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THE FAILURE OF MORALISTS

PEOPLE who know how to read have certain advantages, well known to teachers and reformers in the Third World. The ability to read is of manifest importance to those who want to better their condition, for how can they take part in the processes of constructive change if they don't know what is going on—if they remain ignorant of the forces which keep them in penury? Authentic heroes among those who increase literacy among the under-privileged are men like Paulo Freire and Jonathan Kozol, who tell in their books what they have seen and done in countries like Brazil, Cuba, and the United States (especially in Boston).

Then, at another level, there is the plight of those who know how to read but prefer to hear what is going on from the electronic media. What or how much they learn is the question. Neil Postman, editor of *Et Cetera*, describes in the Winter 1980-81 issue the limits of learning in the typical television news "show." First of all, the program begins with music—not music which varies in feeling with what is shown (as in film dramas), but music that is always the same—suggesting, Mr. Postman says, "that there are no important differences between one day and another, that the same emotions that were called for yesterday are called for today, and that in any case the events of the day are meaningless." He means by this that television news is not meant to instruct, but to amuse or entertain. Moreover, the newscasters are always either handsome or "beautiful."

He continues:

> Television, naturally enough is biased toward compelling visual imagery, and in almost all cases the charms of a human face take precedence over the capabilities of the human mind. It is not essential that a TV news reader grasp the meaning of what is being reported; many of them cannot even produce an appropriate facial display to go along with the words they are speaking. And some of them have even given up trying. It is as if they intuitively understand that this is a medium that dissolves language in a soup of visual images, and that what is essential is only that the audience take pleasure in looking at their faces. To put it bluntly, as far as TV is concerned, in the entire United States there is not one 60-year-old woman capable of being a news reader. Audiences, it would appear, are not captivated by their faces. It is the teller, not what is told, that matters.

But at least they *tell!* They report actual happenings. Mr. Postman is not impressed:

> It is also believed that audiences are captivated by variety and repelled by complexity, which is why, during a typical thirty-minute show, there will be between fifteen and twenty "stories," as they are called. Discounting time for commercials, promos for stories to come, and news readers' banter, this works out to an average of sixty seconds a story. On a WCBS show earlier this year, it went like this: 264 seconds for a story about bribery of public officials; thirty-seven seconds for a related story about Senator Larry Pressler; forty seconds about Iran; twenty-two seconds about Aeroflot; twenty-eight seconds about a massacre in Afghanistan, twenty-five seconds about Muhammed Ali; fifty-three seconds about a New Mexico prison rebellion, 160 seconds about protests against the film "Cruising"; eighteen seconds about the owners of Studio 54; eighteen seconds about Suzanne Somers; sixteen seconds about the Rockettes; 174 seconds for an "in-depth" study of depression (Part I); twenty-two seconds about Lake Placid; 166 seconds for the St. John's Louisville basketball game, 120 seconds for the weather; 100 seconds for a film review.

The claim that TV news is intended to, or does, make the public "knowledgeable" is a fraud, Mr. Postman thinks. He explains—if explanation is needed:

> In the first place, events of serious and urgent public interest such as the taking of hostages in Iran are already known by the audience through radio, newspapers, TV bulletins, and word of mouth, before

> the audience settles in for its evening show. In the second place, whatever else one may say for or against TV news shows, it is clear that the audience can do practically nothing about the things it is shown or told. If knowledge is power, if the function of information is to modify or provide direction to action, then it is almost precisely true that TV shows give nearly no information and even less knowledge. Except, of course, through their commercials. One can be told about Bounty Braniff, and Burger King and then do something in relation to them.

Well, what about the people who can and do read, and who try to read papers regarded as reliable? What does one find in such sources? Apart from crime—by no means a negligible subject!—the daily papers are mainly concerned with economic matters and with military affairs and armaments. People, it is justly assumed, want to know about money and how policy decisions are likely to affect their resources and income; what national and international conditions imply in economic terms; and how to invest, increase, or protect their funds. Politics can hardly be separated from these considerations, with critical commentators finding it easy to show that politics is now a department of economics. And editors are more likely to solicit the opinions of Milton Friedman than to go to people like Leopold Kohr, the late E. F. Schumacher, E. J. Mishan, or Herman Daly for perspective on the turns of politico-economic events. These four are liable to insist on a sort of thinking that is related to long-term views, and even raise moral considerations!

There are also other readers, well-educated, who go beyond the newspapers to the journals of the learned societies—*Daedalus*, for example, quarterly of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. The Winter 198I issue of *Daedalus* is the second of two numbers devoted to "U.S. Defense Policy in the 1980s," and in the *Nation* for Jan. 24, E. P. Thompson, a social historian active in the British anti-nuclear movement, subjects this issue of *Daedalus* to critical review. The writers, he says, are representative of the community of "defense intellectuals" in the United States. Their contributions, for Mr. Thompson, indicate their belief that "civilization is defeated beyond remedy." He says:

> Indeed, this defeat is *assumed*, as a first proposition, from the first page to the last. It is assumed that two great blocs in the world are in a state of permanent war (restrained only by something called "deterrence") and will, forever, remain so. The expertise of the authors—for they are, all of them very great experts—is contained within an infantile political view of the world, derived, I suppose, from too much early reading of Tolkien's *Lord of the* Rings. The evil kingdom of Mordor lies there, and there it will ever lie, while on our side lies the nice republic of Eriador, inhabited by confused liberal hobbits who are rescued from time to time by the genial white wizardry of Gandalf-figures such as Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski or, maybe, Richard Allen.

Why, Mr. Thompson wonders, did not the editor of this respected and authoritative journal consider other contributors for this issue—"for example, those many distinguished scientists, arms control experts (some of them longstanding members of the Academy) who have, over the years, in such places as the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, performed a service to the entire world by presenting seriously researched information and by proposing alternatives to the never-ending arms race?" Twenty-five pages of the *Nation* are occupied by Prof. Thompson's analysis of this issue of *Daedalus*, leading to two conclusions, one about culture and language, the other about policy. The first is that "the premises of nuclear deterrence are *irrational."* The second is this:

> What makes the extinction of civilized life in Europe probable is not a greater propensity for evil than in previous history, but a more formidable destructive technology, a deformed political process (East and West) and also a deformed culture.
>
> The deformation of culture commences with language itself. It makes possible a disjunction between the rationality and moral sensibility of individual persons and the effective political and military process. A certain kind of "realist" and "technical" vocabulary effects a closure which seals out the imagination, and prevents the reason from following the most manifest sequence of cause and effect. It habituates the mind to nuclear holocaust by

> reducing everything to a flat level of normality. By habituating us to certain expectations, it not only encourages resignation—it also beckons to the event.

Would the conscientious readers who take their guidance in thinking from authorities like *Daedalus* be better off if they were illiterates? The question may be rhetorical, but the considerations it raises are not. (See for example *The Bugbear of Literacy* by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy.)

Another article in the issue of *Et Cetera* quoted above, Anatol Rapoport's discussion of present-day Realpolitik, provides well-defined illustration of how prevailing habits of mind encourage "resignation" and also invite the feared event. Prof. Rapoport, who is director of the Institute of Advanced Studies in Vienna, observes:

> One cannot really say that the language of paranoia that dominates the relations among the major powers is inaccurate. One can note, however, that when two paranoiacs confront each other, each is, in a way, a realist. . . . Assume that an arms control agreement has been concluded between the Big Two with proper safeguards against cheating. But since no safeguard is perfect, and since progress in war technology goes on, opportunities to cheat present themselves. For simplicity, assume that each party has a choice of two actions: to cheat or not to cheat. Either party can reason as follows. If the other does not cheat, we can achieve superiority over it by cheating. If, on the other hand, the other cheats, we must cheat in self-defense; otherwise they achieve superiority over us. It follows that it is to our advantage to cheat *regardless* of whether the other cheats or not. Aversion to cheating does not change the conclusion if there is reason to believe that the other has no such aversion. For if the other cheats (which is to his advantage), we must cheat to cancel that advantage. Even if the other is honest, the conclusion remains in force; for we have seen that the honest party has concluded that he must cheat. Therefore, each must assume that the other will cheat even if he is honest. He must cheat in self-defense, and so must we.
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> There is no flaw in this logic. . . . The dilemma arises from the circumstance that both sides come to the "correct" conclusion, namely that they must cheat, [but] both are worse off than if they did not cheat, because presumably the arms control agreement was to the advantage of both sides.
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> There is only one escape from this dilemma: both actors must be not only trustworthy (that is, refrain from cheating), but also must be trusting (that is, must not ascribe cheating to the other). However, in the language of Realpolitik, "trust" is associated with softheadedness or feeblemindedness.

If this argument is sound—if, that is, we can find no flaw in the logic of either of the contestants and none in Anatol Rapoport's conclusion—then the major task for all is to learn how to persuade one another to be both trustworthy and trusting—a most ancient and perennially unsuccessful undertaking! But what else, in the final analysis, is left for us to do?

Lots of things, someone may say. War does not exhaust all human activity. A lot of the time we have peace and do other things. Fortunately or unfortunately, Mr. Rapoport is able to dispose of this claim:

> "War," wrote Carl von Clausewitz, the foremost exponent of Realpolitik, "is the continuation of politics by other means." Read backwards, this aphorism is equally valid: "Politics (as it is conceived in Realpolitik) is the continuation of war by other means." Preservation and extension of power is both the goal and the wherewithal of war. An alliance directed against a state is perceived by the power elite of that state as a threat to its power. Historically, a threat to power or attempts to check its extension has been observed to precipitate war as frequently as expansionist policies.
>
> Clausewitz bequeathed to us the clearest formulation of the "realist" conception of international relations. According to this conception, it is idle to inquire why wars break out. The sensible question is why nations are not *always* at war. Clausewitz's answer was that when nations are not at war, they are waiting for the right moment to launch one, or they may have missed an opportunity to do so when the right moment did come.

While not all our policy-makers are students or followers of Clausewitz, he, or the thinking he pursued, has been influential enough for this idea to be reflected in a great many national decisions—see, for example, the recent historical

studies of William Appleman Williams— and there is certainly more of Clausewitz in our national policies than of Tolstoy or Gandhi. We are back, then, at the fundamental task—learning how to be trustworthy and trusting.

But who, we may ask—since we began by considering the advantages of knowing how to read—is able in the present to write persuasively about the moral virtues? What writer, wanting an audience, would even attempt it? Only a Tolstoy in Europe, and an Emerson in America, were able to carry it off in the last century, and in our own time only an Arthur Morgan, a Mumford, a Krutch, a Schumacher, and a Berry have succeeded, and these, by a sure instinct, weave moral ideas into a fabric of reflection which identifies morality with a particular kind of common sense. But some subtlety and a firm unwillingness to preach are required. They treat of morality as a consequence and not a cause. Writers with underlying faith in human beings do not preach. They do not tell other people what to do. They do not, in the ordinary sense, try to persuade. They are celebrants of the finely "rained excellences of which on occasion men and women become capable. They relate what it means, as Henry Beston put it, to be "on the side of life." They tell the stories of heroes, and their joy in the telling is infectious. It reaches the hearts of the young. It gives images to live up to, ideals to pursue. It is in the doing of these things that the virtues appear. They show that while virtue is indeed its own reward, there are nonetheless bonuses. But only when the virtue is uncalculating. A calculating virtue is a contradiction in terms.

Such writing appeals, not to self-righteous longing for virtue, but to the ethical intuitions. You don't prove the fundamental ethical propositions which identify the higher nature of man, but use them to shape the structures which lead to private and public harmony. They are the test, not the conclusion, of an argument. The virtues are among the fruits of a perennial ethical life. They may be decorative, but they are nothing to take pride in. Virtues are for aspirants to sainthood, and truth is something beyond that.

Moralizing seems always to say, "I am better than you are, and I know what you should do." By instinct the artist rebels. He leaves moralizing to the composers of decalogues, the organizers of sects.

A moment ago we spoke of "truth." To define truth, beyond saying that it is the fundamental longing of the human heart, is to get lost in a tropical jungle. Definitions always provoke counter-definitions, and this goes on until the heart is silenced by the overload of words. Yet we know that a truth-teller, if he has taste and intelligence, wins respect. He carries an atmosphere wherever he goes, which others feel as a healing air. Truth calls out truth in others, although its telling is an artless art. The forms of human activity embody truth-telling in particular ways. We honor the engineer who speaks up when the people have been deceived by the false representations of the politicians of technology. Paul Goodman called upon the professionals to revive their ancient integrities—to be what they say they are, what, for doctors, the Hippocratic oath declares.

The story-teller has a wider audience, a more diffuse influence, perhaps, yet culture-wide and effective from childhood on. His art is in using the levels of mythic abstraction, departing from one kind of "truth"—the humdrum realism of day to day—in order to reveal a transformation of character as it takes place in the grain of a larger life. He makes his tale show forth what lesser truth conceals. We go to the dramatist's play and see a hero made overnight—which never really happens, yet it rings true. The play is a moral telescope, bringing the distant in time and space to the circumscribed region of our awareness, and we have the similitude of truth.

Curiously, truth is more alive for us than anything else we seek, yet it has no finality. A *final* truth would put an end to everything. Truth

is for those who are moving around—forward or back—on the course of life. It is experienced through motion and act, never from standing still. By standing still you may be able to take photographs, but a picture records only a static objectivity, and truth, as we know, dies away unless it flows.

What is the importance of truth-telling? In the framework of our discussion the importance is plain enough— it generates trust. How, besides telling the truth—being trustworthy—can people establish mutual trust?

One answer is basically a designer's answer: By arranging the patterns of life in ways which make it both easy to trust and difficult to fool one another. An honest, trustworthy, and trusting man need not be a sentimentalist. He will not deny the facts of social behavior. Simply for reasons of common sense, he will seek a pattern of life which encourages trust and discourages lying and pretense. He will choose a livelihood that is more naturally geared to honesty than other ways of making a living. He will depend as much as he can on face-to-face relationships and deal with others who feel the same way. He will not expect to erase the evil in the world by making these choices, but he can at least go through life in confidence that evil has become somewhat less. This is the meaning of community.

It is a part of the human situation that we know, at the same time, a great deal and very little. Writers who grasp this are the ones to read. There is always a sense in which we know what we need to know, and another sense in which we shall never know enough. Socrates earned the praise of the Oracle from understanding this. We may not feel able to follow Thoreau's rule "Read not the Times. Read the Eternities"—we cannot all fly to Walden—yet we somehow recognize a writer able to mingle the two in just proportion. A writer who does not bring them together at all is not worth much attention. Precious human qualities will atrophy in a reader whose idea of truth is limited to matters of technique.

That is really all a fine writer can do—combine the changing diversity of the times and of human nature with the Eternities, and do it in inviting but not deceptive style. Truth can always be found in the composition that results.

REVIEW
ANTON MESMER

THERE is a strange company of men—and sometimes women—who appear in the pages of history, exciting great attention for a time, and then, because of their irritating combination of nonconforming originality with great accomplishment, are branded by their more ordinary contemporaries as charlatans and frauds. Centuries later it may be recognized that their chief offense was in being ahead of their age. Great healers are often among their number. An example is Paracelsus, the Swiss-born alchemist and physician who early in the sixteenth century performed marvelous cures, outraging the European doctors of his time by his outspoken attack on their methods of treatment, which he regarded as mostly blind superstition. He wanted medicine to become a science and sought instruction from both nature and philosophy. At a time when fever was firmly believed to be an independent disease, he declared: "It is erroneous to speak of fever as if this were a disease. The name 'fever' refers to the heat of the disease, and this heat is merely a symptom. It is neither the cause nor the substance of the disease." While historians of medicine point out that Paracelsus laid the foundation for the pharmacopoeia now in use, other of his conceptions—plainly metaphysical and apparently "occult"—bewilder modern scholars. How could a man know so much and also be so wildly fanciful?

One writer has remarked:

> Obviously, some of Paracelsus's writings, some of the treatments he suggests, read to us like wanderings of a superstitious imagination, but it should not be forgotten that he lived almost three hundred years before the discovery of bacteria. Considering that he lacked this knowledge, which nowadays we take for granted, his medical insight, his power of diagnosis, are almost uncanny.

This was written years ago. Today there are practitioners of the healing arts who point to the French physician, Antoine Bechamp, who challenged Pasteur's conception of the germ theory, finding Bechamp's ideas and teachings much sounder than the nineteenth-century chemist's claims. In short, Paracelsus' "ignorance" of Pasteur's theory may not have been a serious limitation. Did he actually know more about human health than we know today? Should we try to take everything he said seriously?

Paracelsus might also be regarded as a pioneer in psychotherapy. Whatever we may think about his language, there is penetration in what he said:

> Imagination is Creative Power. Medicine uses imagination fixed. Phantasy is not imagination, but the frontier of folly. He who is born in imagination discovers the latent forces of Nature. Imagination exists in the perfect spirit, while fantasy exists in the body without the perfect spirit. Because Man does not imagine perfectly at all times, arts and sciences are uncertain, though in fact they are certain and, obtained by means of imagination, can give true results. Imagination takes precedence over all. Resolute imagination can accomplish all things.

Great healers are often not only doctors but great thinkers as well. What Paracelsus declares here became the text for the credo of William Blake, and the general influence of Paracelsus can hardly be measured. Among his followers were Johann Baptist van Helmont, Robert Fludd, and William Maxwell, and then, in the eighteenth century, Anton Mesmer. Like Paracelsus, Mesmer created a great stir through his seemingly miraculous cures; again like Paracelsus, he was hated and attacked by the medical profession of his time. And finally, like Paracelsus, in our day he is beginning to be better understood and appreciated.

Occasion for saying this is made by publication of *Mesmerism* ($11.50) by William Kaufmann, Inc., Los Altos, Calif. (94022)—a book consisting of original medical and scientific writings by F. A. Mesmer, put into English by George J. Bloch. In an introduction which gives the salient facts of Mesmer's life—from 1734 to 1815— Ernest R. Hilgard, who teaches

psychology at Stanford University, remarks that "Mesmer was the first of the moderns rather than the last of the ancients," and endeavors to do justice to the thought and career of a doctor who sought "to understand what today might be considered aspects of holistic medicine."

The reader will find in this book the fundamental ideas of Mesmer's theory and practice. This makes better reading than going to encyclopedia articles for an estimate of the man. As with Paracelsus, we may find it difficult or impossible to comprehend some of the things he says, but the quality of what is clear may be the best indication of Mesmer's intentions and what he was like, despite his distance from us in time and conventional outlook. Students of such matters may be especially grateful to the translator, who provides this explanation in his Preface:

> I have tried, above all, to translate Mesmer as accurately as possible. The fact that most of the readers of this book would be exposed to Mesmer's original ideas for the first time simply reinforced this effort to provide a version which is not colored by any attempts to justify or criticize his formulations. In some cases this has meant leaving a sentence unclear although it would have been simple to guess what Mesmer had in mind. I believe, however, that these occasionally awkward sentences will not interfere with the reader's attempt to understand Mesmer's views.

Mesmer believed in a creative and life-giving Force pervading both nature and man which could be used to treat and often cure disease. He found a way, his experience showed him, to transmit this fluid or force—which he called Animal Magnetism—by gaze and passes. His cures attracted numerous followers to whom he taught his theories. His results were so dramatic, and incomprehensible to other physicians, that he suffered much persecution, including rejection by the Commission appointed by the French Academy of Sciences to investigate his theory, which declared that no evidence of the magnetic fluid could be found, and that such treatments would produce "harmful results." In a confidential report the Commission also warned that Mesmerism might be dangerous to "public morality." Mesmerism was in effect obliged to go underground, which led to numerous dilutions and distortions of his ideas. One curious effect of the spread of Mesmerism was the surfacing in America of the Quimby Manuscripts, which became a source for the Christian Science movement. While, today, there is often little distinction made between mesmerism and hypnotism—and Braid is regarded as having put Mesmer's achievement on a scientific basis—this will quite possibly be some day regarded as a serious mistake.

A book of particular interest to read in connection with how Mesmer's doctrines influenced the Parisians of the closing, revolutionary years of the eighteenth century is Robert Darnton's *Mesmerism,* Schocken, 1970, which shows how he was almost worshiped by some, and at the same time viciously ridiculed and attacked by others.

The passages we have selected to quote from Mesmer's writings, as translated by Dr. Bloch—who teaches physiology at the Pacific College of Naturopathic Medicine and has a Ph.D. in physiology from Stanford—are meant only to reveal the quality of the man as a thinker, since the exposition of his theory requires much more than brief quotation. In his "Dissertation" on his Discoveries, Mesmer said:

> Conventional language, the only means available to us for communicating our ideas, has, throughout the ages, contributed to distorting our knowledge. We acquire all perceptions from the "senses"; the senses only transmit to us an object's properties, character, irregularity, attributes; the perceptions of all these sensations are expressed by an adjective or by an epithet like hot, cold, fluid, heavy, light; bright, resonant, colored, etc. For the sake of the convenience of language, people substitute substantives for these epithets; before long, one has substantivized the properties; one says: the heat, the gravity, the light, the sound, the color—and thus the origin of metaphysical abstractions. . . .
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> Truth is nothing but a path traced between errors. With ceaseless activity, the human mind is

> like a spirited horse: it is, for him, also difficult to calculate with precision the amount of energy it is necessary to expend to arrive at a path without running the risk of overshooting it, and then to keep within its bounds for a long time, neither hurrying nor slowing his gait. . . .
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> I believe I have discovered, in Nature, the mechanism of influences which, as I will explain, consists of a reciprocal and alternating "flow" of streams—coming and going—of a subtle fluid which fills the space between two bodies. . . .The most immediate action of magnetism, or of the influence of this fluid, is to reanimate and reinforce the action of muscle fibre. This is done by means of an accelerated movement which is *tonic* and analogous to the organic part to which it appertains. . .

Mesmer nowhere suggests that one can set up as a healer by using the information provided in his writing. Rather, a serious course of study is required. Mesmer explained that his difficulty in getting a fair hearing was in part a superficial resemblance of his ideas to "ancient beliefs, of ancient practices justly regarded for a long time as being errors and trickery." In this century, perhaps, through a better understanding of ancient ideas, a more impartial verdict on his genius will result.

COMMENTARY
MESMERISM NOT HYPNOTISM?

IN this week's Review, it is suggested that there is a basic difference between mesmerism and hypnotism. This difference was elaborated by A. H. Simonin, a nineteenth-century writer, in the *Journal du Magnetisme* (May-June, 1890), as quoted in translation in a Theosophical journal edited by H. P. Blavatsky. The following is taken from *Lucifer* for June, 1890:

> . . . he [Simonin] shows that while "in Magnetism (mesmerlsm) there occurs in the *subject* a great development of moral faculties", that his thoughts and feelings "become loftier, and the senses acquire an abnormal acuteness"; in hypnotism, on the contrary, "the subject becomes *a simple mirror."* It is Suggestion which is the true motor of every action in the hypnotic: and if, occasionally, "seemingly marvelous actions are produced, these are due to the hypnotiser, not to the subject." Again . . . "In hypnotism instinct, *i.e.,* the *animal,* reaches its greatest development; so much so, indeed, that the aphorism 'extremes meet' can never receive a better application than to magnetism and hypnotism. . . . In one, his ideal nature, his moral self—the reflection of his divine nature—are carried to their extreme limits, and the subject becomes almost a celestial being (*un ange*). In the other, it is his instincts which develop in a most surprising fashion. The hypnotic lowers himself to the level of the animal. From a physiological standpoint, magnetism (Mesmerism) is comforting and curative, and hypnotism, which is but the result of an unbalanced state, is—most dangerous."

The ground of this distinction—in view of the vocabulary used by the defenders of Mesrner—may not be acceptable to medical historians, yet readers of Mesmer might find it of interest to have the perspective of his nineteenth-century admirers. Moreover, according to one biographer, Mesmer did not approve of putting patients to sleep.

Another writer on Mesmer quoted in *Lucifer* tells what happened to an English physician who dared to follow Mesmer's example:

> In 1846 the celebrated Dr. Elliotson, a popular practitioner, with a vast *clientele,* pronounced the famous Harveian oration, in which he confessed his belief in Mesmerism. He was denounced by the doctors with such thorough results that he lost his practice, and died well-nigh ruined, if not brokenhearted. The Mesmeric Hospital in Marylebone Road had been established by him. Operations were successfully performed under Mesmerism, and all the phenomena which have lately occurred at Leeds and elsewhere to the satisfaction of the doctors were produced in Marylebone fifty-six years ago . . . time would fail me to tell of Paracelsus (1493-1541) and his "deep secret of Magnetism"; of Van Helmont (1577-1644) and his "faith in the power of the hand in disease." Much in the writings of both these men was only made clear to the moderns by *the experiments of Mesmer.* . . . He claimed no doubt, to transmit an animal magnetic fluid, which I believe the Hypnotists deny.

Medical scholars will probably side with the Hypnotists, but readers who return to Mesmer and read him at first hand should know that his faithful followers did not agree that Braid's work brought realization to what the extraordinary Viennese doctor had begun.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
UP TO THE PUBLIC

LAST year a writer in the *Los Angeles Times* (Nov. 12, 1980) reported at some length on the second thoughts of educators about the recommendation of James Conant, made in 1957, that the nation's high schools should be made bigger and the small ones eliminated. This no longer seems a good idea. A school that is having its problems, given as an example, is the Evanston (Ill.) Township High School, a place so big that the students need maps posted around its buildings and grounds to show them where they are! This school—almost unbelievably—once had nearly 6,000 students, but today, with 3,500, it still seems crowded, and seniors don't know the names of some of the others in their class.

Mr. Conant, who was president of Harvard University, thought that big schools would help to give cultural unity to the population and bring more diverse educational opportunities to the young. It hasn't worked that way for many of the students. The high school, says the *Times* contributor, Dan Morgan, "has become a social battleground that seems rather to have added to tensions." He quotes a Carnegie Council study (1979) which proposes "breaking up the big, monolithic high school and its deadly weekly routine," and notes that James Coleman (author of the Coleman Report) is also calling for changes on the ground that American society is not the same as it was a generation ago. The reporter provides this summary:

> As middle-class families have deserted city schools, the society has moved toward the thing Conant feared more than anything else—a dual system of education for the poor and the non-poor. "We are in danger of developing a permanent underclass, a self-perpetuating *"lumpen* proletariat' in the home of opportunity," last year's Carnegie study concluded. . . . Moreover, there has been agreement among the reformers that many schools are too large. The nation's 13.2 million public high school students attend about 20,000 high schools. About a quarter of these schools, with more than half the total enrollment, have more than 1,500 students and 12% have more than 3,000.
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> "I would say that those over 3,000 are too large for the majority of the youngsters in them," says Scott Thomson, who represents the national association of high school principals in Washington. Thomson, who was superintendent at Evanston from 1963 to 1974, says that smaller schools have "some advantages in terms of human development" and adds that there is no evidence of differences in academic achievement between students in large and small schools.

Mr. Thomson recalls the changes within his own lifetime:

> When I was a boy at Evanston one third of the boys were in interscholastic sports. But it's like shoveling sand against the tide. The large, comprehensive high school made sense when you had a very stable family and neighborhood situation, when kids were known in church and in the community, when a boy was known as the kid with a good sense of humor who's good in physics. Today we have a different neighborhood and family context . . . mobile families . . . kids not well known . . . maybe only a father or a mother at home. Then a kid at a large school is just a number in the community. And he's a number at school.

It is easy to blame administrators and teachers for the low quality of present education—no doubt they bear some responsibility—but schools are institutions, designed to "last," and by nature inflexible. That is one reason why smaller schools would be better. Small institutions are less resistant to change, more responsive to human intelligence. Meanwhile, some history is useful for thinking about these things. Dan Morgan writes:

> The modern American high school is less than a century old, and in its brief life span its objectives have shifted frequently. At the turn of the century less than 6% of all youths attended high school, and most who did went on to college. As enrollments swelled rapidly through the 1930s, high schools increasingly became gateways to jobs and opportunity. In the last two decades they were central in the struggle to achieve racial equality.
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> But in another sense, the pressures on the schools today are unique. For better or worse,

> educators agree, children today have been raised differently from their parents. One child in five now lives with only one parent, and the influences on children include television programs and commercials, magazines and the pervasive drug culture as well as families and teachers. . . .
>
> We have a rising incidence of teen-age pregnancy, venereal disease, truancy, assaults on teachers, and drug and alcohol abuse. "It's up to the public to judge whether that constitutes a youth problem," says Terry Herndon, executive director of the National Education Association.

Saying that these conditions—and the quality of the schools' response to them—are "up to the public" is a plain enough truth, but a truth so complex that spelling it out becomes extremely difficult. One may think that the present superintendent of Evanston High, Nathaniel Ober, who has had considerable experience of "the public," can hardly expect much good to result from public concern.

> In Ober's view, the adult world's perception of youth and of schools has been skewed by "a deep-seated dislike of youth that has grown up in our society in the last 30 years."
>
> "The groups we demean the most in our society are the poor, the black, the female and the young," he goes on. "The community exploits youth but doesn't really like youth. And there are more youth today—that's part of the problem. The biggest problem isn't the schools but the second-class citizenry of young people that has grown to tragically large proportions.

There are two books on the pain and struggle of that "second-class citizenry" which ought to be read at least once a year—Jonathan Kozol's *Death at an Early Age* and George Dennison's *The Lives of Children*—in order to keep clearly in mind how much the schools *are* the problem, and to see what a small part of the public, a few school teachers, attempt to do about it.

Another part of the public is made up of parents. What can they do? What *should* they do? Teach your children at home is John Holt's answer, and whether or not you think you can do it, reading what some parents are accomplishing is an inspiration and a challenge. Even the schools might get better as a result of the efforts of this self-reliant minority. Ultimately, the responsibility for the young reverts to the family—where it belongs.

It is obviously too much for the welfare state, however we may wish to honor Horace Mann for getting the public schools going more than a hundred years ago.

What may happen to other parents determined to make the schools do all they can is illustrated by the jailing of a mother in Chicago (as reported in the *Los Angeles Times* of Feb. 4). The mother is Dorothy Tillman, who was once a field organizer for Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference. She is now exercising her talents to get Chicago parents together to improve the public schools. She gives her reasons:

> I'll keep going back until they stop miseducating my kids," said Tillman, . . . the leader of an angry and militant parent movement that appears to be growing and that top school officials here seem either unwilling or unable to defuse. . . .
>
> Tillman's oldest child, a seventh grader at Irvin C. Mollison School, is regularly tutored at the University of Chicago. Her daughter, a sixth grader, was once tested and found qualified to enter the University of Chicago's elite laboratory school, but "we didn't have the money," Tillman said.
>
> "That child was already reading when she began school. Now she is two levels behind in reading and three levels behind in math. The schools did that," Tillman said.
>
> "These children used to think it was their fault. They thought it was something they were doing wrong," she said. "Failure. The curriculum is designed for failure. . . . I think school officials are more concerned about parents organizing than they are about educating our children."

Dan Morgan concludes with evidence of the substance in Mrs. Tillman's charge:

> Test scores published during the past several years show that Mollison students at the second-grade level are usually at a par with second graders throughout the country, but that each year they remain in school they slip farther back behind national reading levels.

What, then, is "up to the public"?

FRONTIERS

Pictures—Large and Small

WRITING from the viewpoint of intelligent land management, Robert Gomer, professor of chemistry at the University of Chicago, warns that by the end of this century the United States may be able to grow only enough food to feed people at home, which means that a quarter of all that we export—agricultural products valued at $38 billion—will no longer be available. "What," he asks, "will happen to our balance of payments and our living standard then?" Others have called attention to what is happening to our agricultural land due to erosion and "factory farming" methods. In his article in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* for February, Professor Gomer points out that we are losing three million acres a year to the real estate business, which is converting farms into housing developments or other nonagricultural use. The "free market" supposed to be the guardian of economic health is no help at all.

> By the time the market can respond to the disappearance of farmland, the land is gone forever. Analogously, our balance of payments deficit relative to the rest of the world is not by itself, and in any case not rapidly, transformed into economic pressure to preserve farmland. Thus, from any but the narrowest perspective, it may be economic madness to trade an irreplaceable resource, with potential for indefinite productivity, for a temporary increase in living standards and for the one-time profit of the ax-landowners and the developers. But the free market is quite blind to that madness.

Required, he suggests, is government control, as in West Germany, where by law agricultural land is preserved for food production and zoning helps to maintain healthy cities with adequate housing for all. But Americans are not like Germans. Here, selling your farm is no disgrace.

> The tradition of the open frontier, of unlimited supplies of everything, including land, still pervades our national psyche. We still act as if there were no tomorrow. It is quite likely that we will continue our prodigal ways until the shortage of arable land is so acute that the price of what is left will be so high that it will slow the conversion substantially. When it is really too late to save anything, it is also quite likely that local and federal government will step in and piously lock the empty granary.

While Prof. Gomer has proposals for corrective legislation, his comments along the way are of particular interest. He says:

> Keeping small farmers in business is not just a way to prevent land from falling to the developers, it makes economic sense. Our relatively low food prices do not result from the efficiency of huge agribusiness (which can charge pretty much what the market will bear), but from the sweat of countless small farmers, who work longer and harder for less than anyone else in America, except maybe illegal immigrants. A major problem for small farmers is the high cost of equipment.

He concludes:

> It is almost certain that the changes required for preserving our land will eventually have to come about anyway because of energy costs. It would be wonderful if we could make them in time to save what is left of our open land. It is irreplaceable, invaluable.

That is what we call the "big picture." Doubtless there will be changes, but only in response to the extreme pressures this writer speaks of, and come, to coin a phrase, too little and too late.

In striking contrast is the work of Bill Mollison, advocate of "permaculture," who has shown on his farm and gardens in Tasmania that it is possible to grow rich, nutritious crops without machinery by studying how nature works and then creating an ecological system which includes human activity. In *New Roots* for February-March, Jonathan Von Ransom summarizes:

> To visualize a home, farm or community designed around permaculture, picture perennials like fruit, fodder and nut trees and bushes growing under each others' crowns around the edge of a clearing. They nourish the soil, provide human food, shade and windbreak, as well as supporting a herd of sheep and chickens with part of their fallen crop. Virtually every feature of the site, climate or season is turned to conscious advantage, although the soil has barely been disturbed by a plow. . . . Permaculture plays by

> the rules, the most basic ones governing life and energy transfer. This is something Western agriculture began cheating on along with the rest of industrial society about a century and a half ago by becoming dependent on the earth's mineral and energy stores.
>
> Modern-style monoculture farming ignores the natural laws to honor just one function: this year's crop. As a result, says Mollison, "Farming has destroyed 50 per cent of your soils so far. . . . The only answer is to garden where you are. You have to make the system fuel itself—close the energy cycles. You can't use coal—it makes acid rain and atmospheric stress. Not oil—more of the same. Atomic power is responsible for birth defects in 30,000 children from the Three-Mile accident alone, according to Dr. Sternglass of the University of Pittsburgh. That's out. This life system is all we've got."

The wave of new thinking about the soil, growing food, human health, and planetary welfare that began with Sir Albert Howard is coming into a focus of irresistible logic. What Bill Mollison proposes seems completely practical—he has been doing it himself—and his thinking is largely shared by people like the Todds and others at the New Alchemy Institute, by John Keavons of Ecology Action, and Andy Lipkis and the Treepeople of Southern California. Jonathan Von Ransom does a splendid job of covering the essentials of Mollison's theory and practice:

> By thinking in energy functions, a flying insect becomes "airborne fertilizer," a chicken a thermostat and tractor, a tree a living thing that stays in one place a long time and brings up nutrients from deep underground, a squirrel a planter of oak trees and feeder of chickens. . . . "We took four elements," concluded Mollison—"the chicken house, the greenhouse, the orchard-forest, and pond, and counted 90 functional elements we had brought together."

Needless to say, material about Bill Mollison needs reading in its entirety to convey the *practicality* of the permaculture idea—its application in all directions—as for example in Lynwood and Watts, where "there are actually more gardens per capita than in any other part of Los Angeles." This quotation is from a Plowboy interview with him in the November-December 1980 *Mother Earth News*, which tells about his life and the way he works. His permaculture theory—which brings a lot of familiar ideas together, plus his own integrating conception—began to dawn on him in 1969. He decided:

> "Let's apply the principles of environmental science to our production systems." Up to that point, those principles had been taught as *revealed* knowledge. . . . But no one, at that time, ever thought of taking such a relationship and consciously *applying* it, making it part of a design.

Who is Bill Mollison? He has been a fisherman, a fur-trapper, and a field worker for Australia's Wildlife Survey Division of the Commonwealth Scientific Industrial Research Organization—gradually coming "to the conclusion that most contemporary crop-raisers must be doing things the wrong way." Von Ransom says:

> His Tagari enterprises, which include a seed company, a trucking company, and a travel agency besides a permaculture consultancy, support him and all members of his community with living expenses plus nine dollars a week. . . . I concluded that he is proud of his ability to synthesize orthodox business techniques with environmentalist goals. "It's the middle-aged people—the lawyers and professional—who understand best what I'm trying to do," he claimed. His own career prepared him to know the ropes of the system while giving him the dual hands-on and academic background in environmental science that makes him so formidable a thinker.

He has a book, *Permaculture Two*, which may be ordered postpaid for $11.61 from International Tree Crops Institute, Box 888-M Winters, Calif. 95694. In Tasmania his address is Tagari, P.O. Box 96, Stanley, Tasmania 7331.

People in Southern California may be interested to know that Bill Mollison will be giving a three-week course in permaculture from May 24 to June 12 at the headquarters of the TreePeople, 12601 Mulholland Drive, Beverly Hills (Tel: 213—769-2663).