VOLUME XXVIII, NO. 7
FEBRUARY 12, 1975

THE MOST DIFFICULT OF THINGS

THESE are days of the anti-hero in novels and of anticlimax in the short story. To be a "modern" writer you must choose for protagonist a person so "ordinary" that practically any reader can feel superior to him. The heroic is avoided for two reasons. First, it is difficult to imagine how a hero would behave in a society like ours. Second, heroism seems somehow anti-democratic. Mass-Man realism needs no enforcement among the members of a literary community which regards the portrayal of individual achievement as covert advocacy of elitist segregation.

We commonly charge the scientists with "reductionism," but what about artists and writers who shun the portrayal of excellence as a distraction from the realities of dehumanization? The hero accepts the challenge of responsibility—he goes out to meet it on its own ground. But how can Man-as-Victim be charged with or bear any responsibility? It is moral presumption to suggest it. The anti-hero is only what the ugly forces of society have made him.

Admit even a latent capacity in individuals to rise against obstacles, to shape a life worth living in spite of the grubby and oppressive doings of the majority and you destroy the claims of social determinism. The rule of outside forces has displaced humanism in literature as surely as mechanism overcame vitalist principles in biology and medicine. In a single, overlapping century the change was accomplished. In Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground,* the self-styled victim has still sufficient dignity to suspect his own diagnosis and to mock the weakness he complains of. But Kafka's "K" lacks the imagination for this. He numbly suffers the wearing erosions of the system with hardly a reproachful cry. Camus' Stranger is capable of only a single act of the will—and that is passive negation. He turns his head away from the consolation of the priest.

It is true enough that the ghost of heroic resolution is allowed to remain as a haunting presence. Camus' Sisyphus is "happy." Sartre relieves the human of a determining essence in order to free him for "commitment." But this denuded stoicism has none of the sources of a heroic human life.

The angry forces of revolution moved toward the same reductive solution. A radical contemporary of Dostoevsky, Alexander Herzen, foresaw the cultural homogenization that would result from the triumph of mass revolt. A deep generosity of spirit made Herzen join the revolutionary forces, but he could not ignore the price of victory. As George Steiner says, reviewing Herzen's memoirs:

> What lay ahead was most likely a grey plateau, a mass society devoted to the crafts of survival. Herzen knew this he sensed the philistinism, the vengeful monotonies that waited beyond the storm. Unlike so many new left pundits and would-be bomb-throwers of today, Herzen never minimized the cost of social revolution in terms of culture. Stuffed into the dustbin of history would be not only injustice, exploitation, class snobberies, religious cant of every kind but a good measure of the fine arts, speculative insights, and inherited learning that were the peculiar glory of Western man. Herzen knew that the task of a radical intellectual elite was in a very precise sense suicidal. In preparing a society for revolution it was inevitably digging its own grave.

Herzen was right. The vengeful monotonies are upon us, and without distinction of politics. Not long ago, a former president of the Modern Language Association declared that the very idea of culture "is rooted in social elitism." Acts of distinction, eloquence above "gut-level" realism, have become virtually taboo.

In American literature, the conversion to the "mass" view of human life had become evident

with John Dos Passos' trilogy, *U.S.A.* There are no "individuals" in these books. As a critic wrote:

> Whether Dos Passos' heroes succeed or fail, are happy or unhappy, satisfied or unsatisfied, the cause is never in themselves: it is due neither to their force of character, their ability nor their wisdom. Even determinants which are usually considered intrinsic, located in the depths of being, are represented by Dos Passos as fortuitous, adventitious, exterior. His characters are always moved by some outside determinism, usually economic. . . .

One might now redirect Alfred de Musset's reproach to Voltaire, aiming it at the impatient moralists who claimed that only by defining human beings as victims could the struggle for justice be won.

> Sleepest thou content, Voltaire?
> Thy dread smile, hovers it still above
> thy fleshless bones?
> Thine age they called too young to understand
> thee;
> This one should suit thee better—
> Thy men are born!
> And the huge edifice that, day and night, thy
> great hands undermined,
> Is fallen upon us. . . .

So, no heroes allowed. Pageantry is permissible, but not drama. Our spectacles must remain without foreground action by individuals. It is a question, obviously, of righteous objection to dozens of spear-carriers in support of one leading dramatic part. We want no princes of the blood, no unordinary performers in an age when every man is as good as every other. Since the eighteenth century we have known this fundamental truth about all human beings; they are equal, and the plays and stories which show us the labors and triumphs of heroes against the background of a company of walk-one and minor players jar our democratic sensibilities.

Well, what have we given up? What has our reductive social moralizing cost us, in terms of the culture of selfunderstanding?

For one thing, it has cut us off from the archetypal symbols of mythic literature—the figures of striving, of enduring, of struggling against supernatural odds—through which we might come to identify the feelings which could move us upward and onward throughout our lives. The hero, after all, is a type of everyman. The hero represents that part of the human being which longs for transcendence, which is eternally projecting his imaginings on the screen of tomorrow. To outlaw the hero is to shackle Prometheus, dishonor Socrates, and prefer bureaucracy to the laws of nature.

Along with the hero we put aside those types of motivation and action which are the richest generalizations we possess for comprehending our own lives. The gods and heroes are living extensions of human potentiality. Human types are the inclusive abstractions of the directions and confrontations of existence. Victor Hugo explained it well seventy-five years ago:

> No leaf of the orange-tree when chewed gives the flavour of the orange; yet there is deep affinity, an identity of roots, a sap rising from the same source, a sharing of the same subterranean shadow before life. The fruit contains the mystery of the tree, and the type contains the mystery of the man. Hence the strange vitality of the type. . . .
>
> A lesson which is a man, a myth with a human face so plastic that it looks at you and that its look is a mirror; a parable which nudges you; a symbol which cries out "Beware!"; an idea which is nerve, muscle, and flesh,—which has a heart to love, bowels to suffer, eyes to weep, and teeth to devour or laugh; a psychical conception with the relief of actual fact, which, if it be pricked, bleeds red,—such is the type. . . . The good and evil of man are in these figures. From each of them springs, in the eyes of the thinker, a humanity.
>
> As we have said before, as many types, as many Adams. The man of Homer, Achilles, is an Adam from him comes the species of the slayers; the man of Aeschylus, Prometheus, is an Adam: from him comes the race of wrestlers the man of Shakespeare, Hamlet, is an Adam: to him belongs the family of dreamers. Other Adams, created by poets, incarnate,—this one, passion; another, duty; another, reason; another, conscience; another, the fall; another, the ascension.

Without recognition of the octaves of meaning in our selves—without realizing that the myth sounds resonances which set new meanings ringing—we cannot learn from Plato or any other imaginative writer. It is as Northrop Frye said in an essay on education:

> In the Utopianism of Plato and More the traditional authoritarian structure of society was treated as an allegory of the dictatorship of reason in a wise man's mind. We do not now think of the wise man's mind as a dictatorship of reason: in fact, we do not think of the wise man's mind at all. We think, rather, in Freudian terms, of a mind in which a principle of normality is fighting for its life against a thundering herd of chaotic impulses, which cannot be suppressed but must be frequently indulged and humored, always allowed to have their way however silly or infantile it may be.

But while this mode of thinking was gaining ascendancy, another outlook was in formation. Fifty years ago, Ernst Cassirer reached the conclusion that all our mental processes are "mythic," whether we know it or not. He wrote in *Language and Myth* (1925):

> . . . the special symbolic forms are not imitations, but *organs* of reality, since it is solely by their agency that anything real becomes an object for intellectual apprehension and as such is made visible to us . . . the basic mythical conceptions of mankind . . . are not mere products of fantasy which vapor off from fixed, empirical, realistic existence to float above the actual world like a bright mist. . . . Man lives with *objects* only in so far as he lives with these *forms;* he reveals reality to himself, and himself to reality, in that he lets himself and the environment enter into this plastic medium, in which the two do not merely make contact, but fuse with each other. . .

Another law of the myth is that each human reads it for himself, applies it to himself. Prometheus is no one man; he is *all* men. The play is a play, and we translate its meaning to apply where it belongs much as the members of a team, hearing the quarterback's signals, act both individually and as a unit of complex function. Each one is everyone else, and all are necessary.

The spear carrier will have his dramatic high noon, his day in the sun. We know it; he dreams of it; and we are under no necessity to let theories of atomistic uniformity make us reject the high complexities that need time and hierarchical structure to unfold. Who, after all, was not once a helpless babe, carried passively through scene after scene, until the later time for walking, acting, thinking on one's own?

Cassirer says:

> The part does not merely represent the whole, or the specimen its class; they are identical with the totality to which they belong; not merely as mediating aids to reflective thought, but as genuine presences which actually contain the power, significance, and efficacy of the whole. . . . Whoever has brought any part of a whole into his power has thereby acquired the power, in the magical sense, over the whole itself. What significance the part in question may have in the structure and coherence of the whole, what function it fulfills, is relatively unimportant—the mere fact that it is or has been a part, that it has been connected with the whole, no matter how casually, is enough to lend it the full significance and power of that greater unity.

This is indeed the natural way of thinking, and the feeling of powerlessness so often spoken of today comes from the self-denying mythology of separateness, of refusing to recognize how we are united with one another, and how the world in all its functions is a vast constellation of interlaced feelings and ideas.

In *The Stubborn Structure,* Northrop Frye describes the absorption of all members of society in contemporary mythology:

> Mythology in particular, on the level of general education, forms an initiatory pattern of education: understanding the traditional lore of one's society. The basis of it is social mythology, the clichés and stock responses that pour into the mind from conversation and the mass media, including school textbooks. The purpose of social mythology is to create the adjusted, that is, the docile and obedient citizen, and it occupies an overwhelming proportion of American elementary education. . . . Above social mythology is the mythical structure formed by the humanities and the vision of nature afforded by general science, the purpose of which is to create the informed and participating citizen. Above this is the world of art and scholarship, which is to be left to

> shape itself, and acknowledged to have the authority to reshape the structure of general education below it at any time. Where an initiatory mythology controls the whole structure of education as it did in medieval Europe and does now in Communist China tolerance is a negative virtue, a matter of deciding how much deviation is consistent with the safety of the myth. Where art and scholarship are autonomous, tolerance is a positive and creative force, the unity of detachment and concern.

Myth is obviously a word that does double or triple duty in both self-understanding and criticism. One can easily see why, during recent years, there has been much talk of the need to de-mythologize our thinking. But what this really means, if it means anything, is to put good myths in place of bad. There is no ground of plain and unembellished "reality" hiding obscurely beneath the tissue of myth. Max Muller, who long ago began many of our troubles by insisting that myth is a disease of language, regarded the mythical world as a world of illusion which scientific knowledge would some day dispel. He could not see that myth-making, as Cassirer put it, is "a positive power of formulation and creation," but declared it the result of "a mental *defect."* The consequences of this mistaken diagnosis were not long in coming. Cassirer shows the course of the resulting reduction:

> From this point it is but a single step to the conclusion which the modern skeptical critics of language have drawn: the complete dissolution of any alleged truth content of language, and the realization that this content is nothing but a sort of phantasmagoria of the spirit. Moreover, from this standpoint, not only myth, art, and language, but even theoretical knowledge itself becomes a phantasmagoria; for even knowledge can never reproduce the true nature of things as they are, but must frame their essence in "concepts." But what are concepts save formulations and creations of thought which, instead of giving us the true forms of objects, show us rather the forms of thought itself? Consequently all schemata which science evolves in order to classify, organize and summarize the phenomena of the real world turn out to be nothing but arbitrary schemes—airy fabrics of the mind which express not the nature of things, but the nature of mind. So knowledge, as well as myth, language, and art, has been reduced to a kind of fiction—to a fiction that recommends itself by usefulness, but must not be measured by any strict standard of truth, if it is not to melt away into nothingness.

Upon what, then, can we rely? It seems clear that the understanding which is possible for us will not be a matter of *reducing* the terms of our knowledge, but of raising them to more inclusive heights. What structures of meaning, then, will be inclusive enough to contain the entirety of present human experience, and leave open the door to widening possibilities in the future?

Only a "mythic" reply is possible to such a question.

In those far-off days when the gods walked the earth, Thor decided to visit Jotunheim, the country of the giants. He took along Loki for company, and a senant, Thialfi. On the way, the three stayed a night in a large hall, but were disturbed in their sleep by violent tremors. A huge giant's snoring shook them awake, and then they discovered they had been sleeping in his discarded glove. Told of their destination, the giant, Skrymir, offered to accompany them. At nightfall he slept. Needing food which the giant had packed in his wallet, Thor tried to awaken him, but blows from Thor's hammer only made Skrymir complain of falling acorns.

Nothing but misfortune and defeat attended the journey for Thor. Time after time the giants bested him and his companions. In an eating contest, Loki could not compete with the giant Logi, who ate not only meat but the bones and the trough which held it.Thor failed in a drinking contest. No matter how much he drank, the horn remained full almost to the brim. Nor could Thor lift a gray cat off the floor. Then Loki suggested that Thor wrestle with his old nurse, Elli. But Thor could not throw her, and began to lose his footing.

Thor left the giant country filled with shame. On the way back to Asgard, Loki explained:

> Had I known beforehand that thou hadst so much strength I would not have suffered thee to enter

> Jotunheim. Know then that I have all along deceived thee by my illusions. Thy blows on Skrymir's head dug three glens in the mountain, one very deep. As for Logi's victory in eating, I, who am hunger itself, am a great eater, but Logi is *fire.*
>
> When thou attempted to drain the horn, thou couldst not see that the end of it reached the sea. Look you, how much the ocean is reduced by thy draughts! And the cat! When we saw one of his paws lift from the floor, we were all terror-stricken, for what you took to be a cat was the Midgard serpent that winds round the earth, and he was so stretched out by you that he could barely enclose his tail with his head. And Elli, who made you weak, was in fact Old Age, and never was there a man she could not sooner or later humble.

"It will be best," said Loki, "for us to part here, and if you ever come near me again I shall defend myself with other illusions, and you will lose your labor in useless games." Thor was about to cast his hammer at Loki, but the mischievous half-god disappeared, and so had the city of the giants, when Thor returned angrily to destroy it.

Thor, it seems, could have benefitted by instruction from Photius, the Byzantine Pythagorean. In Thor, the man-god, were joined all the powers of nature, and having his excellence in this universal blend he could not overcome any divided aspect of life. Such contests were not for him. He was a man, not specialist in limited things. As actor on the stage of single vision, he would always fail. "Constituted of different powers, we have a difficult life to lead," said Photius. "Though it seems easy to *know yourself,* this is the most difficult of all things."

REVIEW
THE DEEPER SPRINGS

ALPHABET OF THE IMAGINATION, a book of essays by Harold Goddard, invites and delights the mind. Edited by Eleanor Goddard Worthen and Margaret Goddard Holt (published by Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, N.J.), this presentation of "fugitive essays, lectures, formal papers . . . collected from various journals, old cupboards, filing cabinets," is obviously a labor of love by Goddard's daughters.

In his introduction Leon Edel speaks of Goddard's thirty-seven years of teaching at Swarthmore (he died in 1950), then says:

> He understood the beautiful simplicities of early life, when the world comes to us in a very direct, a very "pure" way, untrammeled by our later and more troubled vision of it. Out of this understanding he seems to have performed the alchemy of his classroom. His assembled papers are not only living messages but texts for educators, they show how the stuff of life can animate the stuff of ideas; and how far a simple enthusiasm can carry a dedicated teacher. . . .
>
> He loved literature. He was never tired of telling of its wonders because it meant telling the wonders of the mind and the imagination. He retained that enthusiasm all his life, and this was why he could make the young feel the eternal beauty of the world—and of the word. He lived close to the voices of the past; he made them alive in the present. . . .
>
> His book on Shakespeare continues to fascinate new generations of students and has gone into many editions. Like many of his writings, it was published posthumously [*The Meaning of Shakespeare*, Chicago University Press, 1951]. He never published under the pressures of the Academy: he fashioned his papers first for his audiences; they had that urgent priority. Publication was often an afterthought. This explains why some of his most interesting work remained unpublished, but quite complete, in his desk, at the time of his death.

Having a choice between telling what is in the book and illustrating its quality, we decide on illustration as having the best chance of stirring people to read it. Why this unconcealed enthusiasm? Goddard is extraordinary in his capacity to see in literature the meanings which go beyond what an ordinary reading suggests. He reaches up to that high atmosphere where the delicately searching antennae of the writer move among alternative possibilities, contemplate vistas, and make those finely drawn decisions which words will later attempt to embody. He imaginatively reconstructs the vision of the artist before he began to write; he seems to discern the delicate shapings of ideas in their moments of formation. For numerous examples of what Socrates was talking about in the *Theætetus*, read Goddard.

This reaching after essential content is for him the glory and meaning of literature. The longing and necessity to give voice to such explorations are why the writer writes. To unite with him in those feelings is to recreate a portion of his mind, and this, Goddard would say, is the only way to read. For then the mind of the reader becomes the growing-tip of fresh meaning, and when such readers form a cultural community its generous usufructs become the property of the world.

Goddard must have had such communities in mind when he wrote:

> Pilate asked a famous question: "What is truth?" For some reason that question has made a far deeper impression on the world than the remark of Jesus which called it forth. "Everyone that is of the truth, ' Jesus had just said, "heareth my voice." The same may be said of all the supreme voices. Whoever is of the truth never fails to hear them and to catch an echo in them of something from within himself.
>
> There is a widespread opinion that man desires the truth but that the truth is hard to find. Whereas the truth is right before us and there is nothing we are less willing to recognize. When four such voices as those of Laotse, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky and Emerson become One Voice, why search further? When the greatest of the sages agree, if their agreement is not the truth, what is the truth?

There seems a sense in which Goddard is forever endeavoring to repeat the truth, while showing how it escapes from every man-made captivity. Goddard, Edel says, "wants us to

remember always that the Kingdom of Heaven resides within us." He asks us "to pay dose attention to the way in which things are said, not in the sense of 'explicating' them, but in *hearing* their hidden message." How shall we know when we hear correctly? The answer to this question lies hidden along the path of explorations. So Goddard is continually diving into literature, making illustrations, pointing to possibilities.

The essay, "In Ophelia's aoset," is an example. Those who have read *Hamlet* recently may remember that in the first act Polonius orders his daughter to have nothing more to do with the prince, and Ophelia agrees. Then, in Act II, she comes distraught to her father, saying that while she was sewing in her closet, Hamlet had entered, in disordered garb and pale and saddened mood, behaving most strangely. He seized her wrist, stared into her face, then "rais'd a sigh so piteous and profound"—

> That it did seem to shatter all his bulk
> And end his being. That done, he lets me go;
> And, with his head over his shoulder turn'd,
> He seem'd to find his way without eyes,
> For out o' doors he went without their help,
> And to the last bended their light on me.

What is the meaning of this scene? Goddard gives an interpretation first proposed by one of his students, showing how this reading may be supported from other parts of the play. It is that the closet scene marks the first stage of Ophelia's madness—that Hamlet did not appear to her at all. The familiar interpretation is that, unhinged by her neglect of him, Hamlet is driven by wild feelings to make this confrontation. Some critics, Goddard says, think that Hamlet was "playing a part," hoping that Ophelia would tell others in the court that he had gone mad. "If so," Goddard comments, "he succeeded. But if so, Hamlet falls immeasurably in our esteem."

Goddard presents evidence for the idea that Hamlet's appearance was an hallucination. He defends this reading on psychological grounds, suggesting, finally, that Ophelia sees not Hamlet but his "wraith"—a parallel of Hamlet's later encounter with the shade of the murdered king:

> In that case, one instantly remembers that there is another "subjective" ghost in the play, the spirit of the Elder Hamlet who appears in the Queen's chamber near the end of the third act, in contrast with the "objective" ghost of the same man who appears on the platform in the first act. If Shakespeare had expressly inserted the scene in the Queen's chamber as a gloss on the one Ophelia says took place in hers, the parallelisms could hardly have been closer or more startling. Both scenes are laid in the "closet" of the woman that the man whose spirit appears loved profoundly. Both appearances occur suddenly, without introduction. "How pale he glares!" says Hamlet of his father's spirit. "Pale as his shirt," Ophelia says of Hamlet. The Ghost fixes so intent a gaze on his son that the latter cries out:
>
> Do not look upon me,
> Lest with this *piteous* action you convert
> My stern effects.
>
> As Ophelia tells the story, Hamlet scrutinizes her face with equal intensity and then raises a sigh "so *piteous* and profound" that it seems to shatter him. In contrast with his sudden entrance, the Ghost seems to depart gradually:
>
> Why, look you there! look how it steals away . . .
> Look! where he goes, even now, out at the portal.
>
> Hamlet, in her words, leaves Ophelia in precisely the same fashion:
>
> And, with his head over his shoulder turn'd,
> He seem'd to find his way without his eyes
> For out o' doors he went without their help,
> And to the last bended their light upon me.
>
> When the ghost is gone, the Queen exclaims:
>
> This is the very coinage of your brain.
>
> When Ophelia concludes her story, Polonius cries out:
>
> This is the very ecstasy of love.
>
> The very rhythm is identical.

There is more analysis, including the idea that even if we say Hamlet *did* invade Ophelia's closet, what she experienced was not Hamlet, but her disturbed alteration of him. In justification of such wonderings, Goddard says:

There will always be those who object to what they call "reading things into Shakespeare." But what is, and what is not, reading things into a poet is not as simple a matter to determine as they might think. To insist that there is nothing beneath the surface in Shakespeare's plays is taking just as much liberty with them as to insist that there is much there. Besides, who is entitled to decide what is and what isn't "surface"? These objectors misconceive the very nature of poetry. Verse with nothing under its surface is like an eye with no expression in it. The oracle remains the prototype of poetry at its purest. The oracle is *ambiguous* (a very different thing from *obscure*). It can be taken in two or more fatally different ways. "The Lord at Delphi," says Heraclitus, "neither speaks nor conceals, but gives a sign." Until someone reads a meaning into that sign the oracle does not perform its function. So with poetry. There may be long stretches of prose in verse form in a play where the meaning is so definite that disagreement about it is virtually impossible. But the moment the verse passes into poetry, the clarity of prose, which is like that of the multiplication table, gives way to the clarity of poetry, which is like that of a deep spring or the deep sky. Instantly it challenges us to find *our* meaning in it—at the peril of our souls. "It is very possible to look for subtlety in the wrong place in Shakespeare," says Bradley, recognizing the distinction, "but in the right places it is not possible to find too much." What better place to look for subtlety than in *Hamlet*, and, in *Hamlet*, what better place than in a scene that concerns a character who later goes insane and one who at times skirts the edge of madness?

COMMENTARY
FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE?

WHAT Ronald Glasser observes in the foreword of his book (see Frontiers) has much wider application than to the medical profession alone. He says:

> This is as difficult a time for medicine as it is one of achievement. Despite all the successes a kind of leery feeling parallels the public applause, a suspicion that in making things better some things have been made worse, that in learning more too much has been forgotten.

We have only to read such journals as *Environment*, to listen to economists like Schumacher, or ecologists like Howard Odum, to realize that not only in medicine, but in virtually every area, making some things better is making other things—often far more important things—worse. At issue is not the performance of any single profession, but the modern conception of progress and prevailing ideas of human good.

Yet our troubles often show up most plainly in the practice of professionals. So, not knowing how to change our "philosophy," or that we need to, we blame the professionals, overlooking the fact that they represent the tendencies of us all, which in them have been heightened and trained to almost technical perfection.

One conclusion might be that the time has come to take back a portion of the large responsibilities we have delegated to the service professions, medicine in particular. Does this mean that every man should become his own doctor? We hardly know enough. But we can at least acquaint ourselves with alternative forms of healing, and learn the rudiments of prevention if not the arts which cure.

Curiously, just fifty years ago, in Berlin, a famous surgeon, Professor August Bier, made a strange admission before a large audience of doctors of internal medicine. He had been reading the works of Samuel Hahnemann, a rebel physician of a century earlier, and while not completely converted, Bier was profoundly impressed. As he put it:

> Too late, alas, I have noted the grievous defects of my medical training, since I have given my attention to the elder classic practitioners of medicine and have realized that they observed and studied many things much better, and far more thoroughly, than the doctors of today. Thus I have received a lesson in modesty; for I have come to realize that much which I regarded as my own mental property had already been discovered by others. Having since 1920 studied the works of the original homeopathists, I am now compelled to state that I should have saved myself many errors, detours, and digressions if I had taken up these studies thirty years earlier.

He, too, apparently, thought that his colleagues had forgotten too much. He urged them to "make their own tests before crying out on me as a flagrant traitor to science." They didn't do the tests, of course. They simply excommunicated Bier, professionally.

Martin Gumpert makes this story the foreword to his book, *Hahnemann* (Fischer, 1945), the life of the founder of homeopathy. It is a dramatic tale of the origins of one sort of healing which has been condemned again and again by scientific authorities, yet which keeps coming back to life.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

INSTEAD OF "TRANSMITTING"

THE books and papers on education which come in for review sometimes make us wonder how much of all this writing about teaching and learning is only a brave attempt to extricate what is important from institutional confinements and delusions. How much of what is good is simply the result of a persistent effort to put into present-day language ideas which have been neglected for generations? Can it be that what is easily said, these days, is probably misleading or false?

Recently we came across one version of a very familiar idea: "The most precious responsibility that each generation inherits is the need to transmit the distillate of man's accumulated knowledge and wisdom to the next generation."

But what *is* the "distillate" of man's accumulated knowledge? Does anyone know? Can it be expressed in words?

Discussing the objective of transmitting the cultural heritage, Ortega (in *Some Lessons in Metaphysics*) pointed out the great difference between "living culture, genuine knowledge" and the deposit of learning which is passed from one generation to another. Living culture, he says, grows out of the satisfaction of urgent needs, while students, for the most part, habitually accept what is taught to them as part of the convention of being "educated." The problem, then, is not to transmit knowledge, but to awaken the hunger to know. As Ortega puts it:

> Since culture or knowledge has no other reality than to respond to needs that are truly felt and to satisfy them one way or another, while the way of transmitting knowledge is to study, which is not to feel those needs, what we have is that culture or knowledge hangs in mid-air and has no roots in sincerity in the average man who finds himself forced to swallow it whole. That is to say, there is introduced into the human mind a foreign body, a set of ideas that could not be assimilated.

It is necessary, therefore, to "turn teaching completely around and say that primarily and fundamentally teaching is only the teaching of a need for the science and *not* the teaching of the science itself whose need the student does not feel."

In *Beyond Customs* (Agathon and Schocken, $8.95), Charity James gets at this idea with other words. She calls the objective "Being Enquiring":

> It is a tendency to ask questions, to examine and seek to explain experiences, to explore new possibilities of interpreting data or of possible action. This disposition to enquire is a human tendency clearly visible in babies . . . an essential aspect of a human being's involvement in living. But it is a disposition all too easily conditioned out of children by parents, by the mass media, by the familiarity of repetitive circumstances—and (alas) by many teachers, although it is one of their main tasks to foster it.
>
> Schooling often destroys or disastrously diminishes the disposition to be enquiring because the nature of knowledge is quite simply misunderstood; teachers who see their task as introducing to the young a body of knowledge see knowledge as a collection, or at best a system, of assertions.

Assertions are the least important part of knowledge. Miss James quotes R. G. Collingwood, who points out that assertions are what you find in encyclopedias and textbooks. Seldom is it recognized that assertions are "answers to questions," which are the vital part of the knowledge. Wanting the answers to questions is what makes knowledge *personal*—something more than hearsay. There: fore, Collingwood remarks, "Plato described true knowledge as 'dialectic,' the interplay of question and answer in the soul's dialogue with itself."

Replying to the claim that education must be much more than helping the young to be "enquiring," Charity James says:

> I would certainly agree that within a curriculum in which the process of enquiry is respected it is perfectly reasonable for children to cut some corners by acquiring data which they can't fully appreciate but which they know they need, perhaps for some process

> of *making.* But I don't think this is the reason for so much teaching being presented in the form of assertion. Much more often it is because the teachers themselves are ignorant of "knowledge at first hand," having themselves had so much experience of being asserted at. They see knowledge as property to be handed on and so they find it difficult to introduce children to the process and satisfactions of enquiry.

She quotes Collingwood again:

> Questioning is the cutting edge of knowledge: assertion is the dead weight behind the edge that gives it driving force. Questions undirected by positive information, random questions, cut nothing; they fall in the void and yield no knowledge.

It is far better to demonstrate the need for concepts than to "teach" them as capsules of generalized meaning:

> It is certainly legitimate at times to take a concept which children think they fully understand and to muddy the waters. For instance, if children are sure they know what a family is, it can be valuable to introduce them to very different kinds of family structure from those they know about. But even here it is better to help them to find a stick to muddy the waters with themselves, by intruding materials or experiences which invite questions that will lead them on to understand the functions of families and the great variety of ways in which these can be fulfilled. Of course they may not take up the invitation, having other questions to engage them, which will lead them to a grasp of concepts which they independently find they need. Both these approaches are fundamentally different from instructing children in the meaning of a word, which is what concept-based teaching often amounts to, and must inevitably amount to if it is not enquiry-based. For a concept is a summarised assertion, part of a theory arrived at through stringent enquiry. To understand a summarised assertion in such a way that it is part of one's intellectual toolkit requires that one has seen the need for it.

Help the children, Charity James says, to "find a stick to muddy the waters with themselves." This is a way of saying that the children must be helped to see the need for asking questions. Well, teachers can do much along this line, and later on another sort of schooling may broaden the stimulus to questions. In his survey of the alumni of various liberal arts colleges, Louis Adamic reported that only the graduates of Antioch College, of all those he studied, seemed able to resist the common tendency to conformity to the ideas and practices around them. "Antioch students," Adamic said, "were in continual tension between the college community with its intellectualism and the reality of the outside world." As a result, "they had to develop their own individuality and pattern of life such as would not be merely a reflection of the surrounding culture."

How did Antioch bring this about? Quite apparently, through the alternative study and work program. The students went to school for three weeks, then worked on a job for three weeks. "Scholarship," said Arthur Morgan, who developed this program, "touches a man's needs at many points." But also needed is the common experience of life, which "informs him, guides him, corrects him, disciplines him in a thousand ways that scholarship cannot."

To have at the same time both the provocatives of learning and the checks and challenges which experience in the world provides—this seems the best possible way to use the environment as a part of the educational process. (Since publication of the "Children" article for last October 16, which reported that the work/study program at Antioch went into a decline in the late 1960s, we have been informed by Griscom Morgan that Antioch now has a new chancellor and that a noticeable renewal of the excellences of the original program is taking place.)

Meanwhile, other schools have been experimenting with various versions of work and study. In a paper presented at a conference on Effective Teaching at the University of California in Santa Barbara (1973), Keith Pritsker speaks of "Learning in field experience" as "an idea whose time has come." The generalized term for the program pioneered by Antioch is "Experiential Education." The Greeks called it *Paideia.*

FRONTIERS

What Has Been Forgotten?

IN WARD 402, a novel in which Ronald Glasser embodies the experiences he went through as an intern in a large hospital, a young girl dies of leukemia after heroic efforts to prolong her life. The doctor in charge of the hematology ward had persuaded the parents to permit treatment. She will die, he admits, but with each patient who dies of leukemia, there is the possibility that something more will be learned. He said to the parents:

> "Today in hematology we have drugs which give remissions which specialists dealing with other chronic diseases would give anything to have. A cure may be a long way off, but eventually we will have a whole armamentarium of drugs on our shelves just like antibiotics, to be used one after another so we can maintain our patients in a constant state of remission."

Reluctantly, the parents agreed to continuation of the treatment. The supervising doctor made no false promises:

> "Believe me when I tell you the world has been lulled into a false sense of medical security, and expectation of medical miracles, of escape from pain and suffering, of sudden cures, all because in one field of medicine—infectious disease—there is the magic bullet of antibiotics. But even in that field we barely keep ahead of disaster by expending billions of dollars of research to keep up a constant infusion of newer and newer antibiotics as the older ones become useless. As for the rest, we are still fumbling around in the dark ages. Today we use prednisone and Imuran with the same lack of knowledge as when we used mustard seed and witch hazel. Most treatments today are still prolonged and painful, and the results for chronic diseases, no matter what they might be, are spotty at best. At the most . . . they simply give us time."

The intern who cared for the girl told how the drug worked:

> The prednisone we gave Mary destroyed the billions of leukemic cells clogging her vessels, but that didn't mean we cured her disease, any more than stopping her seizures meant saving her life. If the treatment of leukemia is difficult, it is not because the individual leukemic cells are resistant to medications, but because the overall disease itself—the sheer mass of abnormal cells—obeys first order chemical kinetics. Concern and suffering aside, it is eventually the physics of cellular destruction that beats you. It is impossible to destroy every leukemic cell; no matter what drug you use, in what combination or over what period of time, there are always a few that escape.
>
> No one really knows why. . . . The only thing that everybody did agree on was that a few leukemic cells, hiding in a capillary or menule, managed to escape destruction and, continuing to divide, eventually broke out again, repopulating the entire body with a whole new series of leukemic cells.

That is almost all we learn about Mary. Toward the end, the reader is forced to think of the child as an animated test-tube in which various chemical reactions take place. Then, when the doctor himself can no longer stand the hopelessness of what he is doing, she is allowed to die.

The unschooled reader is likely to exclaim, after reading this book—"There *must* be a better way!" Some medical men may be wondering along these lines. In his foreword Dr. Glasser says:

> This is as difficult a time for medicine as it is one of achievement. Despite all the successes a kind of leery feeling parallels the public applause, a suspicion that in making things better some things have been made worse, that in learning more too much had been forgotten. . . .
>
> It had never occurred to me when I was in school that as a physician there would be anything I'd have to face which was not covered in my classes, anything my professors had not worked out, or at least would not have warned us about. Becoming an intern was like passing through a curtain into a world that had never been mentioned, a world I was quite unprepared for.
>
> Ready for hearts and lungs and kidneys, I was confronted with the whole person. . . .

Well, like everything else in our technologized and over-specialized world, the alternatives to this program of treatment seem hardly to exist. The secret of change may lie in the simple statement of Francisco Ferrer: "The education of the child must begin with his grandfather." The whole way of thinking of the

modern world may have to alter before we are able to recognize alternatives for medicine.

Meanwhile, the criticism grows more searching from day to day. While we were reading Dr. Glasser's book there came in the mail a copy of Dr. Charles E. Butterworth, Jr.'s paper, "Iatrogenic Malnutrition." Far from being a medical rebel, Dr. Butterworth is chairman of the Council on Foods and Nutrition of the American Medical Association. After noting the extraordinary costs of hospitalization in the present, he says (in *Nutrition Today*, March/April, 1974)

> I am convinced that iatrogenic malnutrition has become a significant factor in determining the outcome of illness for many patients. Since "iatrogenic" is merely a euphemism for "physician-induced," perhaps it would be better to speak forthrightly and refer to the condition as "physician-induced malnutrition." I suspect, as a matter of fact, that one of the largest pockets of unrecognized malnutrition in America, and Canada, too, exists, not in rural slums or urban ghettos, but in the private rooms and wards of big city hospitals. . . . Perhaps it's getting worse because of the rapid depersonalization of patient care. One thing seems certain and that is that any physician who can recognize the signs and symptoms of malnutrition and starvation will have plenty to observe if he'll look around any large, city hospital. . . . I believe that we are beginning to see the inevitable consequences of the neglect of nutrition education in our medical schools.

Declaring that "the problem of hospital malnutrition is serious and nationwide," Dr. Butterworth presents a number of case histories of typical "victims." It becomes evident that many doctors are unable to recognize the signs and symptoms of malnutrition. One trouble, Dr. Butterworth says, is that "undue reliance is placed on antibiotics and little or no attention is paid to the factors that nourish the immune mechanisms and support the repair process."

The question of alternative forms of medicine or healing naturally occurs after considering comments and reports of this sort. This, however, is an area involving so much individual responsibility in decision that it seems best left to personal inquiry. Yet one thing is certain: better modes of healing will grow out of a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of human nature. Evident, now, are the multiple weaknesses of the problem-solving, disease-attacking sort of medical practice, which has such vast stores of information concerning pathology and so little working knowledge of human health.