

THE SCHOLAR'S ROLE

THE discussion in the January *Atlantic* of the latest edition of the *Oxford Book of English Verse* (Oxford University Press), edited by Helen Gardner, by Frank Kermode, a scholar of some distinction, provokes a comparison which goes beyond the scope of present-day criticism. Mr. Kermode's review is devoted to the differences between the selections for this famous anthology by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, who put together the original edition which appeared in 1900, and made some changes in his revised edition in 1939, and those preferred by the editor of the present edition, titled *The New Oxford Book of English Verse*. One learns from Mr. Kermode that both scholarship and the poetry-reading public have changed since Sir Arthur's time. The book, in short, cannot do for the present generation what it did for past readers, and it is a question, he thinks, whether such a service can be reasonably continued. So, after a long and knowledgeable summary of the alterations in verse, readers' tastes, and the guiding principles of anthologists, the reviewer concludes:

The question remains: who is going to read this book? Not students, not schoolboys, though I suppose they may still have it thrust into their hands. There is the huge array of poetry in paperback, for the truly interested; and there is no longer any need for those who aren't to pretend.

Mr. Kermode did his chosen work well. One now knows why the book is no longer the same, why some poets have been left out and others included, and this may be of some interest to readers who contemplate buying it for their library or as a gift for a friend. But he didn't celebrate the joys of reading the *Oxford Book of English Verse* anywhere in his review—not at all—which seems to be something that scholars take for granted. The assumption, doubtless, is that everyone who reads the *Atlantic* knows the *Oxford* collection from cover to cover.

Well, maybe. But in our view the whole meaning of reading poetry has been left out. A chance to review such a book is also a chance for the reviewer to do some singing on his own account, hoping to move some of the readers to find similar lyrical and visionary pleasures in such a volume. The details of cultural transition can be left to the cultural historians or the professional journals. These are only the mechanics and the physiology of the craft, or something like that. The excitement of great poetry—and English poetry is great—should not be taken for granted.

We spoke of another sort of comparison. It is this. Years ago we knew a young man who followed a profession that required traveling from town to town. This went on for decades, and he always carried with him in his wardrobe trunk a worn copy of the 1900 edition of the *Oxford Book of English Verse*. No place he went to remained sterile with Shelley and Keats along. He read the book in odd minutes, over and over. He absorbed it, and cherished it as a kind of "new testament." The reading enriched his mind and his language. It fed his imagination. It deepened his sensibilities and enlarged his power of expression. He would read it to a friend now and then, but only when the occasion was right. Never was a book more worthily worn to tatters, or replaced by a new and fatter edition with more regret.

The comparison leads to little more than the conclusion that this young man would not have been helped or hindered by Mr. Kermode's sort of disquisition. He couldn't have cared less about such things. The *Atlantic* review, if he should read it today, would simply pass him by. For him it would be no more than small talk—professional small talk—and he has another profession. So, we might ask, who will read Mr. Kermode's review?

Obviously, other scholars will read it—people in English departments everywhere; and anthology publishers and editors will read and perhaps profit by it. His article is informing, pleasantly sophisticated, and probably correct in its judgments and conclusions. No doubt what he said needed to be said—somewhere. We found parts of it quite interesting, such as the long passage on the function of what could be called "*kitsch*" included in Quiller-Couch's first edition. The kind of poetry that once gave some borrowed color to "lower middle-class conversation" is now out of the Oxford collection entirely. Mr. Kermode says:

That function of poetry is now obsolete, the work is done instead by television advertising. If you take a London child to the Christmas pantomime nowadays you will find that he understands the jokes and you don't simply because he watches commercial television more than you; the dialogue is a continuous allusion to advertising gimmicks and slogans. So is normal supermarket conversation. Whether you prefer this is a matter of taste; but it's worth remembering that the culture of the newly literate in the late nineteenth century might be represented not only by Gertie and Well's Mr. Polly (whose neologisms are a tribute to culture) but by D. H. Lawrence. Poetry was still something you might read without embarrassment, and without taking a course in it; it still had some place in the conversation of all the literate. Whether the admen in any sense supply its place I don't know. What seems quite sure is that there is no longer an easily recognizable public for *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, and no generally acknowledged corpus of English poetry.

Well, this sounds like a fairly accurate assessment of the way things are; but if so, then the idea should be to *change* the condition; that is, it ought to be changed unless Mr. Kermode feels that the paperbacks have eliminated the need for anthologies of English poetry. It is true enough that young people used to go about clutching paper editions of Cummings and Brecht, and some others, and may now do the same with Gary Snyder, but there *must* be joys they are missing, which the *Oxford Book* could afford, and which Mr. Kermode can testify to, if he would. Perhaps

he will, in some other kind of review. He certainly knows how.

So we have been thinking about the abyss which separates scholarship from the needs of human beings—the distance of the approved work of scholars, of the typical examples of their role and the reasons they are chosen for their jobs, from the actual, functioning *splendor* of literature in the lives of human beings!

Piaget has something to say to all these people. *Does* scholarship have anything to do with education? Are people who work in literature at all concerned with the kind of growth our friend accomplished for himself with the *Oxford Book of English Verse*? Why shouldn't they, at least now and then, write for their readers the way Russell wrote about poetry and prose for the *Irish Statesman*? Or the way Thoreau wrote about a man whose books he came to appreciate, as in the case of Carlyle?

Expounding Piaget, Nathan Isaacs speaks of the "true learning" which is our great human achievement, which starts "practically at our birth and goes on all our lives." It comes about only through our own active doing and experiencing. This inner structure-making, which we all pursue, by means of which alone we know what we know, is a highly individual thing. It has practically nothing to do with curricula, scholarly projects, cultural transitions and critical sophistication. It is made of what we take into our minds and make a part of ourselves because it seems *worth* taking in. Scholarship should provide wise guidance in matters of this sort; what other serious purpose can it have?

In 1847, *Graham's Magazine* in Philadelphia published an essay by Thoreau called "Thomas Carlyle and His Works." He was interested in getting people to read Carlyle, and in explaining why. We should like to see some writing of this sort (Thoreau's) again. Toward the end he said:

Carlyle is a critic who lives in London to tell this generation who have been the great men of our race. We have read that on some exposed place in the

city of Geneva, they have fixed a brazen indicator for the use of travellers, with the names of the mountain summits in the horizon marked upon it, so that by taking sight across the index you can distinguish them at once. You will not mistake Mont Blanc if you see him, but until you get accustomed to the panorama, you may easily mistake one of his court for the king." It stands there a piece of mute brass, that seems nevertheless to know in what vicinity it is: and there perchance it will stand, when the nation that placed it there has passed away, still in sympathy with the mountains, forever discriminating. in the desert.

So, we may say, stands this man, pointing as long as he lives, in obediences to some spiritual magnetism, to the summits in the historical horizon, for the guidance of his fellows.

Earlier, he has given reasons for reading Carlyle:

Indeed, for fluency and skill in the use of the English tongue, he is a master unrivalled. His felicity and power of expression surpass even his special merits as historian and critic. Therein his experience has not failed him, but furnished him with such a store of winged, ay and legged words, as only a London life, perchance, could give account of. We had not understood the wealth of the language before. Nature is ransacked, and all the resorts and purlieus of humanity are taxed to furnish the fittest symbol for his thought. He does not go to the dictionary, the word-book, but to the word-manufactury itself, and has made endless work for the lexicographers. Yes, he has that same English for his mother-tongue that you have, but with him it is no dumb, muttering, mumbling faculty, concealing the thoughts, but a keen, unwearied, resistless weapon. He has such command of it as neither you nor I have; and it would be well for any who have a lost horse to advertise, or a townmeeting warrant, or a sermon, or a letter to write, to study this universal letter-writer, for he knows more than the grammar and the dictionary.

Yet Thoreau has a complaint to make of Carlyle, and he is as explicit here as in his praise. Carlyle has only a practical wisdom to offer: he would make us act, not think. "We have thought enough for him already."

To sum up our most serious objections in a few words, we should say that Carlyle indicates a depth—and we mean not impliedly, but distinctly,—which he neglects to fathom. We want to know more about that

which he wants to know as well. . . . We want to hear more of his inmost life; his hymn and prayer more; his elegy and eulogy less; that he should speak more from his character, and less from his talent; communicate centrally with his reader, and not by a side; that he should say what he believes, without suspecting that men disbelieve it, out of his never-misunderstood nature. His genius can cover all the land with gorgeous palaces, but the reader does not abide in them, but pitches his tent rather in the desert and on the mountain-peak.

Thoreau is an exacting man—the sort of man you might want for a reviewer, when choosing what to read. The truth of the matter is that he matches one work of art with another—the highest goal of the true critic. Moreover, too much time is wasted with small things, unimportant things, and the reader or student turns to the critic for help in saving time, not so much to be instructed in the *mores* or in the logic of scholars. In a good society, both would become invisible. Good mechanisms are always invisible. You would have to cut a man up to see his wonderfully functioning organs.

Since some irate practitioner of the written word is always declaring war on the Modern Language Association, we shall not add greatly to any controversy concerning its activities, except to say that "several millions of dollars" seems like a lot of money to be spent in order to get the commas in the right place—as the author intended—and to eliminate bowdlerizations in the works of famous American writers. Petty editing and foolish changes are bad, but to correct these offenses is not really the literary crusade of the century (see *World* for Jan. 22). One might even be willing to let the misplaced commas go if the energies of these people could be turned toward making language come alive. Textual fidelity is a copyist's task, and to set "scholars" at glorified proofreading seems a waste of talent, if they should have some. More difficult would be an attempt to inspirit the prose of the time. Here, again, Thoreau on Carlyle is a brilliant guide, and one who practices what he preaches. Speaking of "style," he says:

One wonders how so much, after all, was expressed in the old way, so much here depends upon the emphasis, tone, pronunciation, style, and spirit of the reading. No writer uses so profusely all the aids to intelligibility which the printer's art affords. You wonder how others had contrived to write so many pages without emphatic or italicized words, they are so expressive, so natural, so indispensable here, as if none had ever used the demonstrative pronouns demonstratively before. In another's sentences the thought, though it may be immortal, is as it were embalmed, and does not *strike* you but here it is so freshly living, even the body of it not having passed through the ordeal of death, that it stirs in the very extremities, and the smallest particles and pronouns are all alive with it. It is not simple dictionary *it*, yours or mine, but *IT*. The words do not come at the command of grammar, but of a tyrannous, inexorable meaning; not like standing soldiers, by vote of Parliament, but any able-bodied countryman pressed into the service, for "Sire, it is not a revolt but a revolution."

Another area of scholarship would profit by such a revolution. In the Autumn 1966 *American Scholar* Michael Polanyi examined the curious phenomenon of a scholarly profession which could not acknowledge that distinctive human behavior may result from devotion to truth. By direct citation, Polanyi showed that the Hungarian uprising in 1956 was a clear demand for a politics which honored truth above ideology. Yet an American scholar in the social sciences spent years in persuading himself that such motives were legitimately named in the practice of his discipline, and even then he hedged somewhat by suggesting that the Hungarian rebels "believed" themselves to be so inspired. Polanyi commented on the general refusal of social scientists to admit the reality and casual significance of moral values:

This analysis shows that a science that claims to explain all human action without making a moral judgment discredits not merely the moral motives of those fighting for freedom, but also their aims. That is why the Hungarian revolutionary movement, which revived the ideals of 1848, and which claimed that truth and justice should be granted power over public affairs, has met with such a cold reception by the science of political behavior. Modern academic theories of politics, on the contrary, gave support to

the doctrine that denies that human ideals can be an independent power in human affairs.

This is a position which denies to all social studies a place among the humanities.

What then of history? Is not history a department in the social sciences? In any event, if history is made to conform to the doctrine described by Polanyi, then what is to be taught to the human beings for whom history is a vital source of identity and personal meaning? After all, human beings not only "study" history, but live it. A book about a boy who grew up during the last Mexican Revolution makes this clear. He was born in the state of Tabasco in 1907, which would make him sixty-five or sixty-six today. The author is Andrés Iduarte (Praeger, 1971), and the title is *Niño*. In the part which speaks of history, Andres and his family have just returned to their home in Villahermosa after a period of exile to the south:

We went to live on another hill, that of Esquipulas. For a boy, living on a hill is a delight: enormous walls on one side, covered with climbing plants and small insects; on the other, tempting rooftops within easy reach. At that time I was studying national history. This was the first truly impassioned intellectual interest of my life. Every day my cousin Panchito Carpio and I climbed to the roof of a small, nearby house. There I read or related to him the torture of Cuauhtémoc, the the last Aztec emperor who fought against the Spaniards. It was the one page of history that most enraptured me. And then there was the account of the execution of Jose Maria Morelos, the great figure of Mexican independence, in San Cristébal Ecatepec. I recall that the school text, by Torres Quintero, said that the waters of the lake had swollen and lovingly absorbed the shed blood. The passage ended on an emphatic note: "There was the hand of God." Naïve as I was about supernatural matters, I looked for a hand in the picture not comprehending that the rising waters were a divine intervention, part of the hidden designs of Providence.

It is time that scholars took into account how children—and all human beings—feel and think. A scholarly indifference to the question of identity will not make for historical writing that anyone can use. And then there will be scholarship that

no one reads or cares about, leaving popular history to propagandists and demagogues:

The elementary schools made chauvinists of us. We hated the Spaniards as Spaniards and reserved a special loathing for Pedro de Alvarado, the perpetrator of the cruel Indian massacres: we adored Cuauhtemoc, who defended the great Tenochtitlan (Mexico City) and who, when forced to surrender to Cortés, asked the latter to kill him with his own dagger; and Cacamatzin, who stoned countless Spaniards to death. We blushed with repugnance at the very mention of Montezuma, the Aztec emperor who surrendered Mexico City to the Spaniards; of Malinche, the concubine of Cortés; of the treacherous Indians who supported Cortés against the Aztecs and so betrayed their country. We were at once indignant and distressed by the intelligence and audacity of Hernán Cortés. Our reading of Torres Quintero's book was an impassioned one and it was almost too much for us when our teacher said, "There were fewer of them and they were evil, but they had horses and harbequebuses and so defeated our ancestors."

The three centuries of the colonial period weighed heavily on our souls. We passed hastily over the worthy missionaries Bartolome de las Casas, Motolinia, Sahagun, and Vasco Quiroga, and the good viceroys Revillagigedo and Bucareli. The "good guys" interested neither our teacher nor us. Their names might somehow dampen our jingoistic fury: it was best to give them the back of our hand.

The point of his book is that Andrés recovered from all this partisanship and hate; but its moral might be that some will never recover from such influences in childhood. The individuals who correct the distortions of their times, during their times, are the autodidacts, the persons who teach themselves, and they are always few in number. It is the business of scholarship, of men of learning, to bring balance, light, and inspiration to the people. Scholarship has no other proper business, no other justification.

REVIEW

A MODERN PAINTER

ALTHOUGH "art" books seldom get attention in these pages, mainly by reason of the frustration which attends writing about things that need to be seen, there are occasional exceptions, and one of them is made by *Lyonel Feininger—City at the Edge of the World* (Praeger, 1965), with text by T. Lux Feininger and photographs by Andreas Feininger, both sons of the artist. This is a peculiarly delighting book, beautifully printed in Germany, with some exquisite color reproductions. Why notice this book in particular? Mainly because the text, by Feininger's son who is himself a painter and who teaches art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts School, is extremely helpful in understanding the intentions and thoughts of modern artists. (There is also a subordinate reason: Feininger was one of the Blue Four painters—Feininger, Paul Klee, Alexei Jawlensky, and Wassily Kandinsky—and Galka Scheyer's collection of their works now belongs to the Pasadena Art Museum. It happens that the Cunningham Press, which prints *MANAS*, has done a great deal of printing for the Pasadena Art Museum, including catalogs for exhibitions of three of the Blue Four painters, among them Feininger, so that their work adorns the corridors and walls of the place where each week *MANAS* is "put to bed." For the staff, therefore, Feininger is an old and familiar friend, making it difficult to ignore this lovely and perceptive book about him by his sons.)

Lyonel Feininger was born in New York City in 1871, of parents who were well-known musicians. When he was sixteen he accompanied them on a European concert tour, and then began his schooling in art at Hamburg. He gained fame as a political and satirical cartoonist for Berlin papers between 1894 and 1898; he came to Chicago as a cartoonist for the *Chicago Tribune* in 1906, then returned to Europe, this time to Paris, where he began to paint, a little before his thirty-sixth birthday. He continued as a painter

until 1919, when Walter Gropius invited him to be the first member of the faculty chosen for the Bauhaus at Weimar. Feininger did the poster for its opening announcement. At the Bauhaus he found he could also teach. When the school moved to Dessau, he gave up teaching to gain more time to paint, but remained as artist-in-residence. After Nazi pressure forced the Bauhaus to close he returned to the United States, where he both painted and taught. He gained recognition from the Metropolitan Museum of Art and taught a summer session at Black Mountain College. He worked hard throughout his life, and died in New York in 1956 at the age of eighty-four.

What of his painting? Feininger was always a "modern" painter. The meaning of "modern," according to Lux Feininger, can be understood in this way:

The common aim then was to renew the language of painting, to break with the cult of atmospheric surface values, to re-introduce a spiritual quality into art which it had lost. In those early times, the visual means used by him were among the most daring, the most "abstract," if the quality abstracted from is the preoccupation with academic standards, seasoned by a dash of Impressionism. Even then, he was remarkable for his individual ways, essentially already a lonely figure. He did not belong to a movement or to a "school."

The trend of modern art, the writer says, was away from the object, and toward the artist's sensibility in relation to an object, or to the relationships or meanings of things, as understood, seen, or felt by the artist. Mr. Feininger says:

For this stage of a broad, historical process, the proper word is "Expression" and hence, "Expressionism," a term which somehow suited painting in Germany better than it did French painting. "Fauves" and "Cubists" pursued analogous aims insofar as they sought pictorial laws to replace the laws of optics. The visual means of the "Futurists," which strikingly related in certain cases to the means of cubism, were overshadowed in significance by the insistence on dynamic motion violence, glorification of the dangerous life, briefly on

moral qualities as opposed to visual ones. With the advent of the war, the historical process quickens. Social criticism and a deep disillusionment with the progress of civilization find expression in works still further reducing the importance of visible objects as compared to the importance the artist attaches to the idea of what he is painting. Aesthetic and lyrical qualities of the work are now on the wane, and the views of their creator become the essential criteria. These comprise political, religious, sociological opinions, to which must be added psychological fads and phobias. The coming of the second World War does not alter the process, merely helps to accelerate it. Throughout, one finds the "I" of the painter, the subject gains the importance which the "Thou" continues to lose. The artist thus assumes more and more the role of a messiah of a preacher, a prophet, an agitator. This function, whether self-styled or assigned to him by an ever-growing critical literature, expresses itself in our time through visual means which are often deliberately chaotic. And the longer one follows this evolution, the more familiar one becomes with such unpainter-like terms as "universal sickness," "crime against humanity," "general destruction." One is at liberty to see a new humanism growing, in this concern with the way humankind is dealing with the Universe, but the criteria of an art which never gave up dealing with the "Thou," conceding it a degree of objective reality, are not covered by such a critique.

The art of Lyonel Feininger is of this kind. Access to it is gained through studying the dialogue between the artist, the "I," and the world around him, the "Thou." A figurative painter, he nonetheless shows a pervading awareness of, and sensitivity toward, the dual nature of reality. His personality is determined by intuition and will.

His works were numerous and diverse. He painted in oils, did watercolors and drawings, woodcuts and prints. He also designed and made toys. He had three sons and they grew up with these wonderful creations in painted wood all around them, especially at Christmas time. Lux Feininger doesn't say much about the family life, but it must have been warm and delightful. Feininger made model sailboats and taught his sons to make them, and they sailed them in the model boat lake in Central Park in New York.

This book is about the development of Feininger as an artist, and it also reveals him as a

man, an intense and industrious and thoughtful human being. Boats, trains, city scenes, and people are the subject matter behind Feininger's art. Everything he did has something inviting about it. There are several other books about Feininger, and many exhibition catalogs. This book is especially good on the toys.

We have said nothing about Andreas Feininger's photographs. They are magnificent. Andreas Feininger was a *Life* photographer for twenty years and we reviewed a book of his pictures of nature subjects in *MANAS* for April 14, 1971. The book is thus a family affair and we wish our copy did not have to be returned to the library.

Speaking of "magnificent" photographs, we now turn to a book full of them and nothing else, the work of Marc Riboud, Roman Vishniac, Bruce Davidson, Gordon Parks, Ernst Haas, Hiroshi Hamaya, Donald McCullin, and W. Eugene Smith, who meet in a new volume titled *The Concerned Photographer* (Grossman Publishers, \$14.95), edited by Cornell Capa. No expert eye is required to enjoy these pictures, which are offered as an antidote to the "bland notion" which equates the "objectivity" of a photographic image with "dispassionate neutrality." The book is the printed record of a second exhibit of a theme which originated in 1967 under the title "The Concerned Photographer," in which six other men participated. The idea of the exhibit was to demonstrate "the intense empathy and involvement of each with his fellowman and the world in which he lived." This book, then, is a continuation of the demonstration, made possible by the International Fund for Concerned Photography, Inc. The editor says in an Introduction:

Humanism in photography has a long and noble tradition—from Matthew Brady, Jacob Riis, Dorothea Lange, and a host of others, to those contemporary practitioners who use their cameras as a tool of social conscience and a means of expressing their reverence and affirmation of life. Lewis W. Hine, an early humanitarian with a camera, expressed it well when

he stated: "There were two things I wanted to do. I wanted to show the things that had to be corrected. I wanted to show the things that had to be appreciated." More recently another photographic giant, Edward Steichen, said (on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday): "When I first became interested in photography . . . my idea was to have it recognized as one of the fine arts. Today I don't give a hoot in hell about that. The mission of photography is to explain man to man and each man to himself. And that is the most complicated thing on earth and also as naive as a tender plant." . . .

Photography has earned its original appellation (from the Greek "to write with light"). There is, and will be, "visual writing," which will include all kinds, from the most mundane and commercial to the unique artistic creations and documentary/commentary depictions of the world in which we live. The latter two can be most readily characterized as "concerned photography"—photography that, in Steichen's words, has a mission "to explain man to man and each man to himself." This is the role to which the Fund dedicates itself.

You open the book to a color shot of Chinese peasants working in the mud of a river—mud above their knees: they're building something, or gathering rocks. It is simply beautiful—the wonder of man is the emphasis in this volume; and of the world. There is also the loneliness, the prosaic, smudged lives of people, but not a picture is "obscene"—that is, something that ought not to be shown. You begin by looking at these pictures with a sense of wonder, and you end with—wonder and gratitude. A key at the back answers questions about each picture, but the first thing to do is just drink them in. No one will be able to find anything wrong with this book. It completely justifies itself and the idea behind publishing it. It is probably better than the idea.

COMMENTARY SCHOLARLY EXAMPLE

INEVITABLY, this week's lead article recalls the memorial volume by the students of Harold C. Goddard, professor of English literature for thirty-seven years at Swarthmore College, printed by the College in 1946 on the occasion of his retirement. Goddard, it may be remembered, was author of *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, published in 1951, the year of his death. Goddard also wrote a rare appreciation of William Blake, *Blake's Fourfold Vision*, lately reissued as a Pendle Hill pamphlet.

Goddard is the best example we can think of to illustrate the ideal of learning. One of the contributors to the Swarthmore publication said:

Dr. Goddard might have been a great scholar. He chose instead to be a great teacher. When he was called to Swarthmore (in 1909), he had already earned a reputation for sound scholarship. In a situation where there was not enough time for all phases of his profession—scholarship, administration teaching—he could have placed reputation above the needs of his understaffed department with its overcrowded sections. A less conscientious man would have used his time in research and made Swarthmore a stepping stone to one of the great universities and to national scholarly distinction. But self-seeking was not in his make-up. He could neglect his own ambitions but not the varied needs of all his students.

Another contributor remarked that in his classes, the "shyest students find themselves speaking and getting into the spirit of the discussion." He understood the secret of inspiring others. He never "gave orders." A student said: "He gave ideas and we gave ourselves the orders. I know of no higher achievement for a teacher." His humor would emerge unexpectedly. A question he set in a final English exam was: "Prove by the theory of William James' *Will to Believe* that the moon is made of green cheese." Another student spoke of how Goddard had taught her to appreciate "the great and subtle truths" of literature:

He translated them to me; and in the process he so brilliantly exemplified the best that was in them that, ever since, he has been one with that best. He was obviously afire with faith in what he was doing. Great books live in Dr. Goddard as surely as they lived in their authors. This faith and life is contagious; his students come away afire themselves.

Readers who have dipped into Goddard's *The Meaning of Shakespeare* will easily share this enthusiasm, which seems completely justified.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves ON AUTODIDACTS

IN recent months, as preparation for writing a book about self-taught people, Ronald Gross has been corresponding with and talking to people who are in this category, and he tells about some of them in a preliminary report. They are known as autodidacts, persons who learned what they know by means other than going to school. That, at least, is a beginning definition. Thinking about this matter, you may finally reach the conclusion that the question of "schooling" only gets in the way of understanding what is really involved. The full conclusion might come out something like this: Genuinely educated people *always* educate themselves; there is no other way in which education can take place. They may go to school or they may not; going to school may contribute to or prevent a person's education. Generalizations about this only confuse matters. We define autodidacts as people who didn't go to school because, as a culture, we think or "believe" that learning is a result of going to school. In other words, we make our definitions according to what is *supposed* to happen, not in terms of what really happens. The value of studying the lives and achievements of those whom we call autodidacts may be that this helps us to do away with certain illusions about schooling, along with bringing other useful discoveries.

An important paragraph by Mr. Gross:

Actually, my correspondents are the remnant of a once vigorous American breed, broader than scientists: the self-taught. Franklin and Lincoln were their precursors, and in our time the style has been continued by Eric Hoffer and Malcolm X. It's a tradition with deep roots in European culture: As Professor Robert McClintock of Columbia has pointed out, prior to the rise of industrialism and our national systems of mass education, the meaning of "Education" in the West was not schooling but self-cultivation. To classical and even Renaissance writers, the idea that one could get one's *education* from those intellectual gym-teachers who tutored one

in the *trivium* would have seemed laughable. "Every man who rises above the common level has received two educations," wrote Edward Gibbon, "the first from his teachers; the second, more personal and important, from himself."

We can think of our illusions about schooling as a stupid mistake and go on to other things, as though it were something that needs correction but is not crucially important. Well, it *is* not crucially important. Loss of a sense of obligation to pursue self-cultivation—as though the goal of human growth could be obtained by other means—has been the psychological cause behind the "revolt of the masses" that Ortega described; it explains the complacency of vast numbers of people who suppose that by getting born they have accomplished all that they need to do as human beings, since excellence is now defined as being like everyone else: a democratic shibboleth and a conditioning-theory conceit. It also explains the incredible arrogance of Establishment attitudes, shaped by men who have had their invincible conventionality polished by a timed exposure to something called "higher education." The illusion about schooling is part of the answer to the question asked by a radical reporter of Daniel Ellsberg: "How is it that liberal, Harvard-educated, urbane men can become so involved and wrapped up in this whole process of conspiracy of lies and brutality?"

An autodidact is a person who, for reasons still altogether mysterious, thinks of himself as someone with inner structure, beinghood, capacities, obligations, responsibilities, and even, perhaps, a destiny to fulfill. An autodidact cannot be stopped. He *will* find his way, improve himself, equip himself, gain mastery over his life or some significant portion of it.

This is of course exaggeration. In a child, a youth, a young person, these qualities come into play only half-consciously. They represent stubborn impulses, secret resolves, unarticulated promises to one's self, and gradual, *very* gradual, realizations. Many such persons make the mistake of supposing that everyone else is similarly

purposed, and learn the contrary only by pain and disillusionment.

The study of autodidacts is fruitful for work in the field of biography, self-actualizing psychology, an understanding of the heroic life, and for thinking about the ultimate of human achievement. It is for those who want to change themselves and charge themselves with enduring intentions.

But what about education, socially speaking? How can you make "normative" a kind of behavior that is statistically quite rare?

This is a question, it seems evident, that should not have a compromised or "formula" answer. On the other hand, the realities for education of discovery of the genuinely normative value of the autodidactic process cannot be ignored. When it is ignored, you get the kind of public education we have today in the United States, which is bad for *everybody*.

If you take the autodidacts for models, then you have, or seem to have, an elitist theory of education. And it *will* be elitist if the typical motives that animate people in our society remain the same. In short, only a Gandhian conception of moral responsibility would permit the embodiment of this kind of educational ideal in the practice of a society, since, for Gandhi, excellence meant putting your capacities at the service of others. The more accomplished the human being, the greater his responsibility to the human community. Actually, this was once the conception behind the old caste idea of India—the Brahmins, the highest caste, were to regard themselves as the *servants* of all the rest. But like every sublime ideal, the excellence of the Brahmins, when subjected to corruption, turned into a sanction for the worst social abuses.

The consequences of the two Western revolutions against the tyrannies of caste and class are now working themselves out before our eyes. What was the remedy for the presumptions, arrogance, and injustice of a blooded aristocracy?

A political system which affirmed the equality of man. But a revolution could not abolish the psychomoral reality and social importance of *noblesse oblige*. The study of the early days of our Republic is valuable, not only for what it can tell us about great autodidacts of the past, but also for the part played by *noblesse oblige* in the lives of extraordinary men—and doubtless women, too, should our historians ever get around to them.

That is about where the present finds us—beset by the intellectual contradiction between a vulgar or over-simplified reading of our traditional belief in "equality" and the splendid realities of the autodidacts who have proved themselves so different from the ordinary run of people—for reasons we do not understand—and to whom we owe intellectual, practical, and moral debts beyond reckoning.

We are certainly and wonderfully equal in the essential qualities of our humanness and our potentialities, but not equal at all in what we do with these resources nor in the ends to which we turn them. The autodidact knows this in his life and in his practice, if he does not know it conceptually.

How are these realities to be made to fit together? It will be done by recognizing them openly and then helping them to *grow* together, as a process of human culture in the soil of our intentions, warmed by the sun of a vision we feel but can understand only as it begins to have increasing practice.

Meanwhile, there are the contradictions and artificialities of our culture with which autodidacts must cope. "Degrees," said one of Ronald Gross's correspondents, "are used as fly-swatters, to kill unpapered people." Without some kind of a "certificate," they report, you can't get a job. One wrote sadly, "Knowing all this, I've urged my children to get a formal education in order to get into society's game, but to do their learning on their own time."

Well, again, there are no formula solutions. But little by little, the fog of illusion is lifting. We know a Middle Western manufacturer who said recently: "I've quite hiring college graduates. They don't know much of anything. I took a laundry truck driver off his route a month ago and now he's programming my computer." He must have been a pretty special route man, but the point is, a farcical, illusionary system will not survive forever. Meanwhile there are areas of activity where *only* performance counts. This is true of the arts, messed up as they may be; and true also of the crafts. The autodidact, at any rate, is better equipped to find and succeed in some unconventional calling. He takes a risk, but then it's becoming risky to remain conventional, these days. As Thoreau said, how do you measure risk for someone more dead than alive? What is the *norm*?

Reading? The best short treatise on autodidacts that we know of—although the term does not appear—is the first "Lesson" of Ortega's *Some Lessons in Metaphysics*, published by Norton in 1969.

FRONTIERS

Through the Eyes of the "Nation"

A BRIEF editorial in the *Nation* for last Dec. 11 speaks of the need for a new kind of bookkeeping—triple entry—to keep the record straight in relation to the environment. As in the past, one column will be for costs and another for income, but the third will take into account any *public* loss that may be incurred by the operation. To illustrate, the *Nation* writer gives some figures compiled on the quick-food industry, put together by Bruce M. Hannon, an engineer at the University of Illinois. Mr. Hannon has been studying the public aspects of the economics of food-store chains like McDonald. His findings seem unbelievable, but as the *Nation* remarks, he is a responsible investigator working under a grant from the National Science Foundation. The *Nation* summarizes:

He reports that the McDonald chain of 1,750 restaurants uses up the energy equivalent of 12.7 million tons of coal a year, which he says is enough to keep Pittsburgh, Boston Washington and San Francisco supplied with electric power for the same period. . . . McDonald's packaging is also gargantuan. It requires 174 million pounds of paper a year, which is the sustained yield of 15 square miles of forest. It sounds appalling, like statistics on the paper consumption of newspapers. Hannon worked on McDonald's energy and resource requirements as an example; there is no reason to believe that the requirement is different at Burger Chef, Big Boy, Wimpy's, White Castle, Burger King, Dairy Queen and others. "They are a symbol," Hannon says, "of the nationwide waste of material and energy resources."

A McDonald spokesman said attempts were being made to reduce the number of bags used for customers, and they feed people on trays when they don't carry the hamburgers away, but significant reductions hardly seem possible without sending the people home to eat! The *Nation* comments:

The trouble is that waste is now ingrained in the national character. We shall have to abandon our spendthrift way of life, but it is not going to be easy and, unlike the quick-food business, it will take considerable time.

What is said about McDonald applies in some ways to much of what you see in markets and other sorts of stores. Packaging for "easy" consumption has become more important to the American shopper than quality products.

This is a situation which brings long thoughts about American affluence and prosperity. Apparently, indulgence of our capacity for "waste" has established many cherished customs.

In an earlier *Nation* (Nov. 20), Seymour Melman begins a study of America's "war economy" by quoting an opinion survey by Samuel Lubell, in which the analyst found that unemployment in various communities in several states was making people wonder if we needed some more war. A man in Fredericksburg, West Virginia, is quoted: "It's a helluva thing to say, but our economy needs a war. Defense spending should be increased to make more jobs for people." This belief, Mr. Melman says, is becoming widespread: "It is that a war encourages high employment and is in general good for prosperity. From being 'good for' it is only a short step to 'essential for'."

What is a war economy? Obviously, we already have one. Mr. Melman says:

A war economy is one in which preparing for war or waging war is the dominant activity. What does "dominant" mean? In an industrialist-capitalist economy, to dominate means first, to have priority control over capital. In 1939, for every dollar of corporate after-tax profit, military spending was 21C. By 1971, for every dollar of corporate after-tax profit, the budget of the Department of Defense was \$1.41. That means that by 1971 the Pentagon had superseded private firms in control over capital. Second, dominating industrial-capitalist economy means controlling industrial technology. For twenty-five years the military agencies of the federal government have dominated U.S. research and development: of \$200 billion of federal money spent for R&D since World War II, 80 per cent was applied to defense, space and the Atomic Energy Commission. Third, the military agencies, by virtue of their control over research, have strongly influenced the curricula for training the people who carry in their minds the possibility of creating new technology. Together with technical research, they are the core production of an industrial society.

Mr. Melman also says:

At the same time, because talent, money and social energy are concentrated on the military, the civilian technology at the base of the American economy has been depleted. That is the main fact underlying the growing inability of many U.S. industries to compete in the world market and even in the domestic market. Inability to serve an evident market is the hallmark of industrial depletion—economic and technological.

In twenty brief, numbered paragraphs, Mr. Melman lists the concrete evidences of America's economic and cultural deterioration, and in conclusion points out that because America participated for only four years in World War II, and suffered no material destruction of economic resources, we are persuaded of the doctrine that wars make prosperity and that American productive capacity is so great that we can put together "virtually any combination of guns and butter." But today our industrial plant is becoming obsolete compared with that of some other countries.

The hamburger habit seems a small matter in comparison with this fondness for a prosperity based upon war.

But other habits have grown, too, during the same historical period. Again from the *Nation* (Dec. 4), we take a passage from Bruce M. Russett's review of *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* by Alfred W. McCoy:

As McCoy points out, there were around 20,000 addicts in the United States in 1946; the best estimates are that the figures then grew to about 57,000 in 1965, 315,000 in 1969, and 560,000 in 1971. The avalanche of addiction was made possible by an evil combination of supply and demand. Demand means the ability of American drug consumers to pay high prices, social conditions feeding the desire for an escape, and the enthusiasm of pushers prepared to distribute free samples generously. Under such circumstances the market will grow as fast as supply will permit. The supply comes from abroad: formerly from Turkey and Iran, now largely from Southeast Asia—60 to 70 per cent of the world's illicit opium from the "Golden Triangle" of Burma, Laos and Thailand.

The relations between America's military activities in that region and the heroin traffic are too complex for brief discussion, and the book, the reviewer says, oversimplifies the solution, yet its facts are not challenged. They alone make the reader shudder with horror, reinforcing the closing observation of the review that Americans must ask themselves hard questions about the "social conditions that breed addiction."

Meanwhile, also in the *Nation* for Nov. 20, Robert Sommer, a psychologist at the University of California at Davis, writes on the growing fears of Americans for their personal security. "The market in home protection devices," he says, "is booming." Everywhere, suspicion is the order of the day. Once the presence of armed police would have made us uncomfortable; now their absence has this effect. The airlines are obliged to see every customer as a potential hijacker, and getting into some areas of a bank is like penetrating San Quentin. Supplying guards is big business, and even park rangers have begun to carry guns—to protect the animals from people. Mr. Sommer comments:

All these things cannot help but affect the American Psyche. I cannot say it is deliberate preparation for a totalitarian state, but it certainly works out that way. It is not the presence of uniformed security guards and TV monitors; it is the quick adaptation that people make to them that augurs so badly for democracy. Trust and respect for other people is basic to democracy. One cannot be wary and untrustful Mondays through Fridays, and warm and loving on weekends.

When, one wonders, will people begin to put "all these things" together and realize what is behind them? We have reported on four items, but they could have been four hundred. Waste and the war are the implied causes, but an emptiness of purpose must have come first. Recognition of this emptiness will have to begin the change, but it seems long in having an effect.