: "Other Japanese towns report up to 40 per cent of their high-school graduates returning disillusioned after two or three years of employment in urban industry." Hardly anyone needs to be told why.

An article in the *Los Angeles Times* for Sept. 13 helps to explain why the mayor of Rebun is toying with the idea of raising beef cattle. Industrial progress is affecting Japan's eating preferences:

> In the northern tier of industrial countries, stretching from Western Europe through the Soviet Union to Japan, dietary habits now more or less approximate those of the United States in 1940. As incomes continue to rise in this group of countries (which total about two thirds of a billion people), a sizable share of the additional income is being converted into demand for livestock products, particularly beef.

Such changes in diet have an ominous effect on world food supply, as Lester Brown, the writer of the *Times* article, points out:

> The impact of rising affluence on the demand for food can best be illustrated by its effect on consumption of cereals, which dominate the world food economy.
>
> In the poor countries, annual consumption of grain averages about 400 pounds per person; virtually all of this small amount must be consumed directly to meet minimum energy needs. In the United States and Canada, per capita grain use is approaching one ton a year; all but 150 pounds of this per capita total is consumed indirectly in the form of meat, milk and eggs—in the case of beef alone, annual U.S. per capita consumption has grown from 55 pounds in 1940 to 117 pounds in 1972.

Since, according to this expert, much of the world's pasture land is being grazed almost to capacity, it doesn't seem as though there can be great increases in the supply of meat as a source of protein. Mr. Brown would be all for full development of seafood production at places like Rebun, but there are certain discouraging facts to be borne in mind. He says:

> In 1969, 20 years of sustained growth in the world fish catch were interrupted by a sudden decline. The catch has since been fluctuating rather unpredictably, while the amounts of time and money expended to bring it in continue to rise every year.
>
> Many marine biologists now feel that the global catch of table-grade fish is at or near the maximum sustainable level. If, as currently seems probable, the global fish catch does not continue rising in the next decade as it did during the last two, the pressures on land-based protein sources can be expected to increase substantially.

The scuttlebutt which circulates among tuna fishermen in San Diego would wholly confirm the

apprehensions of the marine biologists, and then some. The owners of the enormous purse-seiners—one of which can bring in a catch of 1,400 tons of tuna—say privately that large-scale tuna fishing can last only another ten years or so, and their idea is to get all they can as fast as they can and get out of the tuna business. Their big boats cost about $3 million, and can pay for themselves in about four years of fishing, including the expense of an occasional fine of, say, $35,000 paid to Peru for poaching in Peruvian waters. (These fines are only a temporary expense, since the U.S. Government reimburses the tuna fishermen.)

Another warning comes from John F. Bardach, director of the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology at the University of Hawaii. In an interview with a *Christian Science Monitor* correspondent (*CSM* for Sept. 22), he said:

> As today's beef supplies depend on wheat and grain for livestock, so fish supplies depend in large part on plant plankton and floating algae, known to most people as seaweed. Right now, almost a fifth of all of the algae in the sea are being used up in feeding us every year, which indicates that the resources of the sea are far from limitless.

There is the further consideration that a great many fish are used as feed for land animals. The chicken farms of America, Europe, and South Africa use fish as feed, and other animal-rearing practices consume plankton and small schooling fishes. Only 15 per cent of this input is converted into meat that can be used, which shows how wasteful it is to add another link to the food chain.

Dr. Bardach suggests developing a taste for octopus, which is easy to raise, grows quickly, and can be eaten almost entire, with only 15 per cent waste. There is also the giant prawn, of which the freshwater kind sometimes grows to a pound. These are now sold live at $4.00 a pound in Honolulu. Americans, he says, prefer carnivorous fish, but if we want to have enough protein in years to come we should also learn to like the "herbivorous grazers." The carnivores "have difficult and/or expensive feeding habits." Octopuses are carnivorous, but they turn 50 per cent of what they eat into growth, while other animals may convert only 10 per cent.

Soy beans may be one answer to diminishing sources of protein; in any event, cutting down the links in the food chain, which means becoming more vegetarian than we are, will certainly be necessary. Feeling the pinch of meat prices is only the beginning. Mr. Brown says: "As world consumption expands by about 2.5 per cent annually, so should the size of global grain reserves, but over the past decade reserves have dwindled, while consumption has climbed by one third."