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NATURE, NURTURE, CHOICE

THERE are certain images, metaphors, and dramatic situations without which we could hardly formulate our thoughts, much less give expression to them. The "web of life" is one, suggesting the vital interrelatedness of the great system of nature, a unity which is also a vast diversity, enclosing countless interdependencies, wonderful little tropisms and subtle movements, only a few of which are visible. And the more we observe, the more we realize how *connected* everything is, and how feeble or inadequate, really, are human attempts to give precise characterization to natural processes. Yet with this realization comes another equally important one—that we are impelled by *our* nature to try to comprehend what we see and experience.

For the fact is that a number of things are happening in the world—things which we make happen and which happen to us—that cannot be ignored. To have human presence in the world is to seek to understand it. A man is not a man without making this attempt. That he acts upon what he knows or believes he knows is the making of men's lives, and of historical change.

The making of history is also part of the mysterious Web of Life, and a far less predictable process than many of the other aspects of nature. We are now, it seems, in the midst of a peculiarly furious and rapid cycle of historical change, yet also a time of great confusion and uncertainty. The confusion is a fact, and the uncertainty a human reaction to the fact—probably the healthiest thing about the present period. For what could be more productive of disaster than rigid ideas on how to accomplish or accommodate to historical change? You can predict something about the future behavior of simple materials like metals and wood and stone, but human beings are conscious intelligences who are variously determined to have some voice in what they do. They have moral qualities which resist suggestion and conditioning, and also unnaturally stimulated appetites which sometimes frustrate their true needs; and not only are there various contradictory elements in human nature, but they exist in different weights and energies and become active at different levels. Moreover, men unite and divide in unpredictable ways, sometimes for unexpected reasons. A human is an intelligence involved in a process of both internal and external change, and while the external activity is somewhat familiar to us, we know practically nothing about the internal changes—what, indeed, internal "growth" is, and where it may lead.

There are several ways to approach the question of historical change. First, there is the work of the theorists. Then there are the protagonists of specific changes—reformers and revolutionaries. One can study the processes of past changes, and learn something by comparing what actually happened with what the theorists and activists of those days predicted would happen. Finally, one can study the little-by-little alterations in the day-to-day patterns of human affairs to see if these changes can in any way be traced to prior causes, and whether or not the causes were consciously instituted. One might even guess how changes now in process will eventually consolidate, during some future period of greater stability, but this can hardly be done with much confidence.

The idea for formulating the problem of historical change in this way came after reading an article by Michael Corr and Dan MacLeod in *Environment* for November 1972. The focus of the article is on the energy consumption patterns in the new communes which have sprung up around the country during the past ten years. The conclusions are based upon information gathered by visits to twelve communes in the Minneapolis

area, having a total of 116 members. The object was to find out how much these people consumed of natural gas, electric power, and motor fuel, and to tabulate appliance use and automobile ownership and operation. The researchers begin with a definition:

> Students, artists, young working people, political activists, and religious people have formed numerous large households with varying degrees of success. A true commune is defined as a household with a common pool of income and property, allocated by means of a single budget; a common home, in which all goods and facilities (for example, kitchen and bathroom) are fully accessible to all members, and a common provision for care and education of children. A life-style that leads to communal use of facilities would appear to make a pronounced difference in personal energy consumption.

Leaving out the problems these writers encountered, their statistical methods, and the inadequacy of census data for comparative purposes (census findings are intended to help manufacturers to plan more sales!), we give only their conclusions. The Minneapolis commune members, then, consumed natural gas at a rate 40 per cent below a typical Minneapolis one-family residence; they used 82 per cent less electricity than the Minneapolis average, and gasoline at a rate 36 per cent below the national average. The writers say:

> This low rate of energy consumption was voluntary and was not considered by the people involved as a lowering of their standard of living. Most of the people in these groups are young political activists who decided to live collectively for social and financial reasons. The reduction in energy consumption was a result of this desire to live collectively and to de-emphasize the materialistic aspects of life. Some of the people were making conscious attempts to reduce their consumption of energy; others were not. Some were apologetic about their high bills and the number of appliances they owned; others had not given energy conservation much thought.

This article, as it goes from one home-need to another, ranges widely for comparisons with other cultures, showing how these needs may be fulfilled without external energy consumption. In the extended family or commune, moreover, where there are many helping hands, tasks like dishwashing are divided up and not so much of a chore. None of the communes had either dishwashers or air conditioners. Only a quarter of the hot water used by a dishwasher is needed for hand washing. And strong detergents are also eliminated. The writers make this general comment at the end:

> Many of today's young are interested in eastern religions, and such teachings may have a profound influence on how individuals view labor. For instance, Zen teaches that the insights possible through disciplined meditation are also possible when the disciplined alertness of meditation is carried to manual labor, and ultimately to every corner of one's life, with the preferred states of mind being possible through manual labor. Thus a chore like dishwashing loses the onus which some sectors of our culture attach to manual as opposed to mental or spiritual endeavors. Of course this insight is available through such native sources as Henry David Thoreau and some American Indian patriarchs.

What is a real historical change? For what we are thinking of, such a change could be spoken of as a change in the attitudes and beliefs of human beings about themselves—their goals, their responsibilities, and the meaning of their lives. Something of the sort has already happened to the people in these communes. They have changed their way of life, altered their consumption habits—sometimes deliberately, sometimes without thinking about it—because of other changes in goals and values. What *caused* these changes? The question is too complex for us to attempt an answer, but there are doubtless two general causes, summed up under the headings of vision and rejection. The two generally go together in any effective or enduring change.

The material in the *Environment* article qualifies as an example of day-to-day changes during a transition period, which we are able to observe and try to understand. What about proposers and instigators of change?

The most notable figure in this category, of our own time, is almost certainly Gandhi. What was Gandhi's dream or vision? It was twofold. First, he dreamed of a free and independent India with a modest central government, power being decentralized and existing mainly in the people themselves, distributed throughout a country of economically independent and culturally progressive villages, thoroughly persuaded of the non-violent way of life. Gandhi's utopia was initially defined almost wholly in terms of moral qualities, its other aspects taking their coloring in harmony with the fundamental value of respect and search for truth. The other side of his dream was the vision of a warless world, a world helped to this realization by the example of a regenerated India.

Judged in terms of the measure of fulfillment of these dreams, Gandhi can be called "a failure." But as a *Peace News* reviewer remarked recently, "Such a man's failure is more illuminating and more inspiring than all the successes of all the world's pragmatic politicians."

Couldn't Gandhi see this himself? Well, that remains—and should remain—a very interesting but quite unsettled question. It is something like the question, What is Truth?

When a man sets an objective that is both social and personal—and the objectives Gandhi proposed were always both—he relies not so much on his own devotion and steadfast determination, but upon the loyalty and strength of purpose of other people. What if he should expect "too much" of them?

Here we have to take note of Gandhi's convictions concerning the nature of man. He believed that human beings ought to strive for the highest imaginable goals. To attempt less than the highest will be to *achieve* less than is really possible. It is as though he said, "Come be superhuman with me!" The wonder is not that anyone listened but that so many tried. The wonder is not that so many failed, but the comparative magnificence of their attempt. Gandhi believed that the highest objective could finally be reached by each one because he believed in more lives than one. He thought that a man strives to know the truth and to live in its light for one life after another. So he didn't think he was asking anything unreasonable. It was the only thing worth doing, anyhow.

The reviewer we spoke of earlier, Geoffrey Ostergaard, gives attention to a book on Gandhi's political career (*Gandhi's Rise to Power*, Judith Brown, Cambridge University Press, 1972) in *Peace News* for July 28 of last year. Early in his discussion this writer says of the book:

> It also raises the very pertinent question whether a revolutionary movement can formulate and implement a revolutionary strategy without the presence of a dominant charismatic leader who, by virtue of his "exceptional qualities," can stamp his view of strategy on others. The present generation of nonviolent revolutionaries in the West rejects the very concept of leadership, but it has not yet shown that it can succeed without it.

It seems certain, at any rate, that no "committee" would have had the influence on the Indian people that Gandhi exerted, through the years.

What was "different" about Gandhi? This comes out in Ostergaard's discussion of the inadequacy of the language of "interest politics" for an account of Gandhi's career. Since this language serves well to understand other political movements, why won't it serve for Gandhi's activity?

> The reason why it does not lies in the fact that Gandhi was a genuine political innovator, not merely in the sense that he rejected the limits of the conventional politics of his day but, more importantly, in that his whole approach to politics was completely novel. The clue to Gandhi's approach is to be found in his affirmation (quoted by Judith Brown) that "the politician in me has never dominated a single decision of mine, and if I seem to take part in politics, it is only because politics encircle us today like the coil of a snake from which we cannot get out, no matter how much one tries. I wish therefore to wrestle with the snake."

The fascinating thing about Gandhi is that he engaged in the struggle with power without being at all interested in power—that is, he struggled that India should be *free* of power; "having" it was not really a goal or alternative for him. As Ostergaard says:

> For Gandhi, the purpose of life was the search for Truth—the supreme value, to be preferred and to be expressed (so far as one was capable of it) in every instant. Power, the value *par excellence* of politics, held no place in his philosophy, although he did acquire considerable power. He saw, or came to see, that Truth and Power were incompatible. One can search for Truth or one can seek Power (perhaps for quite honorable ends). But one cannot do both at the same time. In one sense, Gandhi never saw himself as being "in" politics. In the quotation above, he uses the phrase: "if I seem to take part in politics." In another sense, Gandhi was "in" politics in order to *transcend* politics, to replace the politics of interest and power by the politics of Truth and Love.

What about the "compromise" so essential in political action? Ostergaard has this to say on the question:

> He was prepared to compromise on matters he regarded as inessential. Towards the end of his life he felt that he had compromised too much: "In placing civil disobedience before constructive work I was wrong. . . . I feared that I should estrange co-workers and so carried on with imperfect Ahimsa." Not all those who followed him when it suited them shared his objective; but the only currency he dealt in was the coin of Truth.

So Gandhi may be counted a "failure." But this view of him can be defended only in terms of a perfectionist view of external historical change. What about the change of heart he was able to stir in countless men and women in all walks of life? How do we know that this is a lost energy, a momentum turned to entropy after the political frustration of the Gandhian dream? How much of the motivation in the communes the *Environment* writers visited had a remote but nonetheless Gandhian origin? What, we might also ask, did Kropotkin contribute to the cultural atmosphere that reaches into the new agricultural vision? What about Sir Albert Howard's labors, not yet admitted to be "scientific"?

If Gandhi had not proposed "impossible" ideals—if he had preferred the cautious "feasibility" studies of the modern think tanks—would he have stirred the Indian masses? What *is* it in human beings that harbors visions of reaching to the stars? What wonderful "extremists" are these men who are able to capture the imaginations of vast multitudes of human beings, and to move them beyond any ordinary reckoning! The "web of life" is indeed a complexity which reaches from earth to cosmic heights, rising on the wings of thought, lifted by the energies of heroic dreamers.

The eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita* is a magnificent portrayal of the Web of Life from this point of view. In it, the God, Krishna, who is all things manifest and unmanifest, reveals to his disciple, Arjuna, the immeasurable dimensions and countless fertilities of the grand totality of being. All the thunder and lightning that ever were is included in the vision—all the monsters, all the wonders, all the celestial and diabolical sights, all the content of heaven and earth and what lies beneath and beyond were spread before Arjuna's astonished senses—and because he was only a man, although a man among men, he fell in helpless fright before the teeming entirety. This, indeed, or something like it, is the total existence from which we make a few abstractions and call them "knowledge"—this is the combine of endless energies from which we siphon a few minor currents and call ourselves masters of the powers of nature—this the spectacle of past, present, and future, condensed into one mighty quintessential *Now,* and made evident to the faltering earthly eye of a completely overwhelmed disciple.

So the Gandhis, the Blakes, the Tolstoys, the heroic change-agents of our unheroic world—unheroic because it shrinks from admitting the mysteries which lie beyond the little knowledge that the modern world possesses—are careful to propose changes which may be nurtured by men in

their own hearts and minds, since it is only in these inner private places that the strength needed for world changes can be born.

From what they and others like them do and say, there eventually result all the little "molecular" changes William James spoke of, which are reflected in daily life, in inclinations of taste, in choices of work, and by these means habits are altered, environments into which children come are slowly transformed, while new generations liberated from old intellectual and moral confinements come into being, to institute other, more far-reaching transformations.

By reason of Ivan Illich, the attitudes toward schools will never be quite the same again. He is a minor Sampson of our time, shaking away at the stately columns of the temple of belief in certificates and diplomas—in *pieces of paper* instead of actual human capabilities. By reason of John Holt, parents and teachers are thinking about children in more understanding ways. By reason of Paul Goodman, fewer and fewer of the young are willing to grow up absurd. By reason of Gary Snyder, a more natural, and naturally productive, life is embraced by many young men and women.

Today hundreds of writers, where five years ago there were only scores, are sounding the warnings of the ecologists. A century ago there was only one—or one or two—George Perkins Marsh, pre-eminently, who began systematic study of the subject in his still valuable and remarkable book, *The Earth as Modified by Human Action.* Inch by inch, step by step, layer by layer, the opinions of men and women are reshaped and retuned, expanded by pioneers, and these people stirred to work in some direction themselves by activists of one sort or another. They gather in groups, are helped to learn by those with more experience, until there is a new, living public opinion ready to take larger steps of reorganization and change.

And all these things go on in people of vastly differing temperaments, capacities, interests and concerns. Poets and peasants are needed, both rebels and builders, both Dionysians and Apollonians, observers and protagonists, and even some quiet, sensible and conscientious establishment types to balance the wild enthusiasts for whom a balanced budget is some sort of middle-class vulgarity.

There are "opposing" forces, it is true; but mostly armed by fear and ignorance, and doubtless a few "bad guys" whose motives are difficult to understand. But on the whole Socrates was right in saying that no man *knowingly* does any evil thing, but only because he thinks it is "good." There is only one true meaning for progress, then, and that is a gain in human capacity to identify what is truly good.

REVIEW
FACTS ABOUT MINORITIES

A BOOK that seems unlikely to be picked up out of curiosity, yet turns out to be intensely interesting, if you read it, is *The Fourth World—Victims of Group Oppression* (Schocken, 1973, $10.00), edited by Ben Whitaker. The contents are eight reports of the field work of the Minority Rights Group, an organization formed recently in England to gather and publish information concerning the oppressed minorities of the world. The sole objective of MRG is to supply accurate information. It has members of every race, nationality and religion, and stays out of politics, since the information would become suspect if it became involved in political contests. The position is stated by Ben Whitaker in his preface:

> M.R.G.'s work operates on the theory that an informed world opinion forms the only real safeguard for human rights. However idealistically one may draft international charters or laws, in the long term their effectiveness is going to depend on the concern of the public and the press to see that they are implemented. The first crime of Northern Ireland was that it was not until the violence began that people outside paid any attention to the discrimination there. It is encouraging that—as Amnesty International has found—even some recalcitrant dictatorships, prompted perhaps by the spread of television and tourism, show themselves increasingly sensitive to criticism. In fact, the oppression by a majority in a democracy can be a more intractable problem than persecution by a tyrant, since at least the death of the latter can hold out a hope of relief.

Among the minorities now suffering oppression are the Asians in Africa, the blacks in Brazil, the Catholics of Northern Ireland, religious groups in the Soviet Union, and outcasts in Japan. These minorities are included in the eight problem areas covered by contributions to this book. However, an introductory discussion by Philip Mason, "What Do We Mean by Rights?", first deserves notice. This writer takes the opening articles of the UN Declaration of Human Rights as the basis for a useful comparison. These articles are:

> 1. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.
>
> 2. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. . . .

Mr. Mason comments:

> It is unfortunate that we use the same word for a legal *right* which can be enforced in the law courts and for the "rights" which men ought ideally to have in a just state. The U.N. declaration asserts that everyone has these ideal "rights," which I show within quotation marks only to distinguish them from legal *rights.* The two senses seem to share one word in most languages; it is not a confusion that occurs only in English. South Africa illustrates the difference most clearly; a list of the U.N.'s ideal "rights" corresponds very neatly with what an African has *not* got. He has virtually no legal *rights* in six-sevenths of the sovereign territory of which he is a subject. Legal *rights* are won by force or bargaining or persuasion and in Britain have been won gradually, piecemeal, one at a time. To distinguish them from ideal "rights" might possibly help minority leaders to think of them as attainable step by step, while to say that everyone has "rights" (which are taken to mean *rights*) they patently have not is surely to encourage intransigence.

Another portion of Mr. Mason's essay illustrates the complex problems of a minority which is not at first aware of its differences from the majority by which they may be distantly surrounded. Illustrations are found in India and Africa:

> It is only in the last fifty years that the Nagas [of India] have learnt they were Nagas; before that they were conscious only of much smaller tribal units covering a few hill-tops and valleys. Yet now they are expected to regard themselves as part of a sub-continent—from where else than the sub-continent will the hospitals come? It seems likely therefore that minority problems will become worse rather than better. Economic wants increase, and with them the need for large markets, while on the other hand

> peoples first become aware of an identity of culture, language and feeling they had ignored—and they suddenly perceive that it is in danger of extinction, liable to be swamped by the pressure of radio, television and the press, of swift communications, of international business. So they set about defining and asserting their national identity and demanding the fullest expression for it. And so eager are they to eliminate any trace of subservience to any other culture that they repudiate the leaders who have most experience of a wider sphere, and who are the most likely to win them the material goods as well as the cultural freedom they want. This dialectic seems likely, during the next few years, to be more rapid and powerful than the development of a sense of international citizenship.

This problem arises, Mason says, as an aftermath of Empire, resulting from what he calls "the tenderness of British colonial officers for people at a primitive stage of social organization":

> This game-warden attitude kept the Nagas and the peoples of the Southern Sudan naked and apparently happy much longer than they would have been otherwise. No one had told them that they were naked or that they were a minority. At the time, it seemed a kindness to prevent their way of life from being destroyed; it is not easy now to be sure that it was not cruel. They were shut off in their paradise, isolated from the main tradition of their principal neighbors—Hindu in one case, Arab and Islamic in the other. The discovery that they were both naked and a minority was harsh.

This book is filled with the background one needs in order to understand the tensions and sporadic outbreaks of violence which come so frequently, these days, in various parts of the world. If we had a better sort of journalism, the newspapers would do their part in supplying this background, but the press is certainly the same, today, as it was in G. K. Chesterton's day, when he observed:

> 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.

So it is today, for example, with the hotly reported conflicts in Northern Island, of which most of us know almost nothing, really, except that the people there don't seem to be capable of getting along with each other. The article in this book, by Harold Jackson, titled "The Two Irelands," clears up a lot of the mystery. Mr. Jackson went to Ireland as a reporter when the violence first broke out in Londonderry in 1968 and has returned there many times. Introducing him, the editor says: "Having had a rib cracked by rioters, been batoned by the police, gassed by the British army, and being agnostic in outlook, he claims to be totally neutral in his approach to the Irish question."

Jackson makes it plain that the issues of the struggle are rooted in history. The northern part of Ireland was colonized by the British in the seventeenth century in order to ease their problems of governing the recalcitrant Irish. Land was given to Scots and English who would undertake to maintain order in their areas, and these people settled mainly in the northeastern counties, where they had disembarked. This was called the Protestant Plantation, and the English, Protestant since Henry VIII, became a majority in that part of Ireland.

The Catholic Irish in the area could not help but distrust them, which gave a "siege mentality" to the colonists. When Ireland won Home Rule in 1920, Ulster, or Northern Ireland, voted to stay British, so that there is now a "double minority" problem. The Protestants are a minority compared to the rest of Ireland, while the Irish Catholics in the north are a minority compared to the Protestant English who have been settled there for hundreds of years. It seems apparent that the English at home are beginning to regard their countrymen and co-religionists in Ireland as something of a bother, these days, while the Protestant Ulstermen are determined to remain British at all costs, for economic as well as religious and cultural reasons, since the Protestants control the Ulster government and are

considerably more prosperous than the rest of Ireland. Mr. Jackson says:

> For its entire fifty years Northern Ireland has been ruled by the Unionist Party and for most of that time there has been only one issue—the preservation of the border with the Catholic Republic. Any real attempt at social, political and economic advance has hit this barrier and bounced back from it. And what has emerged has been a society suffering from a deep psychosis in which rational thought and action are invariably overtaken by emotional spasms the moment it comes under stress.
>
> It is fatally easy for the detached observer to ask loftily why the two sides don't just do this or that to resolve their differences. There is always the calm assumption that reasonable men sitting round a table can come to terms with any problem. But it is vital to grasp that this sort of "reason" is still far off in Ulster because of the enormous build-up in pressure created by the quite genuine fears on each side. The fact that these fears are often based on incorrect assumptions does not mean they are any the less real.
>
> Fifty years of failing to get any real say in the government of the province—and with little prospect of change in the situation—have left the Catholics with a burning sense of grievance, reinforced by both institutionalized and informal discrimination. A man's first name—Sean, Liam, Eugene or whatever—is usually enough to reveal his religion and nothing will convince him that a subsequent failure to get a job or a home was not governed by that fact.
>
> Similarly, the Protestants see themselves confronted by a sullen minority which they believe only wants to destroy their constitution and put them in the hands of what they regard as one of Europe's most reactionary theocratic states. Article 2 of the Republic's constitution, for instance, says flatly that "the national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland." Every Catholic is thought to support that association wholly.
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> The Protestants in turn fear economic decline if they were to be taken over. The average wage in the Republic is some 20 per cent lower than in the north. Ulster spends £150 a head annually on education, housing and income benefits, the Republic only half that.

This paper gives example after example of the deeply rooted psychological barriers to mutual understanding. There are thirty pages of analysis, and after studying them the reader, if he doesn't see any hope for immediate solution, is at least able to recognize what sort of historical blunders are behind the trouble in northern Ireland.

COMMENTARY
IMPASSE IN IRELAND

CENTRAL to Harold Jackson's explanation of the disturbances in northern Ireland (see Review) is what he calls "the total inability of either side to recognize the good intentions of the other," illustrating this distrust by describing an incident in Londonderry. Some Catholic boys were senselessly throwing stones at English troops. The officer in charge called his men back while he approached the angry people. The stone-throwing stopped and the officer talked, attempting to calm the situation. Jackson continues:

> After about ten minutes a middle-aged man forced his way through the crowds and started haranguing the officer about three soldiers who had attacked a Catholic civilian who had given them a lift in his car. The man detailed the injuries the civilian had suffered and, when the officer said he had only recently arrived in the city and knew nothing of the incident, scornfully said, "Well, it was in all the papers. You can read, can't you?"
>
> It had, indeed, been in the papers. The account was of a court hearing in which each soldier was given a six-month sentence for the attack. But this fact had been entirely obliterated from the man s memory: all that remained was the "atrocity" committed against a fellow-Catholic. The swift reaction of the establishment to the event had left no imprint at all and there was the sad feeling that it never would. Thus are the grievances tended and kept alive.

No doubt similar instances of prejudice on the part of the Protestants could be given. "Virtually everyone on Ulster," says Jackson, "feels himself under threat and acts accordingly."

Yet change is sometimes possible even in areas of high tension. In the *Nation* for Jan. 1, Lewis Perdue describes at length the recent advances in Mississippi. A decade ago segregation was the official law of the state, but today—

> Mississippi's public schools are the most fully integrated in the nation; white and Black youth work openly together at school and in their leisure time, often in projects designed to end the last vestiges of white supremacy; white voters last month overwhelmingly rejected the segregationist American Independent Party's Presidential candidate, a governor was elected without shouting "nigger" and his "nigger"-shouting opponent was soundly trounced; . . . almost without exception restaurants, motels and hotels now serve blacks as courteously as they serve whites. . . .

There are other good signs, such as the fact that blacks are now close to a third of the registered voters in Mississippi, whereas ten years ago they were one per cent. Mr. Perdue believes that the young are mainly responsible for these changes.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
BLACK MOUNTAIN—ANOTHER REVIEW

THE subject of Black Mountain College has a mythic splendor which draws the reader interested in education back to it again and again. Why? Because of the cultural vacuum in the modern world; because the world is filled with hungers for a quality of life that we don't know how to define, and perhaps shouldn't, yet are bound to long for the way the old alchemists longed to find the philosophers' stone, or the knights of the Round Table sought glimpses of the Holy Grail. The mythic truth is the truth you can't pin down—which children know better than to want to pin down—which is in the igniting spark that is given off instead of some source that you can mark and identify.

So with reading about Black Mountain College. You can read too much about the place, until it seems quite grubby in spots, and afflicted with all the defects of its virtues. But that is not the way to get the most out of Black Mountain. A reader has kindly sent us another review of Martin Duberman's book on the College, this one from *New York Magazine* for February 5. The writer, Barbara Rose, after giving high praise to Mr. Duberman, writes interpretively in a way that seems the best approach. She says:

> . . . for many of us trained in the "correct" academic centers to continue in the straight and narrow paths laid out in the nineteenth century, Black Mountain represents a myth, a legend—a dream of another kind of education—an integrated approach uniting the intellectual, the emotional and the creative faculties. When our own students began demanding a different education, it was natural Black Mountain should become a touchstone, and that we should try to understand why it produced such an astonishing burst of creativity. For me, Black Mountain became a personal obsession, the utter failure in my eyes of contemporary American art education made me determined to find the secret of Black Mountain's success.

Miss Rose found Duberman's book useful in confirming some views she had already developed concerning art education, and probably education in general:

> For example, I had been thinking, on the one hand, about the relationship of Black Mountain to the Bauhaus, the highly structured German academy where some of the best minds in modern art gathered before Hitler dosed its doors, and on the other, about Black Mountain's relationship to today's university art schools, which are based on watered-down versions of Bauhaus courses in composition, materials and techniques, presumably updated by large doses of media contemporaneity and intimidated by art historical second-guessing. Crucial to an understanding of the three widely diverse types of education in the arts is the personality of Josef Albers, the distinguished Bauhaus professor who arrived at Black Mountain in 1933, speaking not a word of English, and left in 1949, soon to take over the direction of the Yale School of Art and Architecture.

Out of these comparisons, Miss Rose gets three distinctive elements which, she thinks, were responsible for the extraordinary influence of Black Mountain. One is the importance of the Bauhaus stress on discipline. Some mastery was required before "experiment" was permitted. One had to know the basic skills in his field before his "creativity" could flower. Then there was the factor of cross-fertilization between the arts, possible at the Bauhaus but very actively present at Black Mountain. And, finally, at Black Mountain there was a strong sense of community, partly because Black Mountain was located in America instead of Europe, but mostly because of the special conditions under which the college came into being and the cooperative realities on which its day-to-day survival depended. One of the comparisons is brought home emphatically:

> Today, post-Albers Yale is typical of our large university art departments. The departments of the arts are rigidly separated in the university; there is little genuine interchange between students and faculty and no discernible sense of community. The relationship of discipline to experiment is ill-defined, and artists of whatever school might be momentarily fashionable are invited so that the curriculum remains democratically "with-it," while students are prematurely pushed to crystallize a recognizable style, of whatever current persuasion, as early as possible.

Miss Rose finds that Black Mountain stands out above the two other educational situations:

> In terms of sheer creative output, Black Mountain is dearly the superior educational institution of the three, no matter how great the theoretical contribution of the

> Bauhaus. What made Black Mountain special was precisely the element Professor Duberman stresses: that is, its *sense of community.* Black Mountain was poor; its facilities were primitive and all work was shared. There were snakes, bad food and innumerable other inconveniences. Facing these common obstacles cemented faculty and students together. Meals were taken in a communal dining hall, and personal relationships became hopelessly entangled. Yet neither the creation of art nor the lives of artists are entirely tidy matters; and it may be that real teaching in the arts can only be done in such conditions, in which art and life are not separated, and student and teacher live and work together. In such an organic situation, perhaps, the intellect would not be artificially severed from the rest of the mind, heart and body.

Other factors were also involved. First of all, there was the inspiration of John Andrew Rice, who conceived the idea of Black Mountain and who decided that the arts would be the foundation for individual student discipline. Rice believed that from the practice of the arts the student had opportunity to learn that, as Martin Duberman said, "the worthwhile struggle is the interior one—not against one's fellows," and that the opponent is one's "own ignorance and clumsiness." Then there was the rather extraordinary collection of teachers who were drawn to Black Mountain:

> On the faculty (although not necessarily at the same time) were composers John Cage and Stefan Wolpe, design engineer Buckminster Fuller, choreographer Merce Cunningham, painters Ilya Bolotowsky, Ben Shahn, Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline, critics Clement Greenberg, Eric Bentley and Paul Goodman, poets Edward Dahlberg and Charles Olson and photographers Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind. Unlike the Bauhaus, where faculty dominated students, the Black Mountain student body was as exceptional as its faculty, it included artists Robert Rauschenberg, Kenneth Noland, Theodore Stamos, John Chamberlain and Dorothea Rockburne poets Robert Geeley, Michael Rumaker, Robert Duncan and Joel Oppenheimer, choreographers Vila Farber, Paul Taylor and Remy Charlip, and essayist Francine du Plessix Gray.

Even if only a few of these names mean something to the reader—as is the case with us—the ones that are familiar may be enough to suggest that the quality of the dialogue and other activities at Black Mountain was rather distinguished. And the high level of student achievement was not only evidence of what was learned there but also of the sort of students who were attracted by the school. This leads to the concluding comment of Miss Rose, which cannot be ignored:

> In any discussion of its educational principles, it must be remembered that Black Mountain was an elite situation. At times there were less than two dozen students. There were no mammoth lecture courses; students and teachers exchanged ideas on a one-to-one basis. Seen in this context, the demands of today's students for a more creative education are unreasonable, because unfortunately no quality education—especially that of the future artist—can be realized on a mass scale. For mass education per se precludes the vital sense of community.

So, there are these realities about the most vital sort of learning, mysterious and indefinable though they may be in essence. There are, quite evidently, limiting conditions involved, and without those conditions there is little hope of the extraordinary stimulation that Black Mountain provided simply by being what it was. As for calling such a situation "elitist," is it such a bad thing, after all, to set very high standards and to be able to attract the few that want to reach up to them? The tone of a culture should be established by the vision of the best or most accomplished human beings, and democratization ought not to mean the lowering of the vision but equal access to its influence, so that all who want to respond are free to do so. In other ages, an Athens or a Florence set the keynote of cultural achievement, and it is difficult to imagine a civilization worth looking at which would be without such centers of refining and enriching tendencies. If fostering these centers is outside both the capacity and the interest of those who are concerned with public (mass) education, then these educators should at least recognize that the quality of what they do will gradually diminish, year after year, unless they have periodic infusions of new life and intensity from places like Black Mountain. When this is better understood, simple survival might be made a little less difficult for pioneers and original men like Rice and some others.

FRONTIERS

Collaboration With Nature

AT the end of his preface to *Last Chance on Earth* (Schocken paperback, $2.95), Roger Caras says:

> The decision as to what is to die and what is to survive is ours to make, in this generation and the next. To a very large degree, the future of wildlife on this planet will be determined irrevocably before the dawn of the twenty-first century. We are about to commit ourselves once and for all time either to a planet rich in wonderment and beauty or to a planet that is a mockery of itself, drenched in poisons, littered with metal junk heaps, and stripped of timber, an ugly planet that will soon enough strangle itself on its own reeking gases and gag itself on its self-spawned contaminated juices. This is *mankind's* last chance on earth. From here on, the world will be a heaven or hell of our own choosing.

This is strong language, but justified in a book that tells of the diminishing numbers of forty species of animals that, the author says, may have disappeared entirely twenty-five years from now. What are the animals which are nearly all gone or may soon be extinct? The California Condor is one species that is seriously endangered, and the Orangutan has been declining drastically. The Blue Whale is in grave jeopardy, also the Galapagos Tortoise. Steller's Albatross is no longer sighted and the Eskimo Curlew may be nearing extinction. There are less than a hundred Persian Tigers left, and the situation of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker is desperate.

Last Chance on Earth is a lovely study of these rare and often very beautiful animals, with a few pages of text on each one, always with a fine drawing by Charles Fracé.

At the risk of irreverence, one might guess that the monkeys of the Philippines do not mourn the fact that the monkey-eating eagle is down to less than a hundred, all of them on Mindanao, or remark with relief that the brontosaurus is no longer among us; *some* extinctions, at least, do not seem so disastrous; but the point of this book is nonetheless well taken, since Mr. Caras makes his readers realize that human beings are at last becoming fully conscious caretakers of the planet: what we do from now on is crucial for the health and survival of every living thing upon it, including ourselves. As he remarks, whether we shall be able to prove ourselves worthy of "so awesome a trust" remains to be seen.

Even he finds a bit of encouraging evidence, such as come-backs being staged by the Arabian oryx, which was down to less than two hundred, now able to multiply on land provided for them; and the same is true of prairie chickens, which once were found from Maine to Virginia, but in 1906 had diminished to seventy-seven specimens on Martha's Vineyard.

There are some other encouraging signs. World Progress Report in *World* for March 13 tells how last spring four marine scientists and their wives and friends hand-planted 60,000 seedlings of marsh grasses "on a bare eroded marsh in Chesapeake Bay." It worked:

> By fall the survival of transplants, despite animal incursions and hurricane winds, had demonstrated for the first time that the complex and vital ecosystem of an estuarine marsh can be restored after being destroyed. Nor was the experiment an empty environmental gesture: an estimated 50 to 75 per cent of coastal marine life depends directly or indirectly on these organically fertile land-sea interfaces. . . . In the experimental planting, seeds of the nine species of grasses that co-exist in the tidal environment were painstakingly hand-gathered from [sanctuaries]. The seeds were germinated in an incubator and grown to the transplanting stage in greenhouses supplied with seawater before being moved to the sand flat on the bay. There, the new vegetation has become home to the populations of muskrat, raccoon, and Canada geese—a sure symptom of ecological health and a sign of success for the green-thumbed scientists. Encouraged, they plan to expand their activities to eight more ailing salt marshes this year.

Somewhat in the same mood, although concerned with long-term human success in relation to the environment instead of acts of restitution, René Dubos writes in last December's *Smithsonian* about European farming practices

which have been going on for many centuries, with benefit to both man and nature. Dr. Dubos says:

> Much of the Earth's surface used to be covered by forests and marshes. This seemingly endless green mantle had an overpowering grandeur which can still be experienced in the tropical jungle. But it masked some of the Earth's most interesting aspects.
>
> Almost everywhere farmland pastures, gardens and parks have been created by profoundly transforming the natural environments. Wilderness has thus been replaced by man-made ecosystems which have become so familiar that they are commonly assumed to be of natural origin. In fact, it is Man who has created most of the "nature" celebrated by artists and poets. . . .
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> Man's influence on European landscapes has been exerted for so long that it has created a second nature, not always readily differentiated from primeval nature. Like the rest of northern Europe, the Ile-de-France region where I grew up was almost completely wooded at the beginning of the Christian era. Trees still grow luxuriantly there wherever they are given a chance. In all directions around Paris, there are large forests such as those of Rambouillet, Fontainebleau, VillersCoterets, Compiègne. . . .
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> Most of the primeval forest, however, was cleared during the early Middle Ages to create farmland, villages, urban settlements and industries. The region now has such a rich agriculture that it has been called the granary of France; furthermore, its industrial output is very large and ranges from chemicals to automobiles, airplanes and electronic equipment.
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> Ever since the primeval forest was first cleared by Neolithic settlers, the Ile-de-France has been acquiring a humanized quality which transcends its natural endowments. To this day the land has remained fertile, even though it has been in continuous use for more than 2,000 years. Far from being exhausted by intensive agriculture, it still supports a great diversity of human settlements.
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> What I have just stated about the Ile-de-France is applicable to many other parts of the world. The prodigious labors of settlers and farmers have generated an astonishing diversity of ecosystems which appear natural even though they are of human origin. The "enclosures" of East Anglia the *bocages* of French Normandy and Brittany are essentially man-made but their hedges and ditches harbor an immense variety of trees, shrubs and grasses, of insects, fish, rodents and songbirds.

This is an encouraging way of looking at our past history, since it shows that man's relations with nature are far from being always "vile." In fact, Dr. Dubos even has a good word for the Army Engineers, who were responsible, as he points out, for planting a lot of trees and shrubs on the San Francisco peninsula—an area treeless until the nineteenth century. It is not simple use that does harm to nature, but aggression and waste. This seems to be the moral of Dr. Dubos' article. Use may make nature even lovelier than she was before.