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"WHAT I'M DOING IS NOT QUITE RIGHT"

THE cry for "going back to fundamentals" is a familiar one. Even people with very dissimilar ideas on what the "fundamentals" are agree that this should be done. One level of discourse arrays the options for choice of fundamentals, compares them, and endeavors to reach a workable conclusion. The difficulty with these discussions is that they soon become extremely abstract—see the endless debates concerning the best philosophy and the true religion—and people lose interest. They shouldn't, we may say, but they do. The best serious writers are those who are able to hold attention in a consideration of fundamentals. In the practice of this art, is there anyone who has actually improved on Thoreau? We might say something similar about Ortega and Camus. Today, Wendell Berry is a runner-up in this contest, perhaps the writer of our time with the widest serious appeal. How do they do it? There is no classic formula. Only reading them helps.

In a book that came in for review a while back, we found a passage that suggests a way of "going back to fundamentals" while deferring somewhat the argument about what they are. The book is *The Pursuit of Meaning* (Harper & Row), a study of the therapeutic philosophy of Viktor Frankl, by Joseph B. Fabry, who found Frankl's thinking and practice so illuminating that he made it the foundation of his psychiatric career. (The book, we think, is very good, filled with sense and no psychological jargon.) The passage we have in mind is on conscience, certainly a "fundamental" in human life. Dr. Fabry doesn't presume to tell you what it *is*, but develops his discussion on what conscience does. This seems entirely reasonable; it eliminates arguments, while considering what conscience does may result in feelings and intuitions about what it is—highly individual ideas, of course, which are perhaps best, surely at the beginning, possibly at the end. He says:

> Conscience is part of human reality. True conscience is not what parents, religion, or society tell us. These influences are real, but at our core we still have this strange little voice. It plays a central part in our life. How we listen and how we act upon what we hear can make our life meaningful or empty, can cause happiness and fulfillment or tension, conflicts, frustration, and mental disease.
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> The rediscovery of an authentic human conscience has practical consequence. First, we must listen. It may be that the most important task that will bring meaning is to listen to our conscience. We act as humans only if we act because we have decided to and not because we are driven to it or because we are afraid of punishment. It is true that commandments and laws threaten punishment; but as long as we live according to them automatically, we have ruled ourselves out as persons, as selves. The Ten Commandments are among the best guidelines we have, but routine obedience is not enough. As Frankl states, "In an age when the Ten Commandments seem to lose their unconditional validity, we have to learn more than ever to listen to the ten thousand commandments arising from the ten thousand unique situations of which life consists," in order to understand the tens of thousands of unique meanings offered by the tens of thousands of moments that make up our life.

It seems suitable to add that we also need to *outgrow* the Ten Commandments—that is, to have consciences active enough to render them unnecessary; and an advantage in this would be that there are numerous relationships which call for moral decision on which the Commandments don't have much or anything to say. Then doing what we please may seem permitted.

We take, then, from Frankl and Fabry, that Conscience is a fundamental. What else should be considered? Fabry's excellent book illustrates what else. He uses reason to demonstrate the importance of conscience, noting that faulty or unapplied reason may result in misinterpreting conscience. Conscience *needs* reason, and reason needs conscience. Reason without conscience

leads to calculations of the most devastating kind, such as a foreign policy of Mutually Assured Destruction, the claim that the only Good Indian is a Dead Indian, or that the world will be a better place to live in when all the undesirables are eliminated. Did Hitler have a conscience? Frankl, Fabry says, doesn't believe Hitler "ever obeyed his conscience," which seems to suggest that he may have had one. Did the forbidding character of the Grand Inquisitor, in Dostoevsky's tale, have a conscience? One gathers that he did, although it was strangely twisted in effect. Can we say that the failure to use reason as a collaborator with conscience produces the most terrible events in history, or in human life? It seems that we can, although long arguments might result from the assumption.

But since we are not here undertaking to discuss the difficult implications of psychopathology, we feel able to stipulate that we need both reason and conscience as fundamentals, and take this as established. Putting it a little differently, we may say that the rational and the moral are essential elements in human decision. (Some may feel that we should add the mysterious factor of Intuition, but we are trying to keep things simple and might suggest that conscience is a qualified aspect of intuition.)

This kind of going back to fundamentals would mean that we need to develop and discipline our rational capacities and heighten our moral awareness.

How, then, shall we do this? Again, endless argument looms, so we shall say, simply, read Tolstoy, Camus, Simone Weil, and Wendell Berry for examples of thinkers that have done rather well with both. A good book on rationality is Morris Cohen's *Reason and Nature,* and Simone Petrement's life of Simone Weil is a study of moral awareness. Works by Gandhi, and also Schumacher, illustrate the interplay of the rational and the moral in analysis, criticism, and affirmation. We hesitate to do more than suggest such starting-points. Going to school to study "Logic" as the basis of rationality could easily get a person lost in the refinements of reason (if it is really reason), and moralists, if we listen to conventional sources, seem to rely mostly on exhortation, which is notoriously ineffective.

We are not, here, talking about how to influence "other people." We are trying to talk about ourselves—those who, in the common opinion of most of us, need help or instruction the least. We are questioning that assumption, on grounds supplied by two writers. One of them, John H. Schaar (in a paper, "Reflections on Authority"), speaks directly to Americans, saying:

> At the time of the founding, the doctrine and sentiment were already widespread that each individual comes into this world morally complete and self-sufficient, clothed with natural rights which are his by birth, and not in need of fellowship for moral growth and fulfillment. The human material of this new republic consisted of a gathering of men each of whom sought self-sufficiency and the satisfaction of his own desires. Wave after wave of immigrants replenished those urges, for to the immigrant, America largely meant freedom from inherited authorities and freedom to get rich.

In passing we may note that the President of the United States recently confirmed this view, saying he hoped that every American was free to try to get rich. (We haven't changed much.)

The other writer is Joseph Weizenbaum, professor of computer science at MIT, who, at the end of his book, *Computer Power and Human Reason,* speaks of how difficult it is to persuade research scientists to consult self-limiting principles in their work. He says:

> As is true of so many dilemmas, the solution to this one lies in rejecting the rules of the game that gave rise to it. For the present dilemma, the operative rule is that the salvation of the world—and that *is* what I am talking about—depends on converting others to sound ideas. That rule is false. The salvation of the world depends only on the individual whose world it is. At least, every individual must act as if the whole future of the world, of humanity itself depends on him. Anything less is a shirking of responsibility and is itself a dehumanizing force, for anything less encourages the individual to look upon

himself as a mere actor in a drama written by anonymous agents, as less than a whole person, and that is the beginning of passivity and aimlessness.

A little later Prof. Weizenbaum says that acceptance and discharge of that responsibility does not free us of our obligations to each other.

Chief among these is that we instruct one another as best we can. And the principal and most effective form of instruction we can practice is the example our own conduct provides to those who are touched by it. Teachers and writers have an especially heavy responsibility precisely because they have taken positions from which their example reaches more than the few people in their immediate circle.

Admittedly, this conception of individual responsibility calls for effort on a heroic scale. Are we equal to it? The case for acknowledging it anyway is that when you declare an ideal, it shouldn't be compromised at the start with concessions to personal inclinations. The theory of making concessions because of human "inadequacy" was the argument of the Grand Inquisitor to Jesus. You, he said, want people to become heroes. We know better. And we are compassionate. We help them to feel good despite their imperfection and self-indulgent tendencies. And so on. The fact is, the human beings we most admire were and are those who accepted the full scale of responsibility as described by the computer expert—Jesus, Gandhi, and some others.

Let's leave it at that. We might of course extend the argument by claiming, on the basis of mythic truth, that we belong to the Promethean tribe; that the best of humans prove it by their committed lives; that if there is something like essential human evolution, where else could it lie if not in the combined moral and rational excellence reached by the greatest humans we know about? But this would require the development of a metaphysical anthropology to take the place of the Hobbesian doctrine we live by, consciously or unconsciously. Our system, Marshall Sahlins says (in *Culture and Practical Reason*), "gives people license to put their reason to the best advantage and certifies the result as a genuine society."

Thus the nature of man seems a "perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death," and society but the collective effect, miraculously ordered out of private contention "as if by an Invisible Hand." Organization is the socialized realization of desire.

And such is not only how it appears to us, but often to our several sciences of society. My description was phrased as a clumsy disguise of academic economics, yet the problematic is common in political science, sociology—and a certain anthropology (cf. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, Oxford, 1962). History too is often written in utilitarian style, as if it were decided by the distribution of resources and the skill people display in manipulating them. The content of the economizing varies, but all our social sciences participate in the going conception that society is produced by enterprising action. Society is the set of relationships empirically constituted by the pursuit of private interests with the means on hand.

Perhaps this helps to explain the peculiar relation to nature characteristic of Western culture. The foregoing allusion to Hobbes was also motivated. So far as I know, we are the only people who think themselves risen from savages; everyone else believes they descend from gods.

Here a mature anthropologist turns his critical and analytical skills to exposing the common assumptions of our culture as not only science but also folklore: "The development from a Hobbesian state of nature is the origin myth of Western capitalism." Why, one may ask, is that view of human origins any better, or as good, as, say, the anthropology of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, or the Buddhist claim that every blade of grass may eventually become a god?

What is for Prof. Sahlins a pertinent aside—"everyone else believes they descend from gods"—might become for us something more; that is, if we are looking for a conception of human origins that fits with human possibility as proposed by the writers we have quoted on responsibility.

Such thoughts, however, belong to the future. As our situation grows worse—the situation created by the motives declared by Hobbes and Adam Smith—we may find ourselves finally sprung from the assumptions of "our several sciences of society," and take these questions into our own hands.

Meanwhile, what about rationality and moral awareness: How can they be increased?

This is not a question with an answer that can be attempted here. We propose an easier one: What can we do to make rationality and moral awareness *less difficult?* Which is to ask, how can we do less harm to ourselves in these directions?

There is particular value in setting the problem in this way. It removes the almost intolerable obligation of trying to teach people to be rational and exhorting them to be moral. Those best able to teach are doubtless the artists—that is, the great artists—and they succeed only because they don't set out to be didactic, but respond to an inspiration which sets going rhythms of meaning in melodies and intellectual structures; from which we learn as from the morning sun, the sea, and the stars. While here, too, there may be some hints for an anthropology, our present purpose is more modest. At least, we are suggesting: do no harm. Or less harm. We reduce the requirement to "less harm" for reasons that soon become obvious. Consider, for example, what Stephen Arons says in his recent book, *Compelling Belief: The Culture of American Schooling:*

> The society that utilizes the institutional power of involuntary schooling to reduce an individual's control over the development of personal conscience and consciousness threatens to make that individual politically impotent. Under these conditions the government becomes a kind of political perpetual motion machine, legitimizing its longterm policies through the world view and public opinion it creates.

The author, in short, wants to separate school and state. He is a lawyer and he makes a good case for this separation in his book. But many others, through the years, have proposed the divorce, based on the question: What is schooling *for:* turning out citizens who can be expected to do what they are told—in case, say, we get into an obviously immoral war—or individuals who refuse to violate their consciences, who believe that a society that discourages self-reliance (in countless obvious and subtle ways) is doomed in principle?

Well, that's one example of how we might do less harm. What else can we do? The home-schoolers helped by John Holt and others are already doing what they are able; and like the pioneer Americans of two hundred years ago, they have their "committee of correspondence" which puts out a newsletter filled with the facts of life about teaching children at home—a paper which sophisticates readers about the relations with local school systems in various states and the laws in those states, tells how parents sometimes win their right to teach their children; and, most of all, relates the bright and beautiful things which usually result for the children, to say nothing of the ingenuity of parents as teachers and the remarkable fruit of imaginative teaching activity.

For another example we go once more to E. F. Schumacher's classic paper, "The Critical Question of Size" (which appeared in *Resurgence,* May-June, 1975), in which he said:

> The bigger the organization, the less possible it is for any member of it to act freely as a moral being; the more frequent are the occasions when someone will say: "I am sorry, I know what I am doing is not quite right, but these are my instructions" or "these are the regulations I am paid to implement" or "I myself agree with you; perhaps you could take the matter to a higher level, or to your member of parliament."
>
> As a result, big organizations often behave very badly, very immorally, very stupidly and inhumanely, not because the people inside them are any of these things but simply because the organization carries the load of bigness. . . . It is not the people of the organization but its size that is at fault. It is like blaming a car's exhaust gases on the driver; even an angel could not drive a car without fouling the air. . . .

What is Schumacher doing here? He is putting his rational capacities in the service of moral awareness. He is showing that some arrangements have better moral effects than others, and *why*. Moral insight tells what is right and wrong; rational method explains why. We need both. Schumacher adds:

> Many books have been written about moral individuals in immoral society. As society is composed of individuals, how could a society be more immoral than its members? It becomes immoral if its structure is such that moral individuals cannot act in accordance with their moral impulses. And one method of achieving this dreadful result is by letting organizations become too large. (I am not asserting that there are no evil individuals capable of doing evil things no matter what may be the size of organizations or, generally, the structure of society. It is when ordinary, decent, harmless people do evil things that society gets into the deepest troubles.)

Some organization is doubtless necessary, *but how much?* The optimum size will of course vary with geography, climate, cultural tradition, and other factors, but anyone can see that a great many organizations are now much too big, because they are doing so much harm—nations especially. The larger the country, the less it can afford to use reason in its international relations; nations use potential force abroad and propaganda at home, because "reason" is not really an instrument of government in a mass society. Would I, one might ask himself, have pressed the button which released the bomb over Hiroshima? Of course not. How many people in the country would say the same? Nearly all. Why then did it happen? Because President Truman was an evil man? No. He might have figured out how not to use it, but a "man of action" tends to do the simple things instead of the things that are complicated in a job like his. A nation has "national interests," which are always self-interests, and when the nation is too big the support of those interests, which have nothing to do with morality, become compulsions almost impossible to resist.

What can we do about things like that? Well, the more people who figure out ways to reduce their dependent relationships and increase their independent ones, the more influence intelligence and morality will exert.

REVIEW
WRITING: POETRY AND PROSE

[More from the journal of Louis J. Halle, who for many years taught at the Institut Universitaires de Hautes Études in Geneva.]

IT is disturbing that even today, four centuries after Shakespeare and a century after Tennyson, most of our literary figures have not had even one course in Creative Writing. Virtually the only progress we can see, as yet, is represented by the fact that Shakespeare, in his day, did not even know that what he was practicing was Creative Writing.

Realism compels us to recognize that, right up to our own day, persons who had had neither an advanced general education nor a specialized one in literature may still be masters of prose style. The man who, over a century ago, wrote the Gettysburg Address, the Second Inaugural Address, and a letter to Horace Greeley never had more than a year of schooling and in the field of literature had familiarized himself with little more than the King James Bible.

For my second example I cite Mr. Uffa Fox, a designer and builder of small boats. Born in Cowes in 1898, he did not go to college, and the record is silent on his pre-college education, which was presumably whatever the Isle of Wight had to offer. Mr. Fox served his apprenticeship under a Mr. Joe Porter, who, in his old age, took employment under his former apprentice rather than vegetate in the retirement he had earned. What follows, the tribute written by Mr. Fox after the death of Mr. Porter, appeared in the issue of *Motor Boat and Yachting* for May 17, 1968, under the title "Powerboat Design."

> When I was a young apprentice at the age of fourteen, years before the 1914 war, Joe was the chief designer of S. E. Saunders and I was the youngest apprentice. We were friends through all the years between, but alas Joe departed peacefully for paradise during the night of 17 November 1964, before the winter's snow.
>
> We who walk this earth owe a great deal to our elders. Our parents teach us to eat, walk, talk and to behave so that we are a pleasure to others. When we leave home and go to school, the second stage in our lives, our teachers instruct us not only in history, geography, and mathematics, but also how to play a straight bat and enjoy life more fully. At this time our choirmaster not only teaches us how to sing, but also instils in us a love of music which brings joy to our hearts ever after. Then we proceed into our third stage, the working world, and here the master builder, his chief designer skilled artisans and other elder brethren, teach us by their example and work as well as by their advice and instruction.

After an account of what Mr. Porter contributed to his own training, and of their collaboration over the last years, Mr. Fox concludes:

> When Joe first left us I was sad, but as weeks developed into months I missed his presence more and more and now feel lonely without him. When two oak or similar trees grow side by side in the open they grow up as one great circular tree and if one is cut down or struck by lightning the other remains standing and living but now is a half circle and the inner side is without branches, twigs and leaves, so is unprotected; this is much the way I feel, for Joe from my youth up had grown a part of my life, and I now feel lonely and unprotected on one side.

The remnant, we are told, saves the majority, and sometimes the individual redeems the honor of mankind.

To revert to Tennyson's dictum, that not the thought but the form is what makes poetry live, on first consideration one wishes it to be untrue. For does it not make nonsense of half the literature of mankind?

Its truth is attested, however, by the fact that thought which is undistinguished in itself acquires distinction by the form the poet gives it—just as a lump dislodged by the diamond-miner's pick acquires beauty only when it has been given form by the diamond-cutter's art.

I know of no poem in the English language more packed with thought than Tennyson's *In Memoriam.* But the thought, which represents the principal philosophical preoccupations of the

nineteenth century, is neither original nor distinguished in itself. It represents the common disillusionment associated with the development of Darwinism. In the poem, Tennyson was simply the diamond-cutter who gives the raw material form.

Confronting the growing scepticism of the age in which he lived, he was like one who, wrestling with the Devil, is unable to overcome but unwilling to yield. So *In Memoriam* remains an inconclusive debate between his faith and his doubt. But his friend, Edward FitzGerald, if we identify him with his translation of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat,* took the evil's part without reservation. He considered, according to the poem, that any sacrifices we mortals make of the pleasures of the flesh are wasted by reason of the oblivion in death that awaits us all. So he adopted Horace's philosophy: *Carpe diem, quam credula postero*—Live for the day, forgetful of the morrow. This was the thought to which he gave such an entrancing poetic form.

However, if the thought were all, I, myself, would find no value in this poem. The way of life it advocates, so far from maximizing pleasure, would reduce us to misery; for it does not follow that, because drinking gives pleasure, constant drunkenness makes a pleasant life. But the falseness of the thought, as I judge it, does not detract from the beauty of the poem. Since my early youth its verses have sung in my head—as they still do.

> The Worldly Hope men set their hearts upon
> Turns Ashes—or it prospers; and anon,
> Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face
> Lighting a little Hour or two—is gone
>
> And those who husbanded the Golden Grain
> And those who flung it to the winds like Rain
> Alike to no such aureate Earth are turn'd
> As, buried once, Men want dug up again.

On the other hand, to say that the thought need not be true is not to say that it does not count. Whether true or false, it must be appealing—as *carpe diem* is. What need is there to spoil the dream of drinking continuously, which is only a dream, with contemplation of the cirrhosis that would follow in real life? There is, then, better material for poetry in *carpe diem* than in the more realistic admonition that one should exercise moderation in all things.

> *Caliph:* When did you learn poetry, Hassan of my heart?
>
> *Hassan*: In that great school, the Market of Bagdad. For thee, Master of the World, poetry is a princely diversion but for us it is a deliverance from Hell. Allah made poetry a cheap thing to buy and a simple thing to understand. He gave men dreams by night that they might learn to dream by day.

"There is more 'magic' in sin," says V. S. Pritchett, "if it is not committed."

I would hesitate to say of prose what I have said of poetry: that the form counts more than the content of thought, which must be appealing but need not be true. Should not prose, except what is overtly fiction, be literally true? No one would deny that, for example, what we require of an article in the encyclopedia is not beauty but truth. This ought to settle the matter, so that we could now go on to other things—unless I chose to make mischief, as indeed I do, by raising the question of what the difference is between poetry and prose.

The sophisticated reader knows that the difference is not in the appearance on paper, that what distinguishes poetry is not the unequal length of the lines. The difference comes out better if, disregarding the appearance, one attends to the sound, pronouncing it to oneself. Although I consider that what I am writing in these pages is prose and has imperishable truth as its object, I have the devil's own time to keep poetry from creeping in. Lincoln, who never wrote a word of overt poetry in his life, had the same problem.

Take the Gettysburg Address. It is not notable for its content of thought, which is at best banal. Why, then, has it been considered notable at all?

A clue to the answer is provided by comparing it with the Twenty-third Psalm, which is a sort of song (and song is poetry).

> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. . . .

The Address has the same music. Both utterances are distinguished by their rhythms, their beat, the echo of their phrases; the symmetry of passages that rise, each one, from the level of its beginning only to return to it again, as a passage in music takes flight from the keynote only to conclude, like a bird, by coming to rest on it again.

The theme of the Address is dedication, the dedication of a national cemetery, and the word "dedicate" is repeated like an incantation, gaining in power and meaning at each repetition.

> The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

This has equilibrium as well as rhythm, for it is statement and response.

The large rhythm of the phrases in the Psalm tends to be triple:

> He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
> he leadeth me beside the still waters.
> He restoreth my soul. . . .

And again:

> Thou preparest a table before me in the
> presence of mine enemies:
> thou anointest my head with oil:
> my cup runneth over.

The second set of diminishing phrases echoes the first. In the Gettysburg Address the rhythm is primarily duple, secondarily triple, the two rhythms setting each other off, as in so much of Bach's music.

Certainly Lincoln was not consciously practicing the principles of poetics when he composed what he referred to as "a few appropriate remarks." Presumably because his mind had been formed on the King James Bible, his language fell into certain rhythms naturally. So one who does nothing but read sonnets will at last find himself speaking, naturally and unconsciously, in iambic pentameters.

Evidence of this is that Lincoln's private letters have, in greater or lesser degree, the same elements of poetry as his public utterances. His letter of August 22, 1862, to Horace Greeley is an example. After its opening statement ("I have just read yours of the 19th, addressed to myself through the New York 'Tribune'."), it goes on:

> If there be in it any statements or assumptions of fact which I may know to be erroneous, I do not, now and here, controvert them. If there be in it any inferences which I may believe to be falsely drawn, I do not, now and here, argue against them. If there be perceptible in it an impatient and dictatorial tone, I waive it in deference to an old friend whose heart I have always supposed to be right.

All the rest of the letter, which at one point falls into a rhyme in keeping with the context, has the same rhythmical quality, the same beat. The style was the man, and therefore it was consistent throughout his utterances.

If one should ask the members of a class in Creative Writing to paraphrase the Gettysburg Address—that is, to give the content without the form—the result would prove it so undistinguished as to raise the question of why it had ever been highly regarded. If we judge it as an essay in expository prose it is nothing. We must judge it, however, as we judge *In Memoriam,* for it is poetry.

LOUIS J. HALLE

COMMENTARY
NOTE ON NOSTALGIA

THIS week's "Children" ends with a brief recollection of *The Lark*, a little monthly gotten out by Gelett Burgess (and friends) during the last years of the last century. Our actual memories don't of course go back that far, but the man who gave us the volumes of *The Lark* remembered those days well, and their pages acquired another dimension of interest for that reason. One reason for feeling nostalgia in connection with that memorable publishing venture is the obvious pleasure, the plain fun, that the publishers found in getting it out, an enjoyment shared by the contributors as well. The thing is, they were able to *do* it without having to put on a big fund-raising campaign! And they were able to do it at five cents a copy for the readers You didn't have to be rich or have an "angel" to start a little paper, fill it with good material for a couple of years, and then bow out. Will we ever see a time like that again?

* * *

Thinking about what Louis Halle says of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, in his musing and informative discussion in Review, we are led to suggest that the content of the Address was not, at least for Lincoln, really "banal." This word means commonplace and ordinary, hardly worth saying. Yet for Lincoln what happened at Gettysburg brought a sweep of feeling, a majesty of emotion which; demanded words and sentence structure worthy of the meaning he felt. That is, his address was not "crafted" as poetry—as by a painter, adding a touch of color here and there, to obtain a desired effect—but achieved its incandescence naturally. The meaning, that is, compelled the form. "Poetic" hardly serves to describe what he said. Perhaps we could say that the address has a scriptural quality and that any other would reduce or even betray the flow of meaning that came to him at that hour.

Speaking of his own writing, Mr. Halle says that there are times when he has "the devil's own time to keep poetry from creeping in." Is not this the power of an idea to require of the sensitive writer the exactly appropriate form of words? We may call it "poetry," but the label cannot do justice to what has happened.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
VARIOUS NOSTALGIAS

YEARS ago (in MANAS for July 31, 1968), our "Children" writer recalled books for children by James Baldwin (not the talented black writer of the present), who wrote story after story based on the Greek myths, legends, and the heroic traditions of medieval history. Best known, perhaps, were his *Fifty Famous Stories Retold* and *Thirty More Stories Retold,* the latter collection being issued by the American Book Company in 1905. The MANAS article recounted the frustration of a printer (ours) who had a little girl he wanted to get a good story book for. Looking over a current job in the print shop—a catalog of just-published children's books listing *hundreds* of titles brought out that year—he gave up in disgust and went in search of a book by Baldwin on which *he* had been raised. Finally, after his library borrowed it from another library, he secured *Thirty More Stories Retold* and with considerable pleasure read them to his daughter. The one he liked best was about Roger Bacon's talking brass image—what it could do and what happened to it through the folly of Bacon's servingman, Miles. Oiled, wound, and dosed with strange chemicals, this thirteenth-century computer was to tell exactly what the people of that time needed to know, so Bacon waited, listening, hour after hour. But eventually he had to sleep, so Miles took over the watch. After a while, the brass head smoked and gasped, *Time is.* So what, thought the servant; I won't bother the master. A few minutes later the Image thundered, *Time was;* but again Miles decided to wait. Then great noises came: the floor swayed, lightning filled the room, and the head rose from its pedestal and declared, TIME IS PAST, and shattered on the floor in a thousand pieces. His seven years wasted for lack of the required program, Bacon, it is said, gave up computer design and took up alchemy. The printer's daughter insisted on considering at some length what the head might have revealed, offering speculations not without merit. The story, after all, was very good.

Now a writer in *Audubon* for last September, a man of seventy-six, recalls his fascination with a slightly later story-teller, Thornton Burgess, whose bedtime stories on the doings of Peter Rabbit are known at least by reputation by all. During his childhood in the Greenwood Mountain country in Maine, this writer, Olin Pettingill Jr. (can his father be still alive?), tells how he looked forward to each installment of Peter's adventures as they came out in the *Boston Herald.* He cut out and made them into scrap books. Years later he met and became a friend of Burgess, and he tells about the quality of this amiable autodidact. Of his attraction to the tales at seven or eight, he says:

> The stories appealed to me because their narrative form was enticing; they were imaginative yet founded on information that I, as a country boy, recognized as truthful. Burgess gave his characters catchy names—Peter Rabbit, Johnny Chuck, Jenny Wren, Sammy Jay—and distinctive personalities. He permitted them to talk and show emotions but never to live or behave in any other way than as wild creatures. Ever so subtly, without preaching or moralizing, he created sympathy for all his personalities. Many years later in his autobiography, *Now I Remember,* Burgess would explain: "It is as natural for the average boy to throw a stone at a bird or to chase a rabbit or squirrel as it is for him to draw his breath. To tell him that it is wrong or cruel is a waste of breath. Kindness and mercy cannot be implanted from without. They must spring from within. But in that same average boy is inherent a peculiarly strong sense of justice. Arouse his interest in the daily lives of the lesser creatures and that sense of justice is at once aroused. He at once becomes their friend and champion."

An interesting note on Burgess's life:

> Thornton Burgess grew up on Cape Cod and moved later to Springfield, Massachusetts. Owing to family circumstances, he was unable to attend college. Any interest in, or knowledge of, natural history was at best casual. Shouldered with the support of his mother and later of his son, whose mother had died in childbirth, he struggled as an underpaid journalist and wrote jingles and advertising

> copy. He discovered that he liked and began composing bedtime tales to entertain his young son.

A Little, Brown editor read them, liked them, and Burgess's first book, *Old Mother West Wind*, came out in 1910. It was an instant success, as were the other books he wrote, which totalled seventy published by Little Brown. There is now a 150-page bibliography of his writings (thousands of stories, picture books, coloring books) by Wayne W. Wright. Pettingill says that Burgess early supplemented his knowledge by contacting "such authorities as Frank M. Chapman at the American Museum of Natural History, for questions about birds, and Liberty Hyde Bailey at Cornell University for botanical and horticultural problems." The *Audubon* writer concludes:

> I liked books by both Burroughs and Seton. But they were *books*, appearing only now and then, and soon read. The Burgess stories came regularly in newspapers, leading me on from day to day. The more of his stories I read, the more I became interested in the author himself. I clipped out every item I spotted about him in newspapers or magazines and pasted it in my steadily enlarging scrapbooks of Burgess stories. I felt that any man who could write as he did must be worth knowing.

And so it turned out. Burgess, no doubt, is still in print. It would be nice if some publisher would now revive the stories of the first James Baldwin.

* * *

With no more justification than some additional nostalgia—in this case for a small but delightful publication issued for two years in San Francisco (from 1895 to 1897)—and the fact that its editor was Gelett Burgess (no relation, we suspect, to Thornton)—and the additional fact that we have in the MANAS library (a gift from a friend) these two volumes, we shall quote them briefly.

Gelett Burgess became famous for the couplet which appeared in the first issue of *The Lark*, for May, 1895, on a page adorned by a gambolling cow with a quizzical expression:

> I never saw a purple cow, I never hope to see one,
> But I can tell you anyhow, I'd rather see than be one.

By October, the little paper—often called a "chapbook"—was devoting its last page to advertising a book—"The Purple Cow by Gelett Burgess—a book of pictures reprinted from 'The Lark' together with the very peculiar history of The Chewing-Gum Man, printed on thick bamboo paper sent postpaid—price 25 cents." *The Lark*, incidentally, cost five cents a copy.

Then, in the last issue, for April, 1897, garnished by a cartoon portrait of the author, were the words of another couplet, this time stretched to four lines—

> Ah, yes, I wrote the "Purple Cow"—
> I'm sorry, now, I wrote it;
> But I can tell you Anyhow
> I'll kill you if you Quote it!

FRONTIERS

A Lost Dimension of Life

THERE are all sorts of reasons for starting a vegetable garden—the most obvious being the need for good food—but the most important reason may be the attitudes which are generated by this activity. MANAS receives dozens of publications—magazines, newsletters, brochures—which come out weekly, fortnightly, monthly, quarterly, and sporadically—many of them analytical and critical, filled with warnings and predictions, while a few others deal with what some people have begun to do; what it is within their capacity to do toward evolving ways of living and meeting needs which are both wholesome and productive. This latter group hasn't very much changed the ominous figures cited by the critics, but what they have done—or are doing—is to prove that better ways are *possible;* and to show, by the way, that those who undertake them experience a change in polarity of feeling. The beginnings they make produce a certain serenity of mind, even in the face of what may seem ultimate disaster. They have, in short, a kind of life we all want and need. They don't ignore the threatening statistics, but begin, on however small a scale, to produce their own. It seems fair to say that nothing good will happen on a larger scale unless the number of these people is increased.

On our desk are copies of two books: one, *How To Grow More Vegetables* (*than you ever thought possible on less land than you can imagine*)—$9.00—by John Jeavons, of Ecology Action—which now has twenty acres near Willits, California—and the later (last year) *Backyard Homestead Mini-Farm* & *Garden Log Book* ($8.95) by Jeavons, Mogador Griffin, and Robin Leler, both books published by Ten Speed Press, P.O. Box 7123, Berkeley, Calif. 94707. John Jeavons began this enterprise for education in Biodynamic/French Intensive gardening in 1972 (then on a small acreage in Palo Alto). He acquired a nucleus of associates and undertook to demonstrate food-growing techniques which any healthy man or woman can use "to enrich their lives by increasing their level of self-reliance in their own backyards." From the beginning Ecology Action's program has included both research and education. The educational activity is based on Jeavons' book and on a series of self-teaching mini-pamphlets the contents of which are now consolidated and available in *Backyard Homestead.* In the first chapter, the authors ask:

> How self-sufficient can we be? This question, more than any other, has activated Ecology Action's biointensive minifarming research and education program. We have found that 100 square feet can easily produce all the vegetables for one person in a 6-month growing season. On the average, each person in the United States eats 322 pounds of vegetables and soft fruits such as melons and strawberries each year. Our research has shown that a 100 square foot garden, in other words, the average suburban backyard, can easily produce that—up to 1.8 pounds per day, assuming you are an average gardener with a working knowledge of the biodynamic/French intensive method. As your skills increase, and your soil improves, the yields may be even greater.

Needless to say, this takes time.

> If you are new to mini-farming, begin small—and take the time to learn to build up your soil and your expertise. We have been researching and demonstrating for eleven years, and we are still learning from our successes and failures. We do not claim to know all the answers, but want to share with you what we have learned so far in our test gardens, and in our backyard homestead.

These books are for people who want to start gardening from scratch—as Jeavons did (he was a systems analyst in Silicon Valley when he decided that growing the food we eat was a more important kind of work). Here and there in *Backyard Homestead* are texts which embody the motivation for starting out in this direction. One, by an unknown writer, is this: "Man, despite his artistic pretensions, his sophistication, and many accomplishments, owes the fact of his existence to a six-inch layer of topsoil—and the fact that it rains." Another is from Abraham Lincoln:

> . . . ere long the most valuable of all arts will be the art of deriving a comfortable subsistence from the smallest area of soil. No community whose every member possesses this art can ever be the victim of oppression in any of its forms.

The use of *Backyard Homestead* as a practical manual assumes possession and knowledge of the contents of *How To Grow More Vegetables.* This book has a section on "History and Philosophy" which answers immediate and natural questions:

> The biodynamic/French intensive method is a combination of two forms of horticulture begun in Europe during the late 1800's and early 1900's French intensive techniques were developed in the 1890'S outside Paris on two acres of land. . . . The close spacing provided a *mini-climate* and a *living mulch* which reduced weed growth and helped hold moisture in the soil. During the winter glass jars were placed over seedlings to give them an early start. The gardeners grew nine crops each year and even grew melon plants during the winter.

The biodynamic techniques are owed to Rudolf Steiner, an Austrian philosopher and educator who, noticing the decline in nutritive value of European crops, found that the cause was chemical fertilizers and pesticides. He returned to the use of organic fertilizers as a cure for these ills.

> He stressed the holistic growing environment of plants: their rate of growth, the synergistic balance of their environments and nutriments, their proximity with other plants and their various *companion* relationships. He initiated a movement to scientifically explore the relationship which plants have with each other. From centuries of farmer experience and from tests, it has been determined that flowers, herbs and weeds can minimize insect attacks on plants. Many plants benefit one another. . . . The biodynamic method brought back raised planting beds. Two thousand years ago, the Greeks noticed that plant life thrives in landslides. The loose soil allows the air, moisture, warmth, nutrients and roots to properly penetrate the soil.

There is a lot more, of course, to biodynamic gardening, but these are the fundamentals. The vegetables so grown are fragrant and *tasty*, and the activity of gardening restores a very nearly lost dimension of life. The address of Ecology Action is 5798 Ridgewood Road, Willits, Calif. 95490.