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A MOTIVE ALMOST FORGOTTEN

LAST December, at the opening of a new library building at the University of Southern California, Carey McWilliams, editor of the *Nation*, talked about the practical difficulties besetting magazines which undertake to be vehicles for the spread of ideas. All magazines, actually, are having a hard time these days, but Mr. McWilliams is primarily interested in the fate of the serious or quality magazines—such as the *Nation*—which have been dying off at an alarming rate.

There are various reasons for this decline, but the *Nation* editor regards the preoccupation with television as a major cause. We pay, he says, a high price for the instant currency given to commonplace information over television. The TV screen, he points out, does not serve the gestation of conceptions likely to become constructive influences in human life. In this talk, Mr. McWilliams used the word "idea" with a special meaning—idea as thought embodying a seminal quality and power. Ideas, for him, are instruments of cultural and moral leverage; they "keep an intellectual tradition alive, viable, and relevant; they are the yeast of a culture." The vital idea, he says, "has a life of its own." We quote from the *Los Angeles Times* (Dec. 22) printing of his remarks:

> Ideas can lie dormant for years and then suddenly explode with surprising force. Ideas can travel great distances. They can leap over great language barriers and penetrate alien cultures. Ideas have an inherent interest. They are often beautiful. There is a symmetry about them that opinions lack. . . In my view, an opinion bears about the same relation to an idea that facts do to the truth or that information does to knowledge. . . . [Ideas] are creative in the sense that they can combine with other ideas, or modify them, or lead to still more novel ideas. . . .
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> I find the process by which ideas are conceived to be quite mysterious. One may struggle with a mass of data for a long time without being able to make any sense of it and then wake up, some morning, with an idea that illuminates, clarifies, and gives coherence to what was previously a chaos of unrelated facts and information.
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> If the process by which ideas are conceived remains elusive, something can be said about the conditions which further their expression. Ideas must struggle to be born. They must find expression so that they can be studied, distributed criticized, assimilated, rejected or modified. Often a new idea emerges in half-baked form; only later is it refined, restated and made properly presentable.

Mr. McWilliams is making a case for support of the life of the mind. In these few words he outlines how people think (together) seriously and amplify one another's conceptions. He describes the processes of culture formation and continuity.

However, the modes by which culture is generated and sustained vary from century to century. Thousands—or even hundreds—of years ago, great oral cultures were maintained by wandering players, story-tellers, and encyclopedic bards who kept alive the traditional riches of the mind. All the people participated in this transmission and assimilation of the common store of ideas. T. E. Lawrence related that when he was training Arab troops to fight against the Turks in World War I, he found that the drill sergeants spoke to their men in epic language—speech which was the common tongue of all Arabs—learned orally from the classics of Islamic tradition. In *The Bugbear of Literacy*, Ananda Coomaraswamy quotes from G. L. Kittredge on the rich character of oral culture, which always withers when literacy is acquired. "When," Kittredge said, "a nation begins to read . . . what was once the possession of the folk as a whole, becomes the heritage of the illiterate only, and soon, unless it is gathered up by the antiquary, vanishes altogether." Coomaraswamy comments, quoting further from Kittredge:

> Mark, too, that this oral literature once belonged "to the whole people . . . the community whose intellectual interests are the same from the top of the social structure to the bottom," while in the reading society it is accessible only to antiquaries, and is no longer bound up with everyday life. A point of further interest is this: that the traditional oral literatures interested not only all *classes,* but also all *ages* of the population; while the books that are nowadays written expressly "for children" are such as no mature mind could tolerate; it is now only the comic strips that appeal to children who have been given nothing better and at the same time to "adults" who have never grown up.

There is a sense in which Mr. McWilliams is adding to this analysis a chapter critical of television, which did not exist in Kittredge's time. He says:

> Television concentrates exclusively on the present—its beat is today, not yesterday and not tomorrow. The result is to obliterate the past. Yet how can we evaluate the present if we cannot remember the past? . . . So we are breeding, to the extent that we place more and more reliance on television, a new generation of Americans who know little of the immediate past, are obsessed with today, and discount the future.

But television is only the present-day channel for this sort of degradation of culture. Years ago, in the preface to a book on St. Francis of Assisi, G. K. Chesterton declared that journalism had been substituted for history, with the result that readers never hear anything but "the end of the story."

> Newspapers not only deal with news, but they deal with everything as if it were entirely new. It is exactly in the same fashion that we read that Admiral Bangs has been shot, which is the first intimation we have that he had ever been born. There is something singularly significant in the use which journalism makes of its stores of biography. It never thinks of publishing the life until it is publishing the death. As it deals with individuals it deals with institutions and ideas. After the Great War our public began to be told of all sorts of nations being emancipated. It had never been told a word about their being enslaved. We were called upon to judge of the justice of the settlements, when we had never been allowed to hear of the very existence of the quarrels.

Then and now, it is as Carey McWilliams says: "How can we understand what happens on Cyprus without knowing something of its history or its social structure?" Our literacy is not something we have learned how to use. Obviously, our best minds need to give further attention to the pluses and minuses of literacy, what it really represents in human development, and what is required to obtain its benefits.

Well, what ought we to do now, about all this, and is anyone especially to blame for the low-grade level of popular culture? Blame, in a matter of this sort, is practically meaningless. It stirs no positive action and cannot be accurate or just. The question is rather one of wondering how to improve the situation, and of what may be possible for those willing to shoulder some responsibility. Faced with the domination of the mass communication media by great, lumbering, and until recently, quite wealthy publishing institutions of the proudly acquisitive society, what *can* one do?

We should first dispose of the settlement blithely offered by Marshall McLuhan. In *Understanding Media* he declared that the oral and visual expressions of electronic systems—radio, television, film—constitute a return to the splendid synæsthetic immediacy of the town crier in the village square, of the minnesingers of old, and of marketplace sages who instructed both old and young in the lore of traditional culture. Apart from the question of the commercial filters and biases applied by the media—which is crucial, and hardly noticed by McLuhan—there is the matter of the general change in culture in the West since the Renaissance and the Reformation. An oral culture is natural to the traditional society, where the wise are seen to be wise, where the truth is honored and preserved, where morality and vision are diffused by established modes and the heroic and the good are recognized in specified patterns of action. None of these qualities is communicated by the electronic media.

We do not, moreover, have a traditional society. Our culture—for better or for worse—is atomistic, culturally diverse, pluralistic in philosophies and ideals, skeptical as to certainty, and ruled largely by both gross and refined appetites. It acknowledges no common ethic, hails no single prophet, is loyal to no doctrine of truth save the belated and limited deliveries of what is now a somewhat discredited science which, in any event, has never had much to say about the central and persisting issues of human life. We are literate, but also intensely individualistic, if sporadically and carelessly humanitarian; and today we are reluctantly but increasingly disillusioned by the results of what we have been doing with our legendary good fortune and extraordinary technical development during the past hundred years or so.

But since we are critically brilliant, we cannot go back to the age of innocence and faith. We are in the agonizing position of needing desperately to rationalize great and hopeful propositions about the meaning of our lives, and about our future potentialities—in which, alas, we can no longer see sufficient cause to believe. For this reason, mainly, we remain in a condition of aimless drift, cherishing fading recollections of the Promethean spark which flared so brightly during the Renaissance, but was converted into a mechanized blow-torch in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and is now the source of endless brush fires that seem destined to unite in a consuming holocaust. The important question may be: How can we learn to stop fueling flames we do not know how to control? We might note, here, that the late Jacob Bronowski, a distinguished contributor to the *Nation*, was convinced that the "aristocracy of the intellect" would destroy civilization unless knowledge could be imparted to "the homes and heads of the people with no ambition to control others."

While reading Mr. McWilliams' recital of the weakening and decline of the quality magazines—decimated and crushed, over the years, by lack of vigorous support, by spiralling mechanical costs, by increased postal rates, by the displacement effect of the mass media—we recalled the chapter in Annie Dillard's A *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* on the ruthlessness of Nature. Death and destruction are everywhere. Nature's fertility may be profligate and constant, but so is the sweep of her scythe. In unsettling parallel, the processes which condemn to the discard these worthy magazines seem as mindless as the wasting of countless larvae or the rotting of ten thousand seeds for each one that will find a place to germinate. Does the life of the mind, does the Good, have no *friends?* What were these promising births so soon succeeded by mortality *for?* Are the high excellences of human consciousness and sensibility only a sport—of Nature or of some sardonic Mysterious Stranger? How can we make sense of the extreme fragility of the structures of civilized life, this wanton execution at our own irresponsible hands of the organisms of thought?

Annie Dillard asks,

> Do the barnacle larvae care? Does the lacewing who eats her eggs care? If they do not care then why am I making all this fuss? If I am a freak, then why don't I hush?

Well, we read about the loss of these good magazines—so thoroughly done in by present-day processes of economic and psycho-social catabolism, and it is natural to wonder what is *supposed* to happen—what serious and concerned people ought to do—when ideas can no longer find a home; when, even in our affluent, prosperous, we-can-do-anything-we-want society, only a small handful of quality magazines has been able to survive, and even these usually needing some kind of subsidy. In a healthy, civilized society, you could say, no subsidy would be required.

But we do not have a healthy society. Even the big magazines are going out of business. Carey McWilliams reates the common problems:

> Costs are steadily escalating. The newsstand situation is chaotic. As the volume of material

> delivered to newsstands steadily increases, the number of outlets declines. Some 60% of the total estimated $1.2 billion in annual magazine retail sales are now made through supermarkets and chain stores; the checkout counter is where the action is. You will not find quality magazines exhibited in supermarkets.
>
> When the magazine industry cites figures to prove that all is well with the print media, the figures include those of the new magazines. New magazines constantly come and go. . . .
>
> The public is so mesmerized by television that it does not realize the extent to which small circulation magazines—those with circulations of less than 200,000—have long been the main seed bed of our culture. It is hardly possible to think of an important writer who did not first test and prove his talents in a small magazine. . . . Mass circulation magazines, by contrast, are not good vehicles for ideas whose time has yet to come. The small circulation magazines have discovered far more talent and spawned far more ideas than larger ones. . . . In a society geared to mass media, mass markets and mass consumption, the quality magazines have a hard row to hoe and their survival cannot be taken for granted.
>
> Yet the disappearance or decline of these magazines would have a much greater impact on the culture than might be imagined. Thus *Kenyon Review,* no longer published, with a circulation of 5,000, was an important magazine and published much interesting new writing.

The problems of good books are similar, with the demand for bestseller "hits" corrupting the taste of both readers and publishers. It is this "general condition" which troubles Mr. McWilliams:

> Technology has made it possible to reach a new mass for news and opinion no less than products. But the drive to reach mass markets goes hand-in-hand with the obsession with quick profits. . . . What we confront is a crisis in values. . . . There is no specific remedy for this state of affairs. Rather, those who see the problem must join in reasserting the importance of ideas and insist that certain values be preserved—even to the detriment of cash-flow charts and growth tables.

What can be said on the other side of the ledger? Are there any hopeful signs? Well, our time is a time of incredible longing, of immeasurable bewilderment, of anxiety, fear, and insecurity. The stable institutions of the past are trembling or toppling. Dependable and predictable socio-economic processes no longer exist. Yet, here and there, scores and hundreds of tiny, tenuous, intermediate institutions are in formation; they keep on surfacing; some survive and grow a little healthier, year by year. They are sometimes rooted in the excellences, the humane qualities of people, not in the sterile ground of economic formula. These people do a little publishing, a little gardening, a little science, a little teaching and talking to those who will listen, and year by year they become more numerous.

There seems a sense in which some subtle exhaustion of development in the human species brought an end to the forms, possibilities, and securities of the traditional societies two or three hundred years ago—the timing has varied in different parts of the world—and cultural responsibilities have since been differently and more widely distributed, although with little accompanying understanding. This great change had both an inner inspiration and an outer provocation—the traditional societies had grown brittle with age and soft at the top in characterological decay. They *had* to go. A new sort of growth became possible for modern man in an age of independent discovery, learning, and responsibility. Yet, so far, with all our "progress," the present-day messes rival the achievements and are growing worse year by year. Something fundamental to human life seems to have been left out of the modern age.

Today, after the excesses of the new freedom and its casually approved manias and drives have run their course, the message is suddenly coming back from Nature to all intelligent and aware human beings—the responsibility is *yours:* Among people able to think, able to feel, responsibility is naturally created simply from *seeing* what ought to be, what has to be done.

This, we think, is the meaning Annie Dillard was groping for, that Sartre in his assertive manner has been declaring, and that a number of

younger people, however uninstructed, have been accepting and taking on, without fanfare and without claim of credit. A closing paragraph in Gaetano Mosca's *The Ruling Class* may have stated an actual law which assumes a different garb in each epoch, yet applies to human beings possessed of natural maturity:

> Every generation produces a certain number of generous spirits who are capable of loving all that is, or seems to be, noble and beautiful, and of devoting large parts of their activity to improving the society in which they live, or at least to saving it from getting worse. Such individuals make up a small moral and intellectual aristocracy, which keeps humanity from rotting in the slough of selfishness and material appetites. To such aristocracies the world primarily owes the fact that many nations have been able to rise from barbarism and have never relapsed into it. Rarely do members of such aristocracies attain the outstanding positions in political life, but they render a perhaps more effective service to the world by molding the minds and guiding the sentiments of their contemporaries, so that in the end they succeed in forcing their programs upon those that rule the state.

Mosca matured his thinking from 1895 to 1923 (his work was translated into English in 1939) so that it was natural for him to speak in terms of nation and the state—expressions we would now try to avoid in indicating vehicles for social fulfillment. Yet his conception of the dynamics of human and cultural betterment, through the large-hearted striving and continuous commitment of a minority—in these days a growing minority, one hopes—seems entirely accurate. You could call these people the growing-tip of civilization—the generators, conservators, transmitters, and appliers of what Carey McWilliams calls "ideas." Think of what we commonly regard as the best intelligence and most promising developments of the present, and then consider what would be our condition if certain men and women had not lived and worked among us—say, for example, John Dewey, Ortega y Gasset, Arthur Morgan, Aldo Leopold, Sir Albert Howard, Lewis Mumford, and, more recently, E. F. Schumacher, Howard Odum, Noam Chomsky, Theodore Roszak, Wendell Berry, and Annie Dillard. Each can make his own additions. Those named are only a few samples. One could add to the ones in the past figures like Tolstoy, Thoreau, and Gandhi, and for particular forms of insight a more recent writer such as Simone Weil.

It is inevitable, perhaps, that with the breakup of old forms of publishing—under the very stresses making it evident that great changes are on the way—there should be severe mortality among the vehicles for spreading vital ideas. We are quite evidently between epochs, living in a time when the breakup of social structures is unavoidable. In such periods, responsibility for the continuity of culture, for the preservation of channels of communication of a high order, for the cross-fertilization necessary to all new growth—for all these crucial functions of a human society, the motive can only be *noblesse oblige.* Indeed, that has always been the motive of such people as Mosca describes. They are no elite, but simply *accepters* of responsibility, persons who have grown up to and understand their role as human beings. This is the inner process of growth behind obvious labors and transformations—it reaches its norm in the Promethean spirit. People cannot be made to grow up—slowly we are learning that coercion and policing interrupt the process of development. But people do begin to mature under the inspiration of what others have thought and done from natural inclination, simply because it is right and good.

REVIEW
MIND STRUCTURES—HOME STRUCTURES

EXCEPT for the pictures, *The Illuminated Blake* (Anchor paperbound, $7.95), annotated by David Erdman, is a formidable book. But then, it is essentially a glorious picture book, reproducing (in black and white) all of Blake's illuminated engravings, most of them in the same size as the originals. The total of 416 pages is in copybook format, 8 x 10½ inches. All lovers of Blake's drawings will want to have this book, especially at so reasonable a price.

You don't have to be any sort of expert to enjoy Blake's drawings. He has all the charm of a wonderful child, a quality carried into full maturity by a man of unparalleled imagination. Naturally enough, children who learn one or two of Blake's songs at an early age hardly ever forget him. The verses introductory to *Songs of Innocence* may stand for the man.

> Piping down the valleys wild
> Piping songs of pleasant glee
> On a cloud I saw a child.
> And he laughing said to me.
>
> Pipe a song about a Lamb:
> So I piped with merry cheer,
> Piper pipe that song again—
> So I piped, he wept to hear.
>
> Piper sit thee down and write
> In a book that all may read—
> So he vanish'd from my sight
> And I pluck'd a hollow reed.
>
> And I made a rural pen,
> And I stain'd the water clear,
> And I wrote my happy songs,
> Every child may joy to hear.

Blake was a child grown wise. The wonder of his work is its capacity to inspire without a breath of preaching. Some touch with this feeling is what you long for while turning the text pages of *The Illuminated Blake.* Probably Mr. Erdman felt that if he wrote his own poetic counterpoint to the pictures, bending in his feelings with the rapture of Blake's art, it would have been a personal intrusion. So he tells us a great deal about the drawings, letting no fine detail escape the reader's attention. To those who plan to know as much about Blake's work as they can, these notes will no doubt be important. But for the ordinary reader they seem somewhat pedestrian in contrast to the bursting eloquence of the drawing and design.

Those lithe, long-legged figures, acrobatic without strain, dancing freely in space; the decorative elements that contain the page, winding about the calligraphed text—even the color, not reproduced, but which can be imagined if you have ever seen one or two of the illuminations—all this makes looking at Blake's work an exposure to a *paean*—experience of an ecstasy which is not without its brooding, meditative moods. Blake is both cosmic and tender, gentle and fierce. In everything he does, he too is saying, "Nothing human is alien to me." He knows evil as well as good; like Prometheus, his wounds do not heal. For these reasons, perhaps, his songs echo eternally across the centuries. He lived at the height of an inner time far wider than his own century, making him a perennial renewer of the fires of imagination. For every poet worth his salt, Blake is an emancipating force—but force is the wrong word, for behind the energy he gives to form there is a pervading, penetrating intelligence. His power grows from meanings.

While expressing all this, his drawings are, as we said, like the work of children. They have the form of pictures children everywhere love to draw—pictures with some words added to extend the reader's pleasure. When someone asked Blake for pictures "without the writing," the artist said that this would mean "the loss of some of the best things."

There are a number of good books on Blake—many more than we have read or even plan to read. One of the oldest of the "modern" books, Foster Damon's *Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* (Houghton Mifflin, 1924), is our

favorite, since it records the writer's love affair with Blake's work—a love of the artist that thrives on understanding. Another especially helpful study is John Beer's *Blake's Humanism* (Manchester University Press, 1968), from which the reader can learn much without feeling obliged to become a "Blake specialist." Other scholars have written well on Blake's vision, notably Northrop Frye, and for the best brief introduction there is Harold Goddard's remarkable essay, *Blake's Fourfold Vision* (available in pamphlet form from Pendle Hill). Kathleen Raine's two-volume study of Blake's sources reveals the deep current of Neoplatonic thought which lies behind his metaphysical structures. Readers interested in Blake's life and philosophic background will find great riches in Miss Raine's *Blake and Tradition* (Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press, 1968). For books on Blake which reproduce his engravings in color there are the works of Geoffrey Keynes. Mr. Keynes edited a fine edition of *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, produced in color, which is in print (distributed by Grossman in the United States), and also a large volume with exquisite illustrations selected from the Prophetic Books.

We should not conclude without expressing full gratitude for the lovely book Mr. Erdman has put together. It is complete and low in cost. It deserves and will doubtless have a large circulation, creating more and more Blake lovers as it spreads around.

In one of his essays included in *Primitive, Archaic and Modern Economics* (Beacon paperback), Karl Polanyi said:

> I plead for that restoration of motives which should inform man in his everyday activity as a producer, for the reabsorption of the economic system in society, for the creative adaptation of our ways of life to an industrial environment.
>
> It is like rebuilding a house, foundation, walls, fittings and all, while continuing to live in it. We must rid ourselves of the ingrained notion that the economy is a field of experience of which human beings have necessarily always been conscious. To employ a metaphor, the facts of the economy were originally embedded in situations that were not themselves of an economic nature, neither the ends nor the means being primarily material. The crystallization of the economy was a matter of time and history.

For youngish people who, during the 1960s, went back into the hills of Mendocino County of California to uncrystallize their economy, build their own homes and live there in them, the enterprise Polanyi speaks of wasn't just *like* "rebuilding a house . . . while continuing to live in it"—they were doing it almost literally. They weren't, however, interested in adapting themselves to "an industrial environment," but in trying to create another environment—a better one—while maintaining whatever relations with the industrial environment they were leaving that seemed inevitable or necessary. Yet the metaphor holds in the sense that their undertakings were nonetheless framed by prevailing industrial habits and institutional regulations which were foremost among the elements of the environment they set out to change. They were indeed trying to change this environment while living in it. And they began the changes by hiding away in the hills and building their own homes.

What and how they built makes the content of a large (8½" x 11") paperback book, *Dwelling*, by a woman who calls herself River, published by Freestone (Box 357, Albion, Calif. 95410) at $5.00 (add 60 cents for shipping). The builders are not identified by name—to protect, as the author says, "the guilty." This is explained by the publisher, Robert G. Greenway, in a foreword:

> The simple fact is that all these hand-made houses are illegal. County authorities have red-tagged many of them and a few have been ordered demolished if not brought up to code within 60 days. (And when you know that the majority of houses in the county seat couldn't pass the code, and when you know that your dwelling is isolated deep within your own hard-won piece of land, affecting no neighbors—then is when the anger and frustration and paranoia begin to creep in and you begin to believe that the codes are being selectively enforced because your house cost several hundred dollars and didn't support

> the local building industry, or because you have long hair or your children don't attend public school.)

Besides being a resourceful and imaginative woman's story of how she built her own house in the Mendocino County hills, *Dwelling* is an illustrated account of what various others have done—the others being some of the people described by James Real in his *New Times* (Nov. 29, 1974) article. His report tells how some 1,600 "hill freak" owner-builders are coping with the red-tag threat to their hearths and homes.

Well, River built a yurt, and she tells why, using photographs to explain details. Other dwellings shown and described have a circular form—mandala houses. Included are many descriptions of uniquely designed structures by other builders, who are often women. All these homes are illustrated by photographs and sometimes splendid line drawings are added for clarification and drama. One woman says:

> This house grew from the inside out. I didn't design it as it is now at all. What I built was a 12' x 16' box on a platform. With some trepidation, because I'd never built a house before, and I'm a woman. I had a carpenter friend whom I asked to help me and he helped me put the platform up and line it up. But when the time came to build my little house, business called him away, and he couldn't stay. So he said to me, "Go ahead! You can do it. Throw away all your plans (I had drawn it to scale with an eight foot ceiling) and get 500 board feet of 2 x 4 and just start. And if you run into trouble, come ask for help. And just one thing remember: don't build with anything you can't pick up and carry it yourself." Which seemed good advice, because everything is carried in about 100 yards or so. So that's what I did. . . .

Other parts of the book are not nearly so informal. While *Dwelling* is not exactly a book to get for finding out just how to build your own house, it is a fine book to get inspired by, for feeling able to do it, and for countless appealing ideas.

Dwelling has 166 pages, many of them garnished with sage and delighting quotations from people like Wendell Berry, Lewis Mumford, Moholy-Nagy, Thoreau, Gaston Bachelard, and others. People who think highly of Rudofsky's *Architecture Without Architects,* Lloyd Kahn's *Shelter,* and *Handmade Houses* by Boericke and Shapiro, will probably want to own *Dwelling* by River. Her book is organized by themes rather than types of structure, and it has several lines of contrapuntal development, providing a look into the future as well as here-and-now reflections on growing one's home.

COMMENTARY
ENDS AND SAYINGS

THIS week's Frontiers gives some examples of the searching common sense now finding its way into print. Here are two more. This is what Arthur Tamplin, a biophysicist, said a while back (in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* for September, 1971):

> The fundamental question is, simply, "Why more power?" A flat and unqualified statement that power needs are doubling every eight years is not sufficient. To accept this statement is to accept and endorse the notion that electrical power consumption is a desirable end in itself. Today, when environmental questions are paramount, it becomes necessary to question the basis for all intrusions on the environment. I do not know that we need more power. The population of the United States increases at about one per cent a year. It is certainly not obvious that a population increase of one per cent per year demands an increased electrical power consumption of about 10 per cent a year. . . .
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> Where is the evidence that increasing our energy consumption will do anything but compound the problems of the poor and the environment? . . . It is not unreasonable to suggest that, even in our affluent society, poverty is the number one pollutant. Our environmental neglect is just a symptom of our more fundamental neglect of people. When we compare the energy consumption in the United States with that of the rest of the world, the fact that we are facing an energy crisis is a national disgrace.

An over-all view of what is really happening is implicit in the comment of Elise Boulding on the blindness of most "futurologists" to the actual changes in attitude that are already under way:

> The professional futurists are too tied to present special distribution of social, economic and political resources, and too wedded to thirty-year projections based on an artificial isolation of a Hellenic-European stream of history, to be able to conceive of the breaches in time that history in its planet-wide dimension should lead us to expect. Their man-computer symbiosis allows for no sense of the totally other, transcendent or otherwise. The paradoxical thought arises that it may be precisely the most professionalized of the professional futurists who will be in for the most violent "future shock."

Following are three sentences from Lincoln Kerstein's tribute (*Nation,* Nov. 16, 1974) to David Erdman's Blake book (see Review): "Erdman has a surgical eye for Blake's seemingly accidental doodling, squiggles and curlicues, which all turn out to be apposite signs—grapes, snakes, flying creatures. That laser beam uncovers layer upon layer of visual puns and conceits. His effort is inexhaustible in penetrating the strata of Blake's incredibly prolific and far-finding visual and verbal imagery."

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

HIGHER EDUCATION: HOPES AND OBSTACLES

ONE section of a recent report on higher education in California deals with the recognition that "college, for many young people, is largely a place for self-discovery and the development of self-worth." Some of the faculty, it is said, find this an unwelcome attitude on the part of students. "In fact, most institutions discourage any resolution of the very basic questions the majority of students must face during their college career." The report quotes Harold Korn, of the Counseling and Testing Center at Stanford University, who summarizes conclusions from a study of undergraduates in two large California universities:

> Most college students are given only a year or two in which to find both themselves and a vocation plan for their lives; and too often during this short period, while they are being offered encouragement to explore, their daily academic tasks are at odds with their goals. . . . Much of the structure of higher education encourages them to put aside questions of personal relevance in favor of mastering a complexity of academic subject matter. . . . today's college students are confronted with a system that has not even openly acknowledged these contradictions.

Curriculum, Mr. Korn adds, is more often based on the professor's misconceptions than on student needs:

> The curriculum is seldom an integrated whole designed to encourage intellectual development; instead, it is a patchwork made up of what numerous specialists feel is vital to an understanding of their own particular disciplines. Under such conditions, any hope that the student will be afforded an opportunity to fruitfully work through a set of integrating experiences is faint indeed.

The comment of the report, by Keith Pritsker, is pertinent:

> Some attempts to achieve a wholistic approach to undergraduate education are being made. Programs in environmental studies, social ecology, combined social sciences and the development of cluster colleges are a modest beginning. Still, much of the structure of these institutions themselves remains counter-productive of the goals of self-integration and discovery. Meaningful reform will require of many institutions a change in self-identity—of what they are and whom they serve. Such change is not easy and is often painful; but if our colleges and universities are truly to be centers of higher learning they must give continuing recognition to the needs and aspirations of their students.

Problems of this sort receive little attention in MANAS for the reason that a change in the "self-identity" of some 120 institutions—the number of colleges and universities in the state system of California—is considerably more than we feel able to contemplate. It seems better to take on the broader problem of general cultural change or regeneration, if only for the reason that this sort of reconstruction will need to come first, or go on at the same time, if such a network of education institutions is to undergo transformation. It is difficult, of course, to speak of so large an undertaking except by converting the problem into very different terms. Few have done this as well as William James. "I am done," he said, "with great and big things, great institutions and big success, and I am for those tiny, invisible, molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many soft rootless, or like the capillary oozing of water, yet which, if you give them time, will rend the hardest monuments of man's pride."

Who else has seriously considered the intricate processes of general cultural change? Among figures in education in this century, we think only of Arthur Morgan, especially in his book, *The Long Road.* Nineteenth-century thinkers were less reluctant to generalize on such large and important questions. Two exceptional men in particular wrote thoughtfully of the processes involved. One is Henry T. Buckle, in his *History of Civilization in England;* the other, W. E. H. Lecky, in *The Rise of Rationalism in Europe.* Unfortunately, such books are no longer

studied or read. They point to the fact that historic change in human attitudes comes as the result of the impact of seminal ideas which exercise extraordinary leverage. Buckle, however, added:

> But if we look into history we shall clearly see that, although the origin of a new opinion may thus be due to a single man, the result which the new opinion produces will depend on the condition of the people among whom it is propagated. If either a religion or a philosophy is too much m advance of a nation it can do no present service but must bide its time until the minds of men are ripe for its reception.

We may say that a "ripening of minds" made possible the key relationship of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* to the changes in curriculum noted in the report on California education. Other illustrations of work of far-reaching influence will occur to readers. But the process of assimilation is slow, the readiness spotty and often reluctant, as in the case of faculty members who think only of transmitting their specialties.

Yet those who teach in colleges and universities are by no means helpless as individuals. We have a musing essay by two teachers in a small mid-eastern college (in Ohio) which discusses the aspirations and efforts of the faculty there. These writers look both hopefully and critically at the tendencies they find in their own institution. The college is small, the teachers well aware of the special opportunities for good teaching that smallness makes possible. "In general, we try not to surrender to the fragmentation of knowledge, the technocratic vision of education as essentially specialization, that characterizes much modern education." Continuing, they say:

> But at present many faculty move from classes to committee meetings to conferences at a pace which can make Manhattan seem bucolic. It sometimes appears that we are consciously simulating a frenetic urban environment. The causes of our frenzy are unquestionably complex, but three of them seem obvious. We attempt to assess diverse educational experiences by means of quantitative standards, and one result is that both students and faculty are frequently tyrannized by "hours" and other standardized requirements for teaching and learning. Our committees and councils work very hard in trying to construct an undefined academic excellence as though it existed somewhere in a distant future; that is with little sense that we are building on existing strengths we seem often to be spinning our wheels on the road to educational reform. Finally, in our desperate striving for excellence we seem to be drawn increasingly to large institutional models for accountability. Our time investment in developing "objective," rigorously documented standards for faculty promotion and tenure is enormous and it is growing.

These teachers worry about the degree to which "corporate" efficiency is affecting the college's conception of achievement. The goals of "bigness" are infectious and pervasive:

> We are, after all, mainly products of large institutions, having received our graduate educations there and having absorbed many of the institutional and professional values. Our attitudes toward curriculum, disciplines, teaching, scholarship, even our students, have been strongly shaped by our experiences in the large university system. The rewards, moreover, that come our way as faculty members are frequently determined by professional and foundation groups dominated by representatives from major graduate schools. In short, despite the fact that we teach in a small college environment, our perceptions of ourselves, our colleagues, and the college in general may well be predicated on experiences of a very different institutional nature.

Well, there is more searching self-examination along this line, all of it good, all of it unstrident and meditative, developing from clear awareness of ideals and a persistent search for workable alternatives. This is surely the sort of thinking that, little by little, will help the colleges and universities of the country to acquire another identity or a better conception of how to serve students of both the present and future.

FRONTIERS

Innovation and Restoration

NATURAL growth, or progress, it is now becoming evident, is not so much radical change as deepened awareness, gained through fresh subtlety in perception of what in some sense has always been known. The viable new, in other words, always involves a better understanding and appreciation of the old. Basic in this is consciously recovered feeling for the right *scale* of human life, individually and in community. Given the right or humanly natural scale, "the ten thousand things," the practical details of our existence, begin to assemble themselves in order. And when, as today, so many are looking with all their hearts and sharpened faculties to find a scale of living and acting which is natural and good, various common-sense discoveries keep on bubbling up and reaching print. These reports exercise a leavening and fertilizing effect on the rest of us.

We have a random accumulation of examples. *Time* for last Sept. 30 tells about the work of Hassan Fathy, an Egyptian architect, who has rebuilt a village in Upper Egypt, using bricks made of mud and straw. Studying ancient Egyptian practice, he found a way to keep the vault of the roof from collapsing. The Egyptian "authorities" thought he was going backward—they wanted up-to-date structures of concrete blocks—but Fathy proved that mud bricks maintain even interior temperature and humidity while concrete blocks allow variation of as much as 68°F. He then instructed architectural students in Cairo in the reasoned excellence behind traditional Islamic houses and town design.

> Old Islamic houses have filigreed windows and central courts, for example, to admit light without glare, coolness without air conditioning. The same principles could easily be incorporated even into high-rise buildings.
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> Similarly, Fathy taught that the layouts of old Arab towns, rabbit warrens of narrow, tortuous streets, have a powerful rationale. "In desert climates," he explains, "there is always a drop in temperature at night so that a mass of cold air is 'stored' near the ground. In a typical Arab town, the coolness lingers through most of the day. But if you break open the old cities and build broad, straight boulevards, the wind blows the coolness away, and you're left at the mercy of the blazing sun."

Fathy's book, *Architecture for the Poor*, probably belongs on the shelf alongside *Architecture Without Architects.*

Good diet is a basic part of community life in the right scale. Enormous, industrialized farms and vast food-processing plants seem to make good diet highly improbable. A pioneer in demonstrating this was the scholarly dentist, Weston A. Price, whose book, *Nutrition and Physical Degeneration* (1939), is filled with evidence of the superior diets of various primitive peoples. His concluding chapter, "Application of Primitive Wisdom," gives many illustrations of how much the Fiji Islanders traditionally knew about prenatal care and vitamin-rich foods for pregnant mothers. American Indians of the far North, Eskimos, and Peruvian Indians had the same knowledge and used it to produce healthy, normal children. This understanding and practice has been common among tribal cultures, but in "advanced" societies such knowledge is restricted to the relatively few who make deliberate effort to gain dietary intelligence—and who succeed only by conscious rejection of the claims spread by the mass-production food industries. Progress which destroys the simplicities of elementary hygiene is not progress.

In some degree, however, and gradually, we are catching up with the past. Three medical doctors, specialists in nutrition, contributed to the *Journal* of the American Medical Association for last Aug. 19 an article, "Dietary Fiber and Disease," showing that many of the prevailing diseases of the present—coronary artery diseases, appendicitis, gall bladder trouble, hemorrhoids, and obesity—were rare a hundred or two hundred years ago. The writers propose that these ills are now common because of changes in diet: our

foods, especially cereals, are too refined. The resulting loss of fibrous materials is a basic cause of numerous familiar afflictions. In one of several summarizing statements, these doctors say:

> Epidemiologically, and often clinically, these bowel diseases, venous disorders, and hiatus hernia are associated with obesity, diabetes melitus, and coronary heart disease. Cleave and his associates have pointed out that the removal of fiber from carbohydrate foods inevitably leads to over-consumption or too rapid absorption of the refined end-product. They have presented a great deal of evidence that fiber-deficiency associated with excessively refined cereal and sugar consumption may be the primary cause of this triad and some other western ailments. . . . Many of the diseases of western civilization have appeared only in the last century. We believe that they owe their origin, at least in part, to the removal of indigestible fiber from the carbohydrate foods that constitute the major part of our diet.

Wider recognition of the need for far-reaching, common-sense changes is slowly coming about through reports in newspapers and magazines. In the London *Times* for May 19, 1974, a well-known British economist, James Robertson asks, "Can We Have a Non-Profit Society?" He gives cogent reasons for his conclusion: "The profit mechanism is on the way out." This outlook fits naturally with the broader ecological perspective of critics like Howard Odum, who bring the light of analogies from nature to bear on the modern misuse of technique and the folly of uncontrolled industrialism.

Sooner or later, such voices are bound to be heard, since there is really no ground for contradicting them. As they grow in volume, such influences multiply, eventually becoming the surging impetus of change.