

# PREAMBLINGS

We begin with an apology that is anything but routine. It is in fact with profound abjection that we apologize for the absent MBJ's of last year. The reasons are numerous, and include postal strikes, missing MSS., and missing editors, but, reasons to the side, we still owe you all an apology — and something more. We hope you will accept as partial compensation the larger than usual issue that you now have in hand, and our statement of intent to publish an extra issue this year. We are planning an O.E. Rolvaag issue for winter publication, and a special issue focused on statements by our state's NCTE Achievement Award winners about what was good and bad in their experiences in the English classroom.

A year abroad has given us the kind of perspective on educational concerns that sabbatical years are designed to give. Long live sabbaticals, and may teachers on all levels come to enjoy the benefits of such rest and restoration! We spent part of our time observing in an Italian public Montessori school directed by a friend and associate of Maria Montessori, and part of our time in the waiting room of an Italian language school at which our daughter was learning to extend her command of Italian to other moods than the imperative. Our own halting conversation with the mothers who were waiting for their children to finish English lessons had chiefly to do with the state of education in Italy. "Terrible, the children are worked too hard," most of the mothers said. "How is it in your country?" "Terrible, they aren't worked hard enough," we should have said to complete the symmetry, but too many qualifications for this indictment tied our tongue. As well as linguistic incapacity. We think our educational problems stem not from too much or too little work, but from work that often seems without direction and is therefore without motivation.

It is with enthusiasm, consequently, that we see what after our year's absence appear to be new trends in the progress of educational reform. One of these is the growing concern for developing early in our students an interest in a choice of careers, not in order to produce the Alphas and Epsilons of Brave New World, but rather to give students a sense of purposefulness and to emphasize the need to correlate and focus the subject matters of instruction. We are finding now on the college level large numbers of students who are appalled at their own vocational uselessness. Their once limitless world has suddenly discovered that it does not need them, and they have not yet developed the courage to take this world by the throat. On the verge of "commencement" they worry about the uncertainties ahead. How can they commence when they don't feel finished? Some of them are even willing to join a committee to talk about why they do or don't want to be janitors. And, knowing how scarce jobs are, we can't urge them, as we have for years, to choose to be teachers. But we do.

We want to know more about the successes and failures of the "open classroom." We hope that some of our readers who have moved towards a relaxed class structure,

who have placed more responsibility on students for the conduct of instruction, and who have expanded the range of curricular choices, will write to us about their experience. We are interested also in the techniques that have been adapted and developed in the teaching of English (reading, speaking, writing, spelling) by teachers of students with specific learning disabilities. There are bound to be some useful ideas for all English teachers coming out of these special techniques.

Daniel Fader's new book *The Naked Children* makes a powerful case for teaching reading by means of any book, magazine, or newspaper that will start a student's interest. Sy Yesner's article in this issue, from a somewhat different vantage point, also argues for an electric choice. The central achievement of the English teacher is simply this: that his students read with understanding, with critical discrimination, and with pleasure. McLuhan notwithstanding. Minnesota's newly launched "Right to Read" program is lodged at this center.

The annual meeting of the Minnesota Conference on English Education will take place on January 22 at White Bear Lake Senior High School. The main concern of the meeting will be to determine some competencies that the English teacher should have. We plan to publish a report from this Conference and to invite suggestions about competencies (which or whether?) from *MEJ*'s readers. For almost two decades we have been accumulating statements from our English Teaching Methods students about their objectives for their chosen profession. We would like additions to our collection from Methods teachers at other teacher preparing institutions so that we can print a representative selection.

Donald W. Larmouth's "Models in Remedial English: An Interim Report" (*MEJ*, Spring 1970) has been designated by NCTE/ERIC "a substantive contribution to education" and will be made available on a national basis. Another, general tribute to *MEJ* authors has arrived from Myriam B. Ivers, 9th grade English teacher at Willmar Junior High School:

Absorbed in the  
*MEJ*  
Tonight  
I burned the  
parsnips.

Kind words may not butter parsnips, but they get printed by grateful editors.

