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THE ROOTS OF CHARACTER

IT is a characteristic of the times that in seeking solutions for problems, we look for clarifying ideas more than for unusual men. In education, we look for improved learning theory, not for teachers who are able to turn any situation into a learning experience. This may be natural and inevitable in an age which sees its chief attainment as the pursuit and cultivation of rationality. Since the eighteenth century, law and government have been increasingly based upon impersonal principles, with the rights and obligations of all defined by philosophical ideas of the nature of man and of justice.

There can be no doubt of the great advance accomplished through the principle of equality announced in the Declaration of Independence. Even if there have been inexcusable delays in the granting of basic rights to black people, the progress recently achieved in Mississippi ought to be recognized as a measurable if still woefully partial realization of the principles announced so long ago. Numerous other benefits to the common people could be listed as resulting from the inspiration of the great ideals of the eighteenth century.

Why do such changes take so long, and why don't they go farther than they do? No one has clear answers to such questions. You can gather information and make educated guesses, but the problem is about where Socrates left it some twenty-four hundred years ago. The development in people of the knowledge which is the same thing as virtue remains a very obscure process. Yet it ought to be possible to say a little more than this. It is informing, for example, to go back to the June 1970 *Harper's* and read about what was happening in Yazoo City, Miss., as reported by Willie Morris, who was born and brought up there, but who later came north and was then the editor of *Harper's.* Integration of the public schools in Yazoo City, and other changes, were taking place without violence. Morris went back home and talked to a lot of people. From what he says the impression grows on the reader that, whatever the obstacles, the good that was happening in Yazoo City was due to the remarkable quality of various individuals and an underlying character on the part of a great many others. Willie Morris wrote:

> All over town, there were suggestions that something new was coming to the surface here, something never quite articulate with any degree of force or with the courage of numbers in many Deep Southern towns, some painful summoning from the deepest wellsprings. There were whites in town who fully intended to keep their children in the public schools, and who not only would say so openly, but who after a time would even go further and defend the very notion itself of integrated education as a positive encouragement to their children's learning.

In short, strong individual courage and integrity were emerging in some of the people in Yazoo City.

Equally interesting were the observations of a militant black leader who said to Willie Morris:

> This state will solve its racial problems quicker than any state. Economic boycotts and voter registration are more effective here. In the North with the big corporations you don't know *who* to attack. I do think the Black Panthers in Chicago are the most effective way to deal with the situation there. But the Southern white man is more *honest* than in the North. At least you know where he stands. I used to be anti-white. I didn't trust the Northern white workers who came down here. They were like carpetbaggers. But the young kids now, all over the country, are proving their commitment. Racism in the North is more complex and subtle than it is here.

"More *honest"?* What makes people "more honest"? Concepts of progressive change, definitions of human rights, programs of reform—all these expressions of man's rational resources

leave out the foundation of human honesty; or rather, it is taken for granted. Without it, the fruits of rationality wither on the vine. Flaws, frauds, and pretenses go undetected.

You think of Bertrand Russell's "earnest atheists," who began to die out in the nineteenth century. You think of John Schaar's analysis of the loss of legitimacy in government in the United States—of, that is, the dying out of the conviction that the laws of the land are the best we can do to shape our man-made statutes into a reflection of the Moral Law. Why, you wonder, did that black man feel the way he did about Southern whites?

Each one will have a different approach to this problem, since there is no body of conventional opinion on the subject. We thought of a phonograph record made by Clarence Jordan, the founder of Koinonia, in Amerims, Georgia—an *interracial* community in the Deep South. Jordan, who died a few years ago, was a Baptist preacher, a well-educated scholar and a trained agronomist. The record he made was the story of some of his life, giving his reasons for starting Koinonia. It showed his sense of humor and his deep faith in his religion. Apparently there is more of Jordan's kind of practical Christianity in the South than in the North. This may be a factor in the moral quality the black militant was talking about.

The feeling that supports the practice of integrity comes to people in various ways. Some people seem simply to have had it ever since they began to think about themselves and their lives. Others are affected by a crucial psychological experience—perhaps a *peak* experience. Biography is a rich source for learning about such influences. In any event, persons who have this feeling are usually the ones responsible for enduring efforts at human betterment, whatever they may be. "Belief" is not necessarily an ingredient; that is, there are convictions which are never put into words, never justified by logic, never made explicit to anyone else. Often a man or woman who has this feeling speaks of it only from the desire to give the conviction a rational ground for educational purposes.

In comparison with other aspects of education, the need for the development of character, of individual integrity, of the *honesty* the Yazoo City militant spoke of, is hardly mentioned. "Character" remains an almost complete mystery. It has no rational basis in modern theory, biological or psychological, and no place in plans for "progress." That weakness in this area may be the chief explanation for the comparative failure of the eighteenth-century vision is a possibility that has had little consideration. Every other possibility is investigated, but not this one.

Yet there is one notable exception: Arthur E. Morgan, a teacher who is still alive and working in behalf of education and community at the age of ninety-five. Dr. Morgan has devoted his whole life to the study of the formation of human character. The conclusion he reached, insofar as he gained a firm conclusion, is that the small community is the best environment for the building of human character. As for his "inspiration," we quote from one of his commencement addresses at Antioch—the college he revived and put on its feet shortly after the first world war. "Since boyhood," he said, "I have had the prophetic urge; that is, I have had an emotional bent toward the conviction that the manner in which I live my life may perhaps have a significant influence on the long-time course of human events."

Since Morgan is an essentially modest man, this declaration assumes more impressive proportions as a result.

Yet he did not think of his efforts as directly moving "the masses." In *The Long Road*, perhaps his most important book, he wrote:

> A relatively small number of persons, determined to work out the necessary implications of a good design in life in relation to the social order, both in ideas and in action, without limitation or compromise, might achieve a pattern of living of

> great value, which would have general and friendly, even if imperfect, reception. The possibilities of freedom, of good will, of beauty, and of progress in our society are so far beyond present realities that mild amelioration of the present defects of character is not enough. We need action that is as radical in many respects as that of the founder of the religion many of us profess. Such radical departure from prevailing custom will at first be limited to relatively few persons.

Dr. Morgan hoped that Antioch would become a vehicle for inspiration of this sort, yet he found that college, while exercising some influence, reached the young too little and too late. Hence his intensified interest in the small community and the family as the primary matrices for the shaping of character. The theme of all his undertakings is well stated in *The Long Road:*

> We must begin far back, in the slow, thorough building of character which will be tried out in the realities of everyday living, and which by aspiration, disciplined by open-minded, critical inquiry, will mature a philosophy of life reasonably adequate to the present day. As that quality of character is matured, it will result in leadership that will . . . give concrete expression in everyday life to a new vision of the quality that life may have. When that vision is clearly expressed and clearly defined the people will gradually receive it as their own, and we shall in large measure have found the solvent for the complexities and limitations of government and of business—and of human life itself. The long way round, of building character, in the end will prove to have been the short way home to a good social order.

There is little hospitality in the modern mind for such ideas, however resonantly they may ring true. The reason for this is probably that there is no structure of commonly accepted assumptions about the nature of man to give support to views resting on the autonomy and importance of moral character. Man, in the modern conception, is an object, not an initiator or subject; he is acted upon, he does not originate. *He* does not generate as a causal agency, but merely responds to external forces and conditioning influences. The few who have their own intuitions of authentic selfhood develop grounds of independent action, but are reluctant to go against the grain of their times with theories which are likely to be rejected. All social theory tends to derive from political philosophy, and not from conceptions of the intrinsic nature of man. The emphasis in ethical thinking has been almost entirely on the arrangement of relationships among men. Not just men, but just *systems,* has been the objective.

But if the will to act well, justly, and wisely has become weak, what then can be expected from even the best laid plans, the most carefully devised systems? This is a question that is never asked, the assumption being that the moral qualities of human beings are constant, while social schemes are the variables which need attention.

But what if we have reached a point at which there is more reality seen by looking at things the other way around? Suppose that, today, it is more important to consider the moral qualities of human beings than the plans we make for improving their condition?

One way of thinking about this would be to try to imagine what would happen in a given conflict-situation if all those involved were suddenly to exchange places with others who had been brought up on, say, the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius. We are not proposing to introduce a population of mature Stoic philosophers as the solution of all problems, but rather some ordinary people who have learned from childhood to honor what Marcus honored, and to seek guidance for decisions from the canons to which he resorted. This may seem too fanciful a suggestion, but considering it may bring home the fact that today a great many persons are hungering for inner sources of moral convictions, having been left with little or no guidance from the intellectual leaders of their time.

What was the foundation of the philosophy of Marcus Aurelius? It was that the rational essence in man is a portion of divinity—of Zeus himself—and that man is in this measure godlike, although garbed in flesh which produces in him quite other tendencies. Yet a man of godlike essence is

capable of godlike behavior, and the Stoic philosophy would tolerate nothing less as worthy of a man. Marcus said:

> He who acts unjustly acts impiously. For since the universal nature has made rational animals for the sake of one another to help one another according to their deserts, but in no way to injure one another, he who transgresses her will, is clearly guilty of impiety toward the highest divinity, for the universal nature is the nature of things that are; and things that are have a relation to all things that come into existence. And further, this universal nature is named truth, and is the prime cause of all things that are true. He then who lies intentionally is guilty of impiety inasmuch as he acts unjustly by deceiving; and he also who lies unintentionally, inasmuch as he is at variance with the universal nature, and inasmuch as he disturbs the order by fighting against the nature of the world; for he fights against it, who is moved of himself to that which is contrary to truth for he had received powers from nature through the neglect of which he is not able now to distinguish falsehood from truth.

Unlike men of the present, Marcus cherished little hope of changing men's ways. One should try, but it is foolish, he maintained, to be made angry or disappointed by lack of success. There is a sense, we might say, in which, by expecting little or nothing, there is always the possibility of gaining much. This could result, of course, only from a general spread of the attitude recommended by Marcus, which leads every individual to make demands of himself rather than of others. "It is a ridiculous thing," Marcus declared, "for a man not to fly from his own badness, which is indeed possible, but to fly from other men's badness, which is impossible." As to the badness of others, he said:

> When a man has done thee any wrong, immediately consider with what opinion about good or evil he has done wrong. For when thou has seen this, thou wilt pity him, and wilt neither wonder nor be angry. For either thou thinkest the same thing to be good that he does or another thing of the same kind. It is thy duty then to pardon him. But if thou cost not think such things to be good or evil, thou wilt more readily be well disposed to him who is in error.

Again,

> . . . when thou blamest a man as faithless or ungrateful, turn to thyself. For the fault is manifestly thy own, whether thou didst trust that a man who had such a disposition would keep his promise, or when conferring thy kindness thou didst not confer it absolutely, nor yet in such a way as to have received from thy very act all the profit. For what more cost thou want when thou has done a man a service? art thou not content that thou hast done something conformable to thy nature, and cost thou seek to be paid for it? just as if the eye demanded the recompense for seeing, or the feet for walking. For as these members are formed for a particular purpose, and by working according to their several constitutions obtain what is their own; so also as man is formed by nature to acts of benevolence when he has done anything benevolent or in any other way conducive to the common interest, he has acted according to his constitution, and he gets what is his own.
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> . . . consider that thou cost not even understand whether men are doing wrong or not, for many things are done with a certain reference to circumstances. And in short, a man must learn a great deal to enable him to pass a correct judgment on another's acts.

Like Socrates, Marcus was convinced that no man could truly harm another, since it is not possible, he held, to take away one's ruling faculty, the capacity for judgment, and all else is ephemeral and not worth fighting over. As for what we term misfortune:

> Unhappy am I, because this has happened to me—Not so, but Happy am I, though this has happened to me, because I continue free from pain, neither crushed by the present nor fearing the future. For such a thing as this might have happened to every man; but every man would not have continued free from pain on such an occasion. Why then is that rather a misfortune than this is a good fortune? And cost thou in all cases call that a man's misfortune, which is not a deviation from man's nature? Well, thou knowest the will of nature. Will then this which has happened prevent thee from being just, magnanimous, temperate, prudent, secure against inconsiderate opinions and falsehood; will it prevent thee from having modesty, freedom, and everything else, by the presence of which man's nature obtains all that is its own? Remember too on every occasion which leads thee to vexation to apply this principle: not that this is a misfortune, but that to bear it nobly is good fortune.

These counsels were addressed by Marcus Aurelius to himself—and he tried to live up to them. He must have succeeded in some measure, or his wisdom would not be so rich in practical illustration. He did not exempt himself from criticism. In one place he wrote:

> A spider is proud when it has caught a fly, and another when he has caught a poor hare, and another when he has taken a little fish in a net, and another when he has taken wild boars, and another when he has taken Sarmatians. Are not these robbers, if thou examinest their opinions?

By mentioning the Sarmatians as victims of robbers, he showed that he included himself among the offenders, since he had made war against the Sarmatians.

Why return to a time of nearly two thousand years ago for philosophical conceptions? Mainly for the reason that in the ideas which were then current about the nature of man and human possibility, we learn about the convictions of men who lived before the cycle of Christian belief and the subsequent materialistic and scientific reaction to long centuries of theological tyranny over the Western mind. The practical value of these ideas lies in the evidence they provide of the spiritual inspiration which informed the age of classical antiquity, a period from which the modern world has been borrowing for a long time, without giving much attention to its transcendental roots—from which the flower of Greek philosophy, literature, and art drew sustenance. The conceptions of human excellence one finds reflected in Marcus Aurelius were once the basis of higher education.

What is the value of knowledge of these things? "Belief" is not at issue. Possibility is. Such conceptions, if more widely understood, could form the basis for a more generous reception of the educational ideas of men like Arthur Morgan, and a more natural welcoming of those inner admonitions and urgings which come to the human heart, especially in youth. Moreover, the majesty and elevation characteristic of ancient philosophies of soul are seldom encountered in the novel forms of religiosity which are spontaneous expressions in this time of anxiety and universal concern.

REVIEW
THE QUALITIES OF MEN

BACK in 1958 we came across a slender paperback with a cover illustration a little more banal than usual, but bought it anyway, since "Westerns" are always handy to have during occasional fits of insomnia. This one was *The Brave Cowboy* by Edward Abbey, published two years earlier by Dodd, Mead. Well, the book was a total surprise. It began with two men, friends since college days, talking about conscientious objection and the problems of the honest anarchist. Burns, the cowboy, heard that his friend, Bondi, was in jail and deliberately involved himself in a scuffle in a bar so that he would be arrested and put in the same jail. Bondi is awaiting sentence as a draft law offender. He tells the cowboy how he came to be arrested:

> "The difficulty was they wanted me to register as a conscientious objector. Conscientious objector to what? I asked them. To war, they said. But I love war, I said; my father got rich off the last one canning dogfood for the infantry; all Bondis love war. Then what do you object to? they said. I object to slavery, I said; compulsory military service is a form of slavery. But there is no provision in the law for such an objection, they said. But it's the law I object to, I said. That is illegal, they informed me. The law is unconstitutional, I replied. Then you had better take up the matter with the courts, they said. I'm a busy man, I said. What are you doing? they asked. I'm constructing a metaphysic based on the theory of unipolar planes of reality, I said. Would you mind repeating that? they said. That would be tautalogous, I replied."
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> "Then they put you in jail," Burns said; "can't say I blame them."

It was at this point that we decided to title our review, "Did They Really Read the Manuscript?", thinking more of the paperback editors than of Dodd, Mead's. Well, this is only the way the story starts. Burns, less verbal than his old friend, but essentially in agreement, offers to break Bondi out of jail, but Bondi decides to serve his time and go back to living his own life afterward. So Burns breaks out by himself and takes off for the hills, as recalcitrant in act as Bondi was in principle. The rest of the story is about the fumblings of the Omnipotent State in its attempt to catch a natural-born outdoorsman and totally independent spirit. Burns doesn't hurt anyone; he just embarrasses his pursuers almost to death by showing up their immeasurable incompetence. The ending is about right, too.

Peace News reviewed *The Brave Cowboy* a little later, and then Kirk Douglas heard about the story and made it into a very good movie, although the stuff about conscientious objection and anarchism somehow fell out of the story. Abbey may be a more skillful writer now, but he has never equalled the drama, irony, and fun of this book.

Now we have another book which vaguely reminds us of *The Brave Cowboy.* This one, *Red Man,* which grows on you in almost the same way, is by J. Spencer Herz (he uses just "Spencer") and is a Popular Library original (1972).

Torres is an American Indian boy who lives with his father and mother on a reservation in the American Southwest. One day, while coming home from the store with some groceries, his mother is followed by three drunken whites, dragged off the road and raped. She resists so strenuously that they beat her into submission, and later she dies. Torres' father carries her home. Later he goes to a bar and finds her attackers. He does not kill them but beats them very badly. Then a posse comes for him, angry that he has dared to attack white men. They mock him, saying they all rape Indian women. They take him into the desert, stake him out and scalp him. He dies.

Torres grows to manhood with these memories. But he is not only filled with longing for vengeance. He resolves to overcome the weaknesses of the Indians in relation to the whites, to learn to do what they can do. He masters many skills, gains efficiencies, and eventually commands respect. The story is not written in blacks and whites. Some of the white men did not want his father harmed. Some of the white men try to treat Torres fairly.

Yet the same injustices come. A white man camped on the trail Torres is following accuses the Indian of sneaking up on him, intending theft. He is about to shoot Torres with his rifle when the Indian kicks him, spoiling his aim, and Torres disarms and

ties him, but only after a long fight. Angrily, he ties the man to a tree and leaves. But the next day he returns, releases the man, gives him water and feeds him. The experience marked a change in Torres' life:

> When he was through, Torres brought the horse. Placing reins and canteen into the Whiteman's hands, he stood looking down at the man who held the power of death the day before and saw him, now reduced to simple want of breath and food and life.
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> He thought it could be himself lying there with a bullet inside his body, and wondered what the Whiteman would have done for him.
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> But that no longer mattered because revenge no longer mattered. And although he realized that revenge had been important he knew that something had lain between himself and this man that was other than revenge: something that had set them apart by making him less and the Whiteman more. But it was now gone, because he no longer felt it to be true. And he was free.

Now Torres was ready to go home. So he went back to the reservation. He worked for the white ranchers in the area, and they liked his work. He was tireless. They made him a field crew boss and paid him, they thought, well—a dollar a day. He had other Indians and Mexicans to work under him. Sometimes whole families worked the fields, and this way Torres found himself a wife, a Mexican girl. The marriage was permitted by the girl's father because Torres' determination to succeed as a farmer, some day, impressed the old man. "There are not many Mexicans who have his ambition," he said to this daughter.

Torres learned and learned. One employer gave him full charge of his operation as Torres gained the knowledge needed. He knew how to pollinate date trees, how to care for citrus, how to negotiate with the packing houses, and after five years he was able to manage several ranches owned by this one man. He was now making two dollars a day. Then he went to the owner and asked him to go to the bank with him, and recommend him for a loan, so that Torres could have his own farm. The rancher refused. Torres would have to go alone. And when he did, he found that the rancher had asked the banker *not* to lend Torres any money—he wanted him to run his ranches.

That was when Torres began drinking at the *cantina*. He could do everything the white men did, better than they could, but he was stopped because he could not *be* a white man. He had been a savage seeking vengeance. Now he was no longer a savage, but by growing skillful in the arts of civilization he came into contact with another sort of savagery—the cold, inhuman savagery of habits which could not be changed, of minds closed to anything like fairness or justice. He was stopped, so he drank. Not very much. But enough to lead to an altercation with the others in the cantina—men who were jealous of his "status" as a boss, a manager. They mocked him ruthlessly. Finally Torres mopped the floor with three of them; he hurt them, but he didn't kill anybody. And so he was arrested for assault.

The sheriff liked Torres. A lot of white men liked Torres. They thought the rancher, by spoiling his chance for a loan, had done a cheap thing. The deputy who arrested Torres didn't really want to arrest him, but he had to.

Assault would get him no more than ninety days—a small thing. So the friendly sheriff told Torres to work outside—like a "trusty"—around the jail. Torres liked the sheriff, too, but he took off for the waterless mountains. He escaped. They didn't miss him for a while, so there had to be a posse to go look for him. Here the vague resemblance to *The Brave Cowboy* really begins, although it had been there all along in the unbreakable spirit of the Indian.

Again Torres proves his superiority as a man. The one tough, mean, vindictive deputy in the sheriff's office guesses the way Torres will go and follows him. But he can't stand the pace, or the pitiless sun and heat while climbing mountain faces with few footholds. Now there is another kind of encounter for Torres, because his white tracker falls, breaks his leg, and cries out for help. So Torres saves his life. There is a hint that, somehow or other, the deputy is humbled by the experience. He gives Torres his canteen. The Indian wouldn't have taken it, otherwise; he's that kind of a man. Then he disappears. And that is the end of the book. You get the feeling that the human decencies which emerge in this story are at least possible. You get the feeling

that men like Torres exist here and there, and that this is a time for other men to learn from them.

Human nobility is made to seem an archaic reality in such books. But there are responsive chords in all men, and these are made to sound, however feebly in some, by the example of Red Man.

Another book with something of the same quality in it is *Hog Butcher*, the story of a ten-year-old black boy in the streets of Chicago who *has* to tell the truth about a shooting he saw. The event brought strange and unfamiliar emotions to a courtroom. All the cards were stacked against the truth coming out, but it did. And the people who had been lying felt purified—some of them—because a little boy told the truth. *Hog Butcher* is by Ronald L. Fair, and was first published in 1966 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich and is available as a Bantam paperback. It tells about the black ghetto life, the police, the officials, and gives the reason why the truth is systematically suppressed, most of the time.

Since there is now a lot of talk about restoring capital punishment, we might end by speaking of a book (not fiction) published thirty-seven years ago—*We Who Are About to Die* (Scribner), by David Lamson. Lamson, a Stanford graduate, was manager of Stanford University Press, and on Memorial Day in 1933 he returned home to find his wife dead in the bathroom, from blows or a fall. Two hours later he was in jail, and by October he was in Death Row at San Quentin. He spent thirteen months in a condemned man's cell. Then the California Supreme Court reversed the decision of the trial court and ordered a new trial. Being amply literate, Lamson wrote a book about how it feels to be in a death cell and about his neighbors on death row. After telling about one man who was hard for all the other condemned men to bear, Lamson wrote:

> Tweedledum [Lamson's nickname for him] was the only man, of the twenty-six I knew there, who showed the qualities that make a man despised by his fellows. That is why I have tried to tell you about him—because he was the exception. I hope that you, seeing what he was that the other men were not, will understand the great respect I feel for those men, and how it ir that knowing them made me feel a little prouder of being a human being. I hold no brief for what they had done; I don't know what they had done, nor even, in most cases, what they were said to have done. But I know what they were, those condemned men. And one of the things I learned on the Row is that it is a proud and splendid thing to be a human being; and that men such as Tweedledum are rare among mankind. Tweedledum differed from each of the others; and each of these in turn differed from their fellows, and that is the point that makes it all so very difficult. That is the thing that spoils all our easy classifications, our facile generalizations. It is so easy and convenient to talk about "convicts," and "murderers," and "robbers," and "forgers," and "bandits," and what not. But when you start to look closely at any one of these classifications—it disappears. You discover that instead of looking at a class—*convicts*, sp. *robbers*—you are looking at people, human beings, who are all shot through with individual differences to confound and perplex you. And this will be true until humanity becomes a science, which it is not, instead of a pre-science, which it now is.

Apparently, in the extreme situation of death row, certain essential qualities come to the surface in most men. These may be men who could be of great use to themselves and others. How insane to destroy them, however ignorant we may be as to what ought to be done with them instead.

COMMENTARY
FOUNDATION OF ACTION

IN the January/February issue of Environment, Kevin P. Shea notes that ten years have passed since Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* appeared, observing that while this volume was aimed at a particular abuse—the excessive application of pesticides—the author's work was so well done that it stirred the beginning of a national environmental consciousness in the United States. While, as Mr. Shea says, the book brought no "stampede to reform the use and control of pesticides," since both bureaucracies and entrenched agribusinesses require more tangible pressures before they will respond, Rachel Carson accomplished something more valuable:

> That a gentle woman of letters was able to flush from their cover of scientific mystery those who without public counsel had set the pattern of a technology touching all our lives was an inspiration that set the tone and strategy of things to come. . . .
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> Perhaps the most important effect of *Silent Spring* is not those events bearing the imprimatur of a legislative body but the personal acceptance by individuals of the philosophy that it holds. While governing bodies, in their ponderous entanglements, are unable to react quickly to rationality, individuals can be and are persuaded by it. And although the message may not have moved bureaucracies to the effective action that is really needed, in the estimation of many, it has moved people.
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> Who knows how many people have read *Silent Spring* and have acted in some small personal way in accord with its values? The housewife in her garden, a middle-echelon executive in industry, a farmer in Iowa—all may have made small decisions that, while not of great importance in their sum, are signals that the seeds of awareness have been planted.

The inspiration for *Silent Spring*, Mr. Shea says, as for Rachel Carson's other books, came from one central idea, "the interrelatedness of all living things and their surroundings." She ended *Silent Spring* with a powerful reproach: "The 'control of nature' is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born of the Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of man."

There are various sorts "truth." Miss Carson had the rare capacity to help her readers to gain a more profound awareness of the meaning and wonder of all existence—to see the truth in ideas whose time had come.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
TWO STORIES

IT can't be easy to write a good children's story these days. In a period of rapidly changing values, who knows what are the true heroic simplicities? Probably the best stories sort of write themselves, out of some inwardly felt compulsion in the author. There is a sense in which a good story shouldn't be written in some particular way because the writer feels he *ought* to. It should get written the way that *feels* right, and then, if everything works well, those heavy "oughts" will get taken care of without having any special attention.

These are reflections that come from reading books for children with settings in the recent past. To an adult, some of them seem pretty unbelievable. Perhaps this won't bother the children, so does it matter? The stories also have good feelings and strengths. Yet they are so strongly in the past, in an age that is in some ways over, or ought to be. On the other hand, unless one writes fantasy, like *A Wizard of Earthsea*—which is so largely a work of the imagination that it has no date at all—what else can a writer do but use the past? Perhaps we should say simply that a successful story is one which makes all such objections or anticipations not matter at all.

Yet it was with such mingled feelings that we put down Anne Holm's *North to Freedom*, first published in 1963 in Copenhagen, with an English translation in 1965 issued by Harcourt Brace & World. This is a book which evokes all these objections, yet you are glad to have read it in the end. The story begins in a concentration camp "somewhere in eastern Europe." You learn only that a wicked sort of "They" run the camp. A twelve-year-old boy has been in the camp for most of his life—nearly all the time he can remember. At the moment the story begins, David is being given instructions on how he can escape—by a guard he dislikes intensely. He can't understand why this coarse, unpleasant man should help him. Maybe he will be betrayed and shot while climbing the fence. Maybe the electricity running through the fence will be turned on again before he can manage to get over. But he decides to try it, and the guard tells him where a bottle of water, some food, and a compass are hidden outside, in a thicket. So, he gets away.

Little by little you find out about David. The guard told him to find his way by compass to Salonika, a seaport in northern Greece, and there to stowaway on a boat going to Italy. Then, from Italy he must somehow get to Denmark where, the guard says, he will be "safe." That is all he knows. He does not know who he is, except that his name is David. He does not know why he is in the camp. For a while, an older boy protected him, but then his friend died—three years before. (Many people die in the camp, but David survived; the hated guard gave him milk to drink.) So David beats his way toward Salonika, hiding during the day, following the compass, finding scraps of food here and there. Ever southward he travels. Finally, he hitches a ride on a truck, hidden among great cartons, and hears the men say they are going to Salonika. So, in a few hours David reaches the port.

David, it turns out, has made himself quite a linguist during his years in the camp. He has picked up English, French, and Italian from hearing the men speak in the camp, which has prisoners of every nationality. You find, later, that his use of these languages is excellent—Oxford English, someone says. Only the best people were in the camp, it seems. And David is gentle, with fine manners. One of the first things he did after getting away was to wash himself clean, and then his clothes, too, with a piece of soap the guard had provided. For clothes he has only a ragged shirt and trousers. David is astonished to learn that there are many kind people in the world. He tells no one about his past, inventing a story about a circus to which he is returning. He is sure "they" are searching for

him everywhere. David is a wise boy with exquisite taste and manners, yet almost no knowledge of the world.

So, hiding in the hold of a ship with the word "Italy" on its stern, he goes to sea. A sailor who finds him does not tell, but brings him food, and when they get to Italy gives him a lifebelt and tells him how to paddle to shore at night. On land, David discovers an orange, which he has never seen before, and eats it cautiously. He is beginning to learn about the world. He picks up a newspaper and struggles to improve his reading.

The story winds through Switzerland, Germany, and then to Denmark, and there, wonder of wonders, he finds his mother! There are many great adventures along the way. David wins the hearts of a number of people, and bewilders others. He had only one bad experience during his long journey home. What stands out is the courage, dignity, and resourcefulness of this boy. One thing more comes out strongly. He despises violence and will not use it. This is the wind of change blowing in out of the future, lighting the present and the terrible past represented by the camp. Along the way he finds a friend who happens to know the story of his mother and father—how his father was killed, why his mother was released—and he even learns that his mother lives in a city in Denmark. This is how he finds his way home.

North to Freedom won a prize as the best Scandinavian children's book in 1963, and it is not difficult to see why: this extraordinary boy captures the heart of the reader. It may do this with children, too. His qualities push into the shadow the almost supernatural good fortune which brings him home safe at last.

From this story of a boy who wanders across Europe we turn to one about two boys who found themselves alone in the great Barrenlands of northern Canada, their canoe smashed, and the arctic winter only a few weeks away. This is a masterpiece of survival lore, composed by Farley Mowat out of his first-hand experiences during two years spent in those same barrens in 1947-48. Until a friend brought us *Lost in the Barrens* (Little, Brown, 1956), we didn't know that Farley Mowat had written any children's books.

It was a red-letter day for sixteen-year-old Jamie Macnair when the telegram came from his trapper uncle, inviting the boy to live with him in his cabin located a six-weeks' canoe journey to the north of the Pas, where Jamie was to travel by train. Jamie's parents had been killed in an accident seven years before, when Jamie was nine, and his uncle had trapped furiously all this time to make the money to keep Jamie in boarding school. But when the fur market collapsed there could be no more schooling for Jamie. This bothered the boy not at all, since he had dreamed for years of sharing his uncle's adventurous life. Soon Jamie made friends with the son of the headman of a band of Cree Indians, camped nearby, and another sort of schooling for the boy began as he learned Indian ways.

The story develops around the sort of life that Farley Mowat had known when, after release from the Canadian army, he made straight for the barrens country to see the land of the caribou and to get acquainted with the People of the Deer—the Eskimos who lived on the barrens. Mowat was drawn to this adventure by watching the caribou during their great annual migration, from the window of a train. He went to the barrens, lived with the Eskimos, and even learned to speak their complicated and subtle language passably well. All this is reported in his book, *The People of the Deer*.

In this book he tells how the Crees and the Chipeweyans fought over hunting grounds, and the Chipeweyans fought with the Eskimos. Then, as the Crees diminished, due to the depredations of the whites, the Chipeweyans came south, leaving the barrens to the Eskimos. These antagonisms over good hunting areas form some of the background for the children's story. The old, tribal fears and conflicts are overcome, to some degree, as the tale develops.

At the beginning, a band of Chipeweyans appears, led by a chief with whom the Cree headman had made friends. The Chipeweyans were starving and needed enough food to support them during a caribou hunting expedition into the Eskimo territory in the barrens. The Crees give the food to the Chipeweyans, and Asawin, Jamie's friend, wants to go on the expedition into the Eskimo country. His father agrees to this, as a way of knowing that the hunters really need the food. Jamie's uncle lets Jamie go along.

Well, the two boys accompany the Chipeweyans to their main camp, see the signs of extreme hunger, then accompany the Chipeweyan hunters toward the barrens. The Chipeweyan chief decides that the boys must wait at the borderland of the barrens, since the danger from the Eskimos is believed to be very great. So the boys are left behind. But they go exploring, find an old stone building left by Viking explorers of many centuries earlier, and then, taking some risks, lose their canoe in a bad accident. A series of mischances makes the meeting with the Chipeweyans impossible and the two boys are left in the wild barrens to face the severe winter which is almost upon them. How they survive, and what they learn, especially Jamie, makes fascinating reading. It is all very realistic, and a fine story, too.

FRONTIERS

Gradually Penetrating Ideas

MUCH of what is written today concerning the abuse of the land by technological imperatives seems an expansion of a single sentence in Charles Reich's *Greening of America:* "To have just one value is to be a machine." What is the value fulfilled by the machine? Production. The pursuit of production as an end in itself tends to be destructive of all other values.

In *Natural History* for February, Kenneth E. F. Watt, of the University of California at Davis, describes the loss of environmental diversity which results from the subordination of every other human objective to high production. But apart from an æsthetic monotony, why is loss of diversity a bad thing? Prof. Watt writes in answer to this question. First of all, loss of diversity promotes instability. He says:

> In the economic sphere, there has been a tremendous reduction in the number of manufacturers (think of the number of automobile manufacturers in 1910). Our numerous corner grocery stores have been replaced by a small number of huge supermarkets. In many fields, large numbers of small businesses have been replaced by small numbers of large businesses, to the point where we now have close to a monopoly in the manufacture of automobiles, aircraft, and computing equipment. Similarly, in agriculture large amounts of small farms have been replaced by small numbers of gigantic farm corporations. . . .
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> Our great preoccupation with productivity and efficiency and our lack of concern about diversity increase the precariousness of our economic lives. . . . Consider what happens when we try to maximize the manufacturing efficiency of aircraft. We are led, inexorably, to a situation in which a small group of corporations manufacture all aircraft in the United States. Each corporation is so large that it dominates the economies of the communities in which its plants are located. Thus, if a corporation meets with disaster, the community is in deep trouble. This is the case in Seattle, where Boeing sales slackened with saturation of the international aircraft market. Architectural writer Jane Jacobs discovered this principle of relating the economic stability of cities to their corporate diversity when she applied current ecological theories about diversity and stability to her urban studies.

In the matter of food supply, Prof. Watt turns to monocropping:

> A most chilling example was the potato famine in Ireland, where an entire human population was excessively dependent on one food species. The situation is fundamentally the same when an Indian tribe depends greatly upon salmon at a certain time of year, and then something happens to the salmon population (pollution or modification of the environment due to a hydroelectric installation, for example). What few people realize is that the entire human population is now setting itself up for the same situation. For example, as we rapidly deplete the stocks of more and more oceanic species through overfishing and pollution, we cut off optional sources that we might need desperately in the future.

In another article—in *Saturday Review of the Sciences* for February—Prof. Watt looks at a cultural effect of high energy production. He gives a table showing that in the United States the average per capita consumption of energy in coal equivalents is 23,752 pounds—more than in any other country—with Canada a close second. However, book titles published per million per year in the U.S. are only 306, while in countries with low energy consumption (low by comparison), the publishing record per capita is more than three times this rate. While the comparison is only statistical, leaving many questions unanswered, it does suggest that there is more quiet time and more reading in the countries which consume less energy, such as Switzerland, Denmark, and Finland. In America there is also a trend to deadly uniformity in menus, music, and urban landscapes. Prof. Watt has much to say about the rapidly declining number of plant and animal species, which affects us in a variety of ways.

The strength of Prof. Watt's arguments makes pertinent a portion of a reader's letter in *Not Man Apart* for March of last year:

> I am urged, persuaded, advised, and reminded (not yet implored, beseeched, or exhorted) to write my

> representatives to: slow up population growth, save Alaska, stop stripmining, arrest pollution, rescue the redwoods, defeat the highwaymen, chasten the Army Engineers, subdue the auto autocrats, condemn the poison lobby, redeem the Indians, block the snomobilers, punish the eagle slayers, smash the seal killers, etc., etc.
>
> How many years do you think I've got left?

This plaint ends with the suggestion that one, great, single cause be put in the place of all these, to make possible a unified effort crowned with victory. The editor of *NMA* responds by saying that a lot of causes make a healthy situation, since one big organization with one comprehensive purpose could be subverted; and there are other objections. But this reply, while partly reasonable, does not speak to the letter-writer's condition. An article by Gary Snyder, in the *New York Times* for Jan. 12 of last year, does:

> For several centuries, Western civilization has had a priapic drive for material accumulations, continual extensions of political and economic power, termed "progress." In the Judaeo-Christian world-view men are seen as working out their ultimate destinies (paradise? perdition?) with planet earth as the stage for the drama—trees and animals are mere props, nature a vast supply depot. Fed by fossil fuel, this religio-economic view has become a cancer: uncontrollable growth. It may finally choke itself, and draw much else down with it.
>
> The longing for growth is not wrong. The nub of the problem now is how to flip over, as in jujitsu, the magnificent growth-energy of modern civilization into a nonacquisitive search for deeper knowledge of self and nature. If people come to realize that there are many nonmaterial, nondestructive paths of growth—of the highest and most fascinating order—it would dampen the common fear that a steady state economy would mean deadly stagnation.

Little by little, the views of ecologists like Kenneth Watt and of various poet-thinkers are getting around. When the circuits are complete, we may have the basis of a new civilization, or the beginning of a true one.