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A CHASTENING THOUGHT

THERE are, it seems evident, two kinds of truth in respect to social life—the builder truths and the anarchist truths. If we could get these two kinds of truth to work together in harmony—to make room for each other, like the lion and the lamb—practically all our "social" problems would evaporate. Or, more essentially, we would be on the way to understanding ourselves. It seems a certainty that our social problems are in large part projections of the puzzles and conflicts in human nature; we focus on the former because they are objective, easy to recognize, and painful in effect. But the solutions, no matter how hard we concentrate on social issues, doubtless lie in a better understanding of individual psychology. Plato well understood this, as Northrop Frye pointed out some years ago. His *Republic* was not an "ideal State" but an allegory of the disciplined individual life. How does social thinking relate to the welfare of the individual? Quite logically, through education. Education is thought of as a social responsibility and function in behalf of the individual. So Plato's *Republic* becomes something more than an allegory by its focus on education.

Plato seems primarily concerned with "builder" truths. He talks about the making and arrangements of institutions. Apparently. But basically he is talking about the shaping of character. This is a subject on which we have almost total ignorance, and therefore of the highest importance. In education the builder truths and the anarchist truths *have* to collaborate, or the project is a failure. We don't want our children to be offprints of institutions. Dozens of books have appeared in the past five years, all devoted to showing the dehumanizing effects of education bound by institutional constraints. On the other hand, education, except for random or incidental education, requires focus and at least some structure. A sense of form, of limit, of pattern, is essential to the developing child. How can we introduce these elements in education without confining the originality and stultifying the imagination of the young? This is the central problem.

Doing it takes an indefinable wisdom. Since it is indefinable, you don't obscure the reality of the situation by making one inadequate statement after another about what to do, but look for teachers who understand order and are devoted to freedom, and have developed a balance in their lives which, in some mysterious way, exerts the right sort of influence on the young. It is this balance which we need, more than anything else. If its importance is not recognized, and if we look to institutional or methodological solutions for the disorder in education, we shall go on making the same mistakes, year after year.

Wendell Berry is one teacher who is able to look at the disorders in both society and education and then to show how they result from the lack of balance in our individual lives. In his recent book, *A Continuous Harmony,* he says:

> Like a good farmer, a good teacher is the trustee of a vital and delicate organism: the life of the mind in his community. The ultimate and defining standard of his discipline is his community's health and intelligence and coherence and endurance. This is a high calling, deserving of a life's work. We have allowed it to degenerate into careerism and specialization. In education as in agriculture we have discarded the large and enlarging disciplines of community and place, and taken up in their stead the narrow and shallow discipline of economics. Good teaching is an investment in the minds of the young, as obscure in result, as remote from immediate proof as planting a chestnut seedling. But we have come to prefer ends that are entirely foreseeable, even though that requires us to foreshorten our vision. Education is coming to be, not a long-term investment in young minds and in the life of the community, but a short-term investment in the economy. We want to be able to tell how many dollars an education is worth and how soon it will begin to pay.
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> To accommodate these frivolous desires, education becomes training and specialization, which

is to say, it institutionalizes and justifies ignorance and intellectual irresponsibility. It produces a race of learned mincers, whose propriety and pride it is to keep their minds inside their "fields," as if human thoughts were a kind of livestock to be kept out of the woods and off the roads. Because of the obsession with short-term results that may be contained within the terms and demands of a single life, the interest of the community is displaced by the interest of career. The careerist teacher judges himself, and is judged by his colleagues, not by the influence he is having upon his students or the community, but by the size of his salary and the status of the place to which his career has taken him thus far. And, typically, he is where he is only temporarily; he is on his way to a more lucrative and prestigious place. Because so few stay around to be aware of the *effects* of their work teachers are not judged by their teaching, but by the short-term incidentals of publication and "service." That teaching is a long-term service, that a teacher's best work may be published in the children or grandchildren of his students, cannot be considered, for the modern educator, like his "practical" brethren in business and industry, will honor nothing that he cannot see.

It is not from the standpoint of the university itself that we will see its faults, but from the standpoint of the whole community. Looking only at the university, one might believe that its first obligation is to become a better exemplar of its species; a *bigger* university, with more prestigious professors publishing more books and articles. But look at the state of Kentucky—whose land is being vandalized and whose people are being impoverished by the absentee owners of coal; and whose dispossessed are hopeless refugees in the industrial cities to the north; whose farm population and economy are under the heaviest threat of their history; whose environment is generally deteriorating; whose public schools have become legendary for their poor quality; whose public offices are routinely filled by the morally incompetent. Look at the *state* of Kentucky, and it is clear that, more than any publication of books and articles, or any research, we need an annual increment of several hundred completely literate *graduates* who have some critical awareness of their inheritance and a sense of their obligation to it, and who know the use of books.

That, and that only, is the disciplining ideal of education and the methods must be derived accordingly. It has nothing to do with number or size. It would be impossible to value economically; it is the antithesis of that false economy which thrives upon the exploitation of stupidity. It stands forever opposed to the assumption that you can produce a good citizen by subjecting a moral simpleton to specialized training or expert advice.

Mr. Berry is only incidentally talking about Kentucky. What he says applies to the world; or rather, it doesn't apply to the world but to the individuals whose common motives, goals, and values have made the world into what we now experience.

If you take a social view of what he has described, you are likely to respond with anarchist truths. You will say that the thing to do is to stay away from those deadly places of artificial learning and do something on your own to get an education. A lot of people are doing that—the ones, that is, with initiative and imagination, and who are resourceful enough to find out what they need and then to go out and get it. After all, what they need is *there*. So long as we have a few people around like Wendell Berry, it is bound to be somewhere.

But there are other ways of thinking about this problem. A great many people in the world, perhaps the majority, need help. They need the assistance of others to bring into focus the knowledge that their life and development depend upon. This is the other side of the coin, for now it is no longer a question of rejecting the rigid institutions of the past, but of seeing the necessity for another kind of institution—adaptable to immediate human need.

Now required is the builder spirit. Needed are teachers who are not absorbed in their specialties or fields, persons who recognize that great gaps are developing between the knowledge we have as a civilization and its intelligent application. Take for example the work undertaken by the New Alchemy Institute, of Woods Hole, Mass. (P.O. Box 432). This is a group of young scientists and others who see that there is no future in further development of "bigness" in industry and agriculture, that what is needed are skills, methods, and processes evolved on a human scale. The educators at the New Alchemy Institute are working out ways of growing essential foodstuffs—garden vegetables, fish, and even fish food—within the competence of individuals and small groups. They are also developing simple, rural

technologies. While their studies could be termed small community agronomy, the actual content of what they are doing is rich in the human qualities of self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and imaginative application of research findings in the framework of a non-acquisitive way of life. The New Alchemists are by no means the only people doing this sort of thing, but they are perhaps the most representative and encouraging example. Like the practitioners of homeopathic medicine, they try out on themselves the remedies they hope will be widely valuable, before they offer them to others.

Then, there is the work of the Intermediate Technology Development Group, Ltd., carried on under the supervision of E. F. Schumacher. As a result of his travels as a consulting economist, Dr. Schumacher realized that there was little relation between modern economic theory and agricultural expertise and the practical needs of the great mass of the poor in the under-developed countries. The political manipulations of "foreign aid" commonly neglect the requirements of the small farmers who form the bulk of the population, while national leaders use borrowed funds for the development of showy technology, often more of a threat than a benefit to the people. The work Dr. Schumacher has undertaken is to *interpret* science and technology at the level where it can do the most human good for the greatest number. So, like the New Alchemists, Dr. Schumacher and his associates are dealing only externally with the practical know-how of intermediate technology; in reality, they are dealing in self-reliance, self-help, and hope.

What Nancy Milio, a young registered nurse, did in Detroit more than ten years ago is another illustration of building activity. It took her some time to figure out what she wanted to do, and then more time to learn how to do it. First she had to reject the patterns and thinking of existing institutions—and then learn how to use them, in limited ways, in spite of their shortcomings. She had decided that she wanted to help the black mothers who lived in the Detroit ghetto—in the neighborhood where, years before, she had grown up—to take care of their babies. Disillusionment was essential preparation for being effective in this work. In her book, *9226 Kercheval* (University of Michigan Press, $7.95), she tells what was wrong with her outlook at the beginning:

> My naïveté at the time about the politics of living, the use of power, the force of vested interests, was immense. I believed in the efficacy of the helping professions, medicine, nursing, teaching, social work. I accepted their credos at face value, and I believed in their organizations and agencies. I thought that the aims of well-intentioned professionals were as a matter of course carried out through established institutions. Consequently, I thought I was being fairly astute when I determined that if there was any place in Detroit where a community health nurse would get a chance to do what I wanted to try, it would be the VNA [Visiting Nurse Association], which has the reputation of being a very stable, respectable, solvent, and charitable home health care agency, the second largest of its kind in the country. Two and a half years out of college, and I was not able to think of myself outside the category of "nurse." I was not a person with an idea and a will and a heart, I was a professional person with an idea, working within the understandable limitations of an organizational setting.

Well, she broke out of that setting. She soon discovered that the limitations of the setting were exactly what would prevent her from doing what needed to be done. She found out what needed to be done by talking to, spending time with, learning to understand and appreciate, the people who needed help. And then, together with their support and assistance, she *invented* exactly the kind of loose-jointed institution they needed—a Mom and Tots Center, for day care and prenatal as well as infant care. The professional knowledge she brought to this enterprise was crucial, but even more important were the balances of human understanding that she developed, so that the good she wanted to do actually got done. She wrote in retrospect:

> I too paid for being identified with the assumption that white people can help black people to attain their identity as black people, implying that we as white people have already gamed our own. It is no more than a contemporary version of the white paternalism of a generation ago. Being involved in the Mom and Tots venture helped me to put into words what only my insides told me in the beginning.

> It is in our equivalence as human beings that we help to define each other, not as people in one category molding people in another category.

Elsewhere she wrote:

> . . . I began to realize that although I am white I am not all wrong. Although my race is responsible for degrading other races, I do not bear the guilt alone or as an individual; I can accept my responsibility for working toward human wholeness in society out of a sense of personal conviction and worth rather than self-recrimination and guilt. On this basis I can stand in agreement or disagreement with any man, black or white, and in quietude or anger. I began to realize that as in any other relationships, but especially between black and white, infinite patience is no more conducive to wholeness than perpetual rage, expressed or hidden. Dishonest patience or tolerance is as belittling as open disdain.

Well, the real educators are the "interpreters" who find out how to make knowledge fit human need. In the process they get the balances between freedom and order that we talked about at the beginning. Nancy Milio learned those balances by being in the thick of things, and insisting on doing what needs to be done.

Culture is kept alive by such people, for they are the only ones who prevent the institutions of the age from lapsing into mechanical grooves and erecting barriers to adaptability and innovation.

There is also a level where writing about such things is immeasurably valuable. Consider Thoreau. Thoreau is a magnificent interpreter for people who have just begun to wonder about the meaning of their lives. One needs, of course, to make oneself ready to benefit from Thoreau. There are existential prerequisites for understanding such men. But, when understood, they become transforming influences. There have been countless young men who, after reading Thoreau—or Tolstoy, or Blake—have never been the same. These writers have Socratic impact: they both shock and illumine. They know both freedom and order—*in themselves.*

Or consider Gandhi. He saw what the Indian people needed. They needed self-respect. They needed to recognize their own dignity; but this was difficult so long as they continued to depend upon the British for their social order, their economic necessities, and their cultural goals. So, at the beginning, more than anything else, they needed *freedom*—freedom in order to become responsible, useful, strong, and caring of one another.

Gandhi set out to work for all these goals at once, since he saw the deep interdependencies of the needs of the Indian people—of the villagers, who are close to nine-tenths of the population. In Gandhi's writing, you see the builder truths and the anarchist truths harnessed together at every point. The only thing you can do with these two sorts of truth to make them work together is to keep them flexible—not in moral compromise but in workable educational balance. Gandhi's compromises were for him necessary steps of growth, or he wouldn't allow them. The balances between freedom and order are always determined, when they are true balances, by the level of self-discipline and resourcefulness reached by the people. These qualities vary, so that the compromises vary, too. A good compromise is an order which presses people to grow into greater freedom as they become able. But they have to do it themselves.

From this point of view even law-makers and constitution-makers are teachers, since they establish the external models of balance or practical compromise between freedom and order that a better understanding of both builder and anarchist truths will eventually replace with more flexible or "organic" models.

One good thing about the interpreters who write the Thoreaus and the Berrys—is that from them one may learn how what we call social problems originate in individual attitudes, feelings, and ideas. Plato's allegory was a good one—we do see ourselves reflected in the society around us.

And this, in the present, is a somewhat chastening thought.

REVIEW
TWO-WHEELED OMNIBUS

ROBERT PERSIG'S *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (Morrow, 1974) has various values and appeals, but the most important thing to say about this book may be that it gives evidence of a spreading cultural maturity. The author seems to have been able to assimilate the philosophic significance of the cycle of Western civilization, and to put it in language that is lively without diluting the content. Using simple analogies, he shows the reader the practical limits of intellectual inquiry (and therefore of its technological applications), and he makes little dramas out of steps toward self-understanding. The skeleton of the book is a long motorcycle trip with his young son, along with a married couple who are friends. One point seems to be that if you reach very far ahead of your times in understanding, you are likely to be regarded as insane. This is not an angry conclusion, nor one of central importance, although it gives the book its mood.

Since, in a work like this, someone has to play the wise man, now and then you may feel that Mr. Persig is far too bright to make a good companion on a trip. But this is only a device to say what he had to say, and his modesty, if a bit contrived, is acceptable. The book is unusually enjoyable as well as instructive in numerous directions. Our review will be limited to sampling one or two of its themes.

On this trip, the man and his wife who accompany Persig are technology-haters who don't know the first thing about looking after their machine, and are determined not to learn. For them the people who understand technology are the "enemy"—the *they* who have to be shunned. Persig plans the trip as an extended "Chautauqua lecture" to convert the couple to his point of view. He was once ignorant of how motorcycles work, but now he knows a lot about it and makes this knowledge the analogue of every sort of technical knowledge human beings can have. He wants to show how far it can take you and also what it will never do. His audience for the Chautauqua series is not willing and the lecture series does not win them over. But both its development and the various interruptions which divide it into segments make good reading. Persig says of his friends, John and Sylvia:

> Anything to do with valves and shafts and wrenches is a part of *that* dehumanized world, and they would rather not think about it. They don't want to get into it.
>
> If this is so, they are not alone. There is no question that they have been following their natural feelings and not trying to imitate anyone and the natural feelings of very many people are similar on this matter, so that when you look at them collectively, as journalists do, you get the illusion of a mass movement, an entire political anti-technological left emerging, looming up from apparently nowhere saying, "Stop the technology. Have it somewhere else. Don't have it here." It is still restrained by a thin web of logic that points out that without factories there are no jobs or standard of living. But there are human forces stronger than logic. There always have been, and if they become strong enough in their hatred of technology that web can break. Cliches and stereotypes such as "beatnik" or "hippie" have been invented for the antitechnologists, the antisystem people and will continue to be. But one does not convert individuals into mass people with the simple coining of a mass term. John and Sylvia are not mass people and neither are most of the others going their way. It is against being a mass person that they seem to be revolting. And they feel that technology has got a lot to do with the forces that are trying to turn them into mass people and they don't like it. So far it's still mostly a passive resistance, flights into rural areas when they are possible and things like that, but it doesn't always have to be this passive.
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> I disagree with them about cycle maintenance, but not because I am out of sympathy with their feelings about technology. I just think that their flight from and hatred of technology is self-defeating. The Buddha, the Godhead, resides quite as comfortably in the circuits of a digital computer or the gears of a cycle transmission as he does at the top of a mountain or in the petals of a flower. To think otherwise is to demean the Buddha—which is to demean oneself. That is what I want to talk about in this Chautauqua.

The figure of a mythic man named "Phaedrus" runs through the book—a kind of ghost who is probably a projection of one side of the author's thinking. He serves to objectify most of the intellectual problems which are dealt with. In Persig's definition, Phaedrus is a "classicist"—one who sees the world in terms of timeless or enduring principles of form. This usage is contrasted with the "romantic" understanding which looks at immediate appearances.

> The romantic mode is primarily inspirational, imaginative, creative, intuitive. Feelings rather than facts predominate. "Art" when it is opposed to "Science" is often romantic. It does not proceed by reason or by laws. . . . The classic mode, by contrast, proceeds by reason or by laws—which are themselves underlying forms of thought and behavior. In the European cultures it is primarily a masculine mode and the fields of science, law and medicine are unattractive to women largely for this reason. Although motorcycle riding is romantic, motorcycle maintenance is purely classic. The dirt, the grease, the mastery of underlying form required all give it such a negative romantic appeal that women never go near it.

This book, however, is only peripherally an argument about the importance of understanding the technology of the tools you depend upon—a point which is pretty evident, anyway. Mainly the author is after release from unrecognized assumptions. He does not add much to the Socratic injunction—"The unexamined life is not worth living"—although he would probably say that the unexamined life is "very confusing, and therefore a source of pain."

There are fine passages on Phaedrus' experiences in teaching English in a college in Montana, telling in detail what happened when he refused to give any grades for one semester. The objections of the students were almost all from those likely to fail. *They* were the ones who wanted the approval and support of the system; the others saw the advantage of getting their motivation out of themselves instead of from the expectation of a good grade. Another part deals with an assignment asking the students to explain the meaning of "quality." A development of several pages shows that while quality is beyond definition, everyone knows what it means.

The reader may suppose that all this is rather obvious—and since it is, to continue would only give a misconception of the book. The points are often obvious, but Persig's talent for dramatizing makes them worth while. The "obvious" is exhibited in a fresh light, sometimes a light so revealing that we see that what seems obvious has not been well understood.

The book has a rich background of learning, used in distilled form by the author. The foundation of modern thought in Hume and Kant is briefly shown, and Plato's use of rhetoric examined, somewhat as Eric Havelock considers it in *Preface to Plato.* Mr. Persig is a remarkably effective teacher. His book would be a good one for two or three people to read together, for both pleasure and profit.

The rest of our space may be used for further reflections about the "classic" and "romantic" approaches. These categories are much richer than Persig makes them seem. This is probably inevitable when such watershed terms are used to illuminate a particular problem. Actually, they can be applied in all directions. For example, you might say that the truly balanced classical man, when he sets out on a journey of becoming, turns into a romantic; and that a good romantic demonstrates the validity of his vision against a background of classical understanding. When the classical turns rigid, it displays the shackles of tradition, the hardened and arrogant faces of institutional sovereignty. And romanticism, when it loses its foundation in the classical past, can have only a fluctuating, tropical growth that soon withers into either melancholy defeat or angry nihilism after the first hard historical trial.

"Romantic" is commonly used to describe people who like to dream without counting the cost of realization. Yet there have been romantics who understood this well. One was the Irish poet, George Russell, or A.E., who, in a seldom

remembered essay, "The Hero in Man," first published in 1910, wrote of the frustrations which attend those who seek fulfillment in the inner life. We find, he said, that it is not a solitude at all, but a highway thronging with multitudinous experience.

> For our guidance when entering here many words of warning have been uttered, laws have been outlined, and beings full of wonder, terror, and beauty described. Yet there is a spirit in us deeper than our intellectual being which I think of as the Hero in man, who feels the nobility of its place in the midst of all this, and who would fain equal the greatness of perception with deeds as great. The weariness and sense of futility which often falls upon the mystic after much thought is due to this, that he has not recognized that he must be a worker as well as seer, that here he has duties demanding a more sustained endurance just as the inner life is so much vaster and more intense than the life he has left behind.
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> Now the duties which can be taken up by the soul are exactly those which it feels most inadequate to perform when acting as an embodied being. . . .

The romantic is one who senses, however dimly, the glories of a classical balance that is forever in the future, and forever becoming. The terrain of "what is" reveals the classicism of the past; its balances are explicit in the laws of nature; its symmetries are in sums taken, limits marked, platforms erected. The vistas of what may be chart the wide territory of the future—seen and illumined by the imagination. The mysteries of growth, of the swelling, burgeoning potentialities of other springtimes than the ones we can remember, keep that future from being only a mechanical or statistical prediction. It is the feeling for these things in the romantic which enables him to break out of the limits of mere extrapolation, even while using the classical past for a sense of measure, dimensioning the conception of reach which gives rational form to his dreams.

COMMENTARY
AN ENGINEERING THEME

WENDELL BERRY'S conception of the farmer—the good farmer—has had various antecedents in American thought, the most notable being the view of Thomas Jefferson that Americans would remain virtuous only so long as their principal object remains agriculture. "When we get piled upon one another in large cities," he said, "we shall become corrupt as in Europe, and go to eating one another as they do there."

A much later expression of this outlook came with publication in 1930 of *I'll Take My Stand* (Harper), a literary defense of the agrarian way of life by twelve Southern writers. This book was restored to print in a paperback edition in 1962. In a new introduction, Louis D. Rubin points out: "What the Agrarians warned about our business civilization is constantly reinforced by such social analysts as Riesman, White, Packard, Warburg, and many others who nowadays point to the yawning discrepancies between the glittering American social ideal and the human misuse that lies behind it."

Among the contributors were John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Stark Young. Their basic contention is well put by Mr. Ransom:

> He [the farmer] identifies himself with a spot of ground and this ground carries a good deal of meaning; it defines itself for him as nature. He would till it not too hurriedly and not too mechanically to observe in it the contingency and the infinitude of nature, and so his life acquires its philosophical and even its cosmic consciousness. A man can contemplate and explore, respect and love, an object as substantial as a farm or a native province. But he cannot contemplate nor explore, respect or love, a mere turnover, such as an assemblage of "natural resources," a pile of money, a volume of produce, a market, or a credit system. It is into precisely these intangibles that industrialism would translate the farmer's farm. It means the dehumanization of his life.

Another contributor, Lyle H. Lanier, said:

> It is not the machine, however, but the theory of the use of the machine to which I object, and if this theory, which we may call industrialism, is a valid hypothesis of the course of Western civilization, all discussion of "progress" would do well to cease. The only intelligible meaning of progress implies social institutions for producing psychological effects just the reverse of those so outstanding in our Machine Age.

A book which said these things in 1930 deserves to be in print, and to be read.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

ALL IN ONE DAY

THIS is no time to put together a string of happy thoughts about what a wonderful world we live in; the world is a mess and the people who live in it are mixed up and in pain. Yet . . . in one day's "take" from the mail and other sources we got a new magazine which reports a minor social miracle going on in northern California, a book about an American journalist and his magazine-writer wife who became Irish farmers, and another book about how to use the poetry of William Blake, Robert Herrick, William Carlos Williams, and Wallace Stevens, and others, to stir children from seven to twelve to write poetry of their own.

So what is the state of the world? Do you read the papers to find out, or inspect your mail and what comes in selectively from the library? What is *really* going on? Then there is the matter of technology and its many sins. Some technology was involved in producing these books, in getting those Americans to Ireland, and in making lovely poems available to so many children.

Well, there doesn't seem to be much sense in paddling around the swamps of mediocrity, hoping now and then to locate a nice thing that's happening somewhere. *That* isn't an activity that makes anything good happen, even if ignoring the mess is neither possible nor desirable. So we let reading the papers go. Maybe Kenneth Koch has part of an answer in telling about poetry and children. His book, *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?* (Random House, 1973), is filled with the work of his students. He says:

> The usual criteria for choosing poems to teach children are mistaken, if one wants poetry to be more than a singsong sort of Muzak in the background of their elementary education. It can be so much more. These criteria are total understandability, which stunts children's poetic education by giving them nothing to understand they have not already understood; "childlikeness" of theme and treatment which condescends to their feelings and to their intelligence and "familiarity," which obliges them to go on reading the same inappropriate poems their parents and grandparents had to read, such as "Thanatopsis" and "The Vision of Sir Launfal." One aspect of "childlikeness" which is particularly likely to work against children's loving poetry and taking it seriously is a cloyingly sweet and trouble-free view of life. Even Blake's "The Lamb," alone or in context with other sweet poems, could be taken that way. It is constant sweetness that is probably the main thing that makes boys by the time they are in fifth or sixth grade, dislike poetry as something sissified and silly.

Mr. Koch didn't just read a great poem to the children and then say, "Go on, write one of your own." He spent time living in the poem, exploring its meanings, wondering about why the poet wrote what he did. After Blake's "Tyger," he asked:

> Who is Blake talking to? Why does he think the tiger is "burning"? I responded in a positive way to all their answers; even wrong answers would show them thinking about the poem and using their ingenuity, trying to understand. Once started on that path, with my help and that of their classmates, they eventually understood. As soon as I could, I would begin to associate the poem with their own experience. Have you ever talked to a cat or a dog? Have you ever seen its eyes in the dark? Did they shine like those of a tiger? Unfamiliar words, such as *fearful* and *frame*, and odd syntactical constructions, such as "What dread hand: and what dread feet?" I treated as small impediments in the way of enjoying the big experience of the poem, to be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Moved by Blake, Arlene Wong, a fourth grader in New York's PS 61, wrote:

> Oh Rose, where do you get your color?
>
> Dog so beautiful, how did you learn to bark? Will you teach me?
>
> Ant, the most precious, where did you get your body?
>
> Beautiful butterfly, where did you get your wings?
>
> Rose: there once was a red sea and I fell in.
>
> Dog: my mother gave me lessons.
>
> Ant: three rocks were stuck together, then lightning hit me.

> Butterfly: one day a kid in Mrs. Fay's class drew a butterfly, then it got loose and it was raining, then it was alive the next day.

Mr. Koch gave ten lessons, a poet for each, and had a rich harvest of children's work every time. Their poems make his book. He tells in enough detail how he read "adult" poetry with the children, and at the end lists a number of great poems that can be used in this way.

The other book, *White Goats & Black Bees* (Doubleday, 1974), is by Donald Grant, a man in his fifties who was a correspondent for the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* for twenty-five years. He tells why and how he and his wife got themselves a farm in Ireland, and what happened to them in doing it, and afterward. The book begins:

> Mary and I walked away from our city penthouse and our well-paying jobs as newspaper and magazine correspondents writing about world affairs. We left behind a life of luxury and glamour, accepting a reduction in our income by something more than 80 per cent.
>
> We began a new life as peasants on a rocky scrap of land in a remote corner of Ireland.
>
> We knew nothing about farming, excepting what one might learn by growing roses on a terrace high above the city's noisome streets. Mary sold her automatic dishwasher to the tenant who took over our penthouse. I donated my white tie and tails to Peruvian relief.
>
> The great change began casually. One summer day Mary and I were seated on our terrace, in the shade of the awning, I with my Agatha Christie and Mary with her seed catalog. The steady splash of the fountains made a pleasant sound against the background blare of taxi horns.
>
> "You know," I said, looking up from my book, "farming has always appealed to me. Since I was a kid I have always wanted to be a farmer."
>
> It was a distinctly odd thing to have said. My entire life had been spent in cities—as, for that matter, had Mary's.
>
> She didn't look up from her seed catalog, and only mumbled something about sweet peas.
>
> "So have I," she said crisply, "so why don't we?"
>
> "So why don't we what?" I asked vapidly, not having taken my own suggestion seriously.
>
> "Become farmers."

You can see what Mr. Grant is like from this. The rest of his book is an adventure story. We should admit, perhaps, that he is a pretty competent man, able to make a radical decision from strength. Not everyone can do that. But such changes surely have to begin with action by the competent, who are also able to give their reasons. How will larger changes ever get going, if the competent don't show the way? Does anyone still imagine that real changes are accomplished by *passing laws?*

The changes in mind and heart come first, then comes individual action, and then come new values and patterns of human endeavor, and then you make what few laws you need, as sensible after-thoughts, which is all they really are—good for picking up dropped stitches and declaring what is *fait accompli.* (That's what John Adams said about the American Revolution.)

There is a fundamental lesson about laws and lawmaking in James Real's article, "California Hillbillies Fight Back!", in *New Times* for Nov. 29 of last year. (*New Times* is a "feature news" magazine which comes out every two weeks in New York.) These "hill" people are really graduates of the flower children generation along with some older ones (although much younger than Donald Grant) who decided to "homestead" in the beautiful and sparsely populated hills of Mendocino County, about a hundred miles north of San Francisco. They built some sixteen hundred primitive homes in the mountains, spread over about 2,000 acres. These dwellings were inevitably illegal in terms of the building code, but the owners kept still about where they lived. Then, one day, for reasons not hard to imagine, a County task force "red tagged" as many of these homes as they could find. Tear it down and build it right, the red tag said in effect. Mr. Real's article tells how these people got together, organized in a loose-jointed, informal way, admitted their guilt, and won over practically everybody (except the chief building inspector) with their counter-proposal of a common-sense

revision of the code that would assure reasonably sound cabin construction and tried and true rural sanitation.

Who are these obviously intelligent, resourceful people—including registered nurses, a historian and a couple of professors, an M.D., a fine arts graduate, a dropout art director, a calligrapher, several law school graduates, and other miscellaneously talented individuals—that make up this new peasant population in Mendocino County (which is a handier and less expensive place to settle in than Ireland)? They are, Mr. Real relates, "youngish veterans" of the aberrations, confrontations, and traumas of the sixties who decided on individual change and trooped off in ones and twos to get lost in the mountains.

> They are some of the more determined survivors who have quietly infiltrated the remote parts of the northern California wilderness. They bought large cheap parcels of land logged over during the century that the giant timber companies ran everything north of San Francisco. They built with their own and friends' hands an unknown number of primitive, sometimes very handsome houses of recycled lumber and other castoffs of the technological society. They tended their organic gardens, their goats and chickens, and a very limited herd of small children. At a time when all who lived through the great depression are frightened stiff about having to live through another, these kids have so reduced their dependent needs that they are unmoved by the state of the economy. Average cash outlay for these small houses is about $100.

It so happens that we have for future review a book called *Dwelling* about some of these owner-built homes in Mendocino—probably the "very handsome ones"—by a young woman named River. We'll get to it before long.

Well, we look at the daily papers, which always make you a little sick, and then at what comes in the mail and from the library, and keep in mind that these other things are happening, too. If they keep on happening, and if other competences develop, then, some day, these people now making personal changes will be getting out the daily papers (smaller ones, we hope), and they won't make you sick any more. What other way is there for the right sort of changes to come about?

Lots of other ways, no doubt. We'll hear about them when they come in the mail or from the library. The bad things surface easily; the good things take time.

FRONTIERS

Ideas Whose Time Has Come

A REPORT on world food supply in last December's *Elements*, a monthly publication of the Institute for Policy Studies (Washington, D.C.), describes the remarkable gains in agrimltural production made by France and Bulgaria during the past twenty years. In the first half of this century France had to import much of its food. Then, in 1955, the growth began:

> Wheat production jumped from 10 million tons that year to 14 million by 1967; corn shot ahead from 11 to 41 million tons, barley grew from 27 to 97 million tons, milk from 18 to 29 million tons, poultry from 300 to 640 million tons; and there were equally spectacular rises in beef, pork, and many other agricultural commodities. All of this was accomplished without increasing land under cultivation.

France is now able to feed all her people and has a surplus of food products for export. During practically the same period, Bulgaria moved from being one of the most backward agricultural countries in the world to its present position of having a major source of foreign-currency income in food exports.

> What happened in France and Bulgaria was the result of deliberate decisions aimed at changing the structure of all agricultural sectors. These miracles—reached by following quite different roads—were made possible by heavy capital investment, particularly in machinery and fertilizers. But this is no simple-minded advertisement of the green revolution, for the capital investments were part of an overall change in the entire agricultural sector. Mechanization and fertilization were accompanied by expansion of storage facilities, pesticide production, stables, silos and irrigation works, improved seeds, high quality animal breeding, livestock health care, a build-up of agri-industry, and so on. And there were massive public education campaigns. In little less than a decade Bulgaria managed to train technicians and specialists from the peasantry itself.

Commenting on this record, the *Elements* writer says:

> The UN now estimates the world food deficit at 16 million tons or 4.3 per cent of total production in underdeveloped countries. By 1985 it anticipates a deficit of 85 million tons or 15.6 per cent of production. Wheat will be especially scarce. But with growth rates similar to those in Bulgaria and France the wheat problem in the underdeveloped world would be solved entirely by 1982 and the projected rice shortages by 1978.

Such increases, however, are unlikely, the report says, unless there are far-reaching changes in these areas, laying the basis in land reform for agricultural growth. The pattern of development established in France will hardly serve in the poor countries:

> Development of expensive machinery, which achieved most efficient usage on large landholdings, led to the demise of the small farmer. Tens of thousands of farmers were forced off the land, transplanted to towns and cities. Fortunately France's industrial and tertiary sectors were developed enough to absorb the majority of these farmers. What is alarming about today's underdeveloped world, this world where the gap separating it from the developed countries is widening, is that this Third World has neither the characteristics nor the opportunities the presently affluent nations had in the past. Many of these countries have only recently been freed from colonialism. They either lack industries entirely, or their industrial sector is developing too slowly to absorb all the surplus manpower generated by the exodus from the countryside, and the greater part of their populations is still rural. . . .
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> Peasants in underdeveloped countries may have no place to go if structural changes take place. We must not repeat the experience of France where concentration of holdings was carried out at the expense of the impoverishment of the small farmers. If our intention is to act in accordance with the best interests of the peasantry then we must accept the fact that small owners, minifundists [farmers with not enough land to support themselves] and landless peasants must find a place in agriculture itself, and we must also inevitably conclude that the intensification of agriculture which occurs as a result of structural change must be based on the increased use of manpower. Land distribution is not enough.

Farming by cooperative groups is one suggestion. The advances in Bulgaria were achieved by this means, along with modernization

of methods. Yet access to land is the initial requirement:

> . . . it is impossible to give incentive and inspiration to the broad peasant masses now subsisting in conditions of underdevelopment, living on the borderline of hunger, in misery and with no prospect of improvement for themselves or for their children, exploited by great landowners or enslaved by minifundia. A break in this vicious circle—change in land tenure structures—is the basic multiplying factor which can arouse the peasantry and permit it to assimilate technological improvements which will increase once and for all the necessary production of food.

This analysis shows that the time has come for three ideas already in the air. One is the idea of the Land Trust, a financial agency for agricultural and community rebuilding, making land available to those who want to work and use land responsibly. Second is E. F. Schumacher's program of Intermediate Technology Development, as the only practical means for advancing agricultural methods in the developing countries, as well as for land-use reform in the developed countries. Third is the small community industry advocated by Arthur Morgan, as the basis of social and cultural health in rural areas.

The November/December issue of the International Independence Institute newsletter reports spreading interest in the land trust movement, with inquiries coming in from all over the world. Robert Swann's handbook, *The Community Land Trust*, has proved widely useful to people wanting to establish land trusts, and the Institute has become a clearing house for information (West Road, Box 183, Ashby, Mass. 01431). The Institute is presently considering the possibility of a traveling exhibit or "fair" on Intermediate or Appropriate Technology, to help "synthesize and coordinate efforts in developing countries—and also in so-called 'developed' countries which are now searching for ways to meet the ecology or environmental crisis." This proposal came as a result of Dr. Schumacher's recent lecture tour of the United States.