

The Other World

Robert Greenwood

This month, for the first time, REASON presents a work of fiction. REASON is not a literary magazine and does not plan to become one; we have selected Mr. Greenwood's story at least as much for its message as for its literary qualities. We may occasionally print other works of fiction that have something important to say to our readers, if the response is favorable. Mr. Greenwood provides some interesting food for thought as 1973 draws to a close.

I kept thinking about that line from Emily Dickinson, the one about the horses' heads being pointed toward eternity. Only I wasn't on a journey toward eternity, metaphysically speaking. My immediate destination was Fishers' Store, and I was driving the buckboard, and with a single mule, not a team of horses. The mule kept flicking her ears, switching her tail. It had been a long pull up the grade from the canyon. I had rested her at Traverse Creek at the gravel ford, where the bridge used to be until it had been washed out in the floods several years ago. She took the grade at her own casual pace. I could see Fishers' Store ahead through the low branches of the live oak trees.

I caught sight on my right of the old hulk of an automobile rusting away in the manzanita bushes. George Fisher had not traded in cars now for several years. At one time he had taken them in trade and sold parts. The old hulk was one of the last models that had been made in the old Chevrolet Monte Carlo series. It had been cannibalized long ago: the tires were gone, all the upholstery stripped away, even the glass removed from the window frames. It was only a carcass; there was something vaguely disturbing about it, an association

that roused old memories, unpleasant to contemplate if you let your mind wander back into time.

I tied the mule to the porch rail close enough to the water trough so that she could help herself to a drink. Two wagons were tied up at the other end of the porch; one belonged to George Fisher. A bicycle leaned against the front steps. Three white chickens with red combs were scratching in the dust. An old brown dog looked at me out of the corner of his eye from underneath the porch and then went back to sleep. The store was a large frame building covered with cedar shakes, unpainted and rough in its general appearance, and the shingles were discolored through long exposure to sun and wind. I unloaded eight cases of fresh peaches from the buckboard, carried them up to the porch and left them in the shade.

I stopped before going inside the store to feel my pocket, to make sure it was still there. It was, and my fingers were reassured by its familiar shape, its tactile quality. "Hello, Tom," George Fisher said as I walked inside. "Those look like nice peaches." He stood behind an old wooden counter, that familiar squint on his face.

Heaps of merchandise and groceries, much of it locally produced, filled the long tables and rows of shelves; sacks of shelled corn and grains leaned against the counters, presenting to the unfamiliar eye an aspect of confusion. "They're the best of the orchard," I said, walking up to the counter. "I want the wooden cases back, when you get around to it."

"I have your IOU here." He marked it paid, signed it, and handed it over the counter to me. He had taken my IOU six months ago on the promise of the peaches. He smiled and gave me that appraising look of his, suggesting an aspect of his character that was curious by

nature. His head was nearly bald, with a fringe of curly gray hair around the crown. He had an angular nose, pointed at the tip. Some men had let their beards grow out, and kept them trimmed with scissors, as I did, but George was always clean shaven.

At the other end of the store three people were gathered around a long table. I watched them for a moment. "My mother wants to know if you have any honey today," I said.

"Good honey is hard to get. I have a little that John Ferguson brought in last week, very good, too. The best substitute for sugar there is. How much do you need?"

"How much can you let me have?" I asked.

"Let me look and see," he said, and he moved down the aisle between shelves stocked with rows of glass jars and bottles, in all shapes and sizes. I was always amazed how quickly he found exactly the item he wanted among all that discontinuity. "Here it is. John Ferguson's honey. Look at that amber color," and he set it down on the counter. "John takes first class care of his bees. He brought in twenty pints. Your mother will find this is fine to cook with. How is your mother, Tom? Is she feeling well these days?"

"She works hard, but then we all do these days. She's inclined to fret too much about a lot of things. Otherwise, she's fine." Over at the long table there was a small excitement, a commotion

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brought about, I thought, by the appearance of a lucky number. Two men were pointing toward what at this distance looked like a wagon wheel set horizontally on the table, slowly revolving. Mrs. Fisher stood beside the wheel, an old green eyeshade pulled down over her forehead. "How is the roulette game going?" I asked George.

"Pretty good," he replied. "It keeps Clara busy—not that she needs anything more to do." He came around the counter. "Go over and say hello to Clara. Ralph Johnson is over there, and your neighbor, Paul Thomas."

I walked over to the game. "Hello, Clara," I greeted the woman wearing the eyeshade. "Have these fellows busted the bank yet?"

"No, and they're not going to, either. The odds will have their way in the long run," she said, a tone of finality in her voice, somehow hinting at a secret knowledge of the laws of probability. Mrs. Fisher was heavy, muscular even, her neck thick and powerful, like a man's, her arms strong, but agile. The eyeshade pulled down over her brow gave her an almost inscrutable aspect, but her eyes were steady and looked directly at you. Her outward manner, gruff as it might appear, was not the sum of her; she was comfortable in life, or about as comfortable in it as one could be these days, and took a genuine pleasure in its feelings and possessions. Her speech was always direct; she made herself understood through understatement. Her motions as she operated the game were swift and confident. "They just hit a number, but I'll get it back." She moved over to the wheel, one hand resting on it, waiting for the men to place their bets on the layout.

"How is your brother and his wife?" Ralph asked, placing a bet, and then looking up at me.

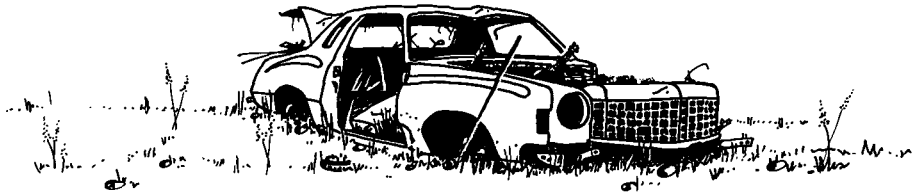
"Bill is fine. So is Fern. Bill was wondering the other day if you had any of that wine left you made last year."

"Not a bit of it. Fisher got most of it and traded it off. It was a good crop of grapes I had last year. I've got a good crop coming along this year, too. Tell Bill I'll trade you folks for some of your peaches. I can make some nice brandy with peaches." Ralph had been a widower for three years. In that time his aspect had grown more solemn with each passing year. There seemed to be a general debility of body as well as of the spirit; he had grown thinner each year until now he had an emaciated cast about him. His cheeks were hollow, his eyes deeply set.

His wife had died suddenly and under circumstances so painful that the memory of it was etched not only indelibly upon his own mind, but in the memory of others as well. Her appendix had burst. Because of the distance one had to travel

to a doctor, and because the element of time was crucial—a combination of circumstances so unfavorable as to make the situation almost hopeless—it had not been possible to save her. Ralph had hitched the horse to the wagon, and had carried her in her agony to a great pile of blankets he had hastily arranged in the back of his buckboard.

On that day I had been outside hoeing in the tomato patch. I heard her screams first, and then the wagon and horse clattering down the road. Mother and Bill had heard and had come running around the house to the garden. Through the pine trees we looked down upon the road and saw Ralph sitting on the box, his face



ashen white, urging the horse on toward Placerville at a gallop. Mrs. Johnson lay in the back of the buckboard clutching the blankets—as though by seizing them and hanging on to them she might somehow keep hold of life itself. Her screams swelled up through the pine trees, piercing the air, and she rocked back and forth as though locked in a fierce struggle.

We were silent. It was as though we were listening to a warning siren. Finally the buckboard disappeared around the curve of the road and was lost to sight, but we could still hear her screams, and then later, after we had looked at one another, only the sighing of the wind in the trees. We learned later that she had died in the buckboard on the grade down to Placerville.

Sometimes when in adversity, when the work is not going well, or when there is too much of it to do, giving way temporarily to despair, I have heard her screams from some corner of my memory, like an echo.

"You want to sit in on the game, Tom?" Clara asked, her face impassive, like an old oak tree.

"After a bit," I said. "George and I plan to do some trading." Clara had the white ball in her beefy hand, and gave it a smart spin around the rim of the wheel.

I felt my pocket again to reassure myself it was still there, to know tangibly the secret of its presence, known only to myself.

Paul turned to me, watching me out of one corner of his eye. At 30, he was only six years older than myself, but I noticed that his beard had begun to show faint traces of gray around his mouth. "Bob Crocker up on Whalen Creek was in early this morning and did some trading. He'd

caught a nice string of rainbow. He traded them to George for some scrip. Trout won't keep too long, so George will have to trade them right out before they go sour." The ball had dropped into the wheel and bobbing about like a cork.

"The trout are down at the spring, all dressed and salted down in madrone leaves. They'll keep there; we'll trade them out before the day is gone," Clara said. She swept a hand over the layout, retrieving the bets, pointing a finger at number 11. "No winners," she announced.

"Anyone been down to Placerville lately?" I asked.

"There was another big slide on the

grade just this side of the river," Paul answered. "You can get through on a horse all right, but it's a tricky business with a team and wagon. Too narrow in some places. Some of the folks down at Kelsey try and keep it open, but they don't have much to work with, and they can't always spare horses for working on the road."

George had come inside from the porch. "I got your peaches, and your packing cases are in the buckboard." He walked behind the counter and started figuring on a piece of paper.

"How much is the honey?" I asked, moving it to one side of the counter.

"It's \$3.50 a pint. Hard to keep in stock. There's a lot of call for it. John Ferguson is the only one around here knows anything about bees; this stock he brought in won't last long." He was explaining to me the law of supply and demand in his own way, in the provincial sense, with a knowledge gained naturally and easily through experience.

"We need the honey. I'll take it." Mother had particularly emphasized I was to get the honey today.

"Do you need anything else?" he asked. "Do you have any scrip?"

I fingered the secret object in my pocket again, wondering if this was the proper time to produce it. "We have some scrip over at the place, but I didn't bring any of it with me."

"I could advance you some scrip against some of your almond crop. I can always use almonds in the store. How does your crop look?" Again the inquiring look and I could tell that his calculations had shifted to almonds.

"The trees came through the frost all right. Good blossoms this year, and a nice

crop shaping up on the trees. I'll check with Bill, but I'm sure we can let you have at least one hundred pounds this year." I had now decided to reveal my secret, to confirm its reality.

"I could let you have \$50.00 in scrip for one hundred pounds," he said. "You folks have nice almond trees at your place. I'd have to get them from you already husked, of course."

He had started printing his own scrip about seven years ago. He had found an old hand press in Placerville along with four cases of ancient foundry type, some ink and paper, and other accessories. It was only a small press, cast of solid iron. It was operated manually on the leverage principle and was purely functional. Fisher had appreciated that functional aspect at once and had got the knack of operating it quickly, again that practical streak in his character. He had issued his first scrip on small cards and in a series of denominations. The smallest value was \$1.00 and the largest \$50.00. Otherwise, they were all uniform in appearance:

FISHER'S STORE
Bear Creek, California

Will Pay to the Bearer on Demand
One Dollar
In Groceries or General Trade

George F. Fisher

He personally signed each piece, and sometimes he wrote the date at the bottom underneath his signature. The scrip served a dual purpose: it could be used by the bearer to purchase goods from the store, and Fisher himself used it to buy goods for his stock. He carefully kept a ledger to account for the amount of scrip outstanding, how much he had issued, and how much was invested in inventory at any given time.

"I don't think I'll borrow any scrip against the almond crop," I told him, reaching into my pocket. "I have something else here you might be interested in trading for. Something I found the other day." I watched his brow lift in anticipation as I pulled my hand from my pocket and placed the coin on the counter.

"Where in the world did you find it? You sure don't see these anymore. I don't think I've seen one now for ten years." He picked up the coin and inspected it carefully, turning it over in his fingers. "And in nice condition, too." He turned around and took an old book from one of the shelves.

"I was putting in some peach seedlings down by Dry Creek the other day, and while digging a hole to plant one, I turned it up with a spade of earth. I wasn't sure of what it was at first. But it polished up nicely, didn't it?"

He was looking in an old coin book, seeking to identify the coin. "You know your place over there is right on the site of the old mining camp of American Flat. It was quite a place back in 1850, during the days of the gold rush. I read about it once years ago in a copy of the county history. In those days there were several stores there, a gambling tent, a hotel, a blacksmith shop, an express office, and hundreds of placer claims along Dry Creek. Been nothing like a town there now for well over a hundred years, just ranches and pasture land. I read somewhere that when the placer claims petered out the miners all left and went down to Spanish Flat. Lord, that was a long time ago."

"The date on the coin is 1848," I said.

"So it is," he replied, looking at it closely, then up at me. "It's gold, you know."

"Yes, a ten dollar Liberty."

He was leaning over his book, chin in hand, and seemed lost in the study of calculations. "This book here says it contains .48375 pure troy ounce of gold, not quite half an ounce. You understand I can't pay you anything for the rarity of the coin. Not many people these days can afford to indulge in that sort of thing. But I'll buy it for its gold content. I'm paying \$300.00 an ounce for gold now, and I'll give you \$145.00 in scrip, good against anything I have in stock."

"All right," I said, "I need some shotgun shells, .12 gauge, if you have any."

"I have a few, but they come high. Impossible to get, you understand." He turned toward the roulette table. "I want Clara to see this," he said, motioning to her. "Clara, come over here and see what Tom has brought."

Clara removed her eyeshade, smoothed her hair, and the gesture was distinctly feminine. Ralph and Paul followed her over to the counter. I wondered what each of them in turn might be thinking as they looked at the coin, of how each person's thoughts might interpret and respond in different ways, evoking the personal reality of dissimilar and singular experience. Against the patina of the old wooden counter the coin kept a reality of its own: hard, independent, unique in its lustre.

"Good for you, Tom," Clara said.

"You lucky devil," Paul said, smiling.

Ralph nodded his approval.

I picked up the coin and handed it to George, watching every gesture of the exchange, seeing it in slow motion, taking note of the precise moment, and the significance of it, when the coin left my fingers and rested in the palm of his hand.

"He found it over at his place, at the site of the old mining camp, a place called American Flat," George said, looking at me for confirmation.

"That's right," I answered. But my mind was turning to the more distant past, to another contemplation, of something once chanced upon in a moment of exploration, of an image once glimpsed that had for me become a part of memory, and more.

"You'll have to try that famous luck of yours at the wheel," Clara said.

"I intend to," I said. "George is going to get me some shotgun shells, and then I want to look around the store. I'll be over directly." I followed George into a room in the back of the store. He opened a heavy iron box with a large key, counted out my scrip for me, and deposited the coin inside the box.

"Will one box of shells do?" he asked.

"I have a few boxes here, but I prefer to ration them out. You don't use them for rabbits and quail, do you? That would be a waste. You can get small game with a snare."

"I use a snare for rabbits, traps for quail. I only use shells for deer. Give me buckshot, if you have it."

"All right. We'll settle up the bill later when you get the rest of the things you want."

I put the box of shells on the counter beside the honey. Then I walked down the aisle, dodging grain sacks, looking at the canned foods on the shelves. Mrs. Jameson had brought in about thirty jars of her cucumber pickles since my last visit. Mrs. Benson had traded some of her canned tomatoes: her brand was distinctive because she always put in some green pepper and onion for extra flavoring. We never traded for home canning. It was scrip wasted, Mother said, because every summer we had a large garden, "and you know that Fern and I always put up all the canning we need every year." Then I looked at some artificial trout flies tied by Leroy Samuels of Kelsey. He had mounted different assortments on cards, and I chose one with Royal Coachman, Black Gnat, and Mayflies, putting it in my shirt pocket.

Then I walked over to the roulette table. Ralph and Paul were still playing the numbers. Clara watched the layout to see where I would place my bet. I put \$2.00 in scrip on the black. Clara spun the wheel and the black came up. "You lucky devil," Paul said, "I bet you could win if you played with wooden nickels."

"No wooden nickels allowed in this game," Clara said, paying my bet. The mention of wooden nickels had reminded her of something. "Some man came in here out of the blue last week with some of the old paper money and wanted to play. I wouldn't let him. Told him that old paper money was no good, as if he didn't know. He was sizing me up for some kind of sucker, I guess. Then he said he wanted to trade for some of our scrip."

"What did he have to trade?" Ralph asked.

"Nothing but old paper," she answered. "He had an old Treasury Note, and said we could have it at a deep discount. I told him it wasn't worth the paper it was printed on, and did he take me for a damned fool? He had walked all the way up here from Coloma in the hot sun. I let him have a drink of water out at the pump. But that's all he got here."

"Do you still see much of that old paper money anymore?" Ralph continued.

"Not very much." She was turning the little white ball over in her fingers. "A while back a man came in here with some old stock certificates on Great Western Energy Resources. Had about 2,000 shares. Said he'd take whatever we'd give him for them. I told him no, you see. That company went bankrupt years ago." She made ready to spin the wheel. "Now and then we get a silver dollar. Some people saved them in the old days. We get silver halves and quarters now and then; they're good. George trades them with the other stores for hard-to-get goods."

I put some scrip on the black again.

"Guess you folks were smart enough not to get stuck with much of that old paper," Ralph said.

"We got stuck like everyone else," Clara answered, a note of annoyance coming into her voice. "About a year after the panic some slicker walked in here and unloaded a lot of worthless bonds on George. Some debenture notes on Consolidated Coastal Electric, which was going belly-up at the time, only George didn't know about it. The slicker got away with a wagonload of goods, I tell you. We still got those damned bonds back in the office." She checked the bets and spun the wheel.

"That's been a mighty long time ago," Ralph reflected, watching the bouncing ball.

"Yes," she said, "a long time ago." The ball landed in number 11, black. "You win again, Tom," she said, pushing scrip toward me.

Paul stood up. "That's all for me today," he said. I've got to start back down the hill. Got to get home and milk the cows."

Ralph stood up, stretching his legs. "I've got to be on my way, too," and he waved his ancient straw hat in a gesture of goodbye.

"How much for the trout down at the spring?" I asked Clara.

"One dollar each. Six dollars for the lot." She removed the eyeshade and hung it on a brass hook on the wall.

"I'll take them."

"You can pay George for them. I'll go down to the spring and get them and put them under the box in your buckboard."

She walked heavily toward the door, smoothing her dress over her hips as she walked.

My thoughts returned again to that image in my mind, of something once discovered and since contemplated, of an impression so indelible as to have fastened itself upon my memory in a visual way. I thought of it as my own personal discovery, though at the particular moment of discovery it had been in Fishers' Store for a long time, neglected and seemingly forgotten. I had happened upon it one day almost by chance in the untidy storeroom while searching for some object of utility, and my first response on seeing it had been one of astonishment. As I had studied it more carefully my astonishment turned to wonder. To have discovered it in those circumstances, surrounded by broken and discarded objects, was amazing in itself.

I walked over to the counter and said to George: "Do you still have those oil paintings by Isabel Blackstone?"

He looked thoughtful for a moment. "You mean that roll of canvases?"

I nodded.

"I think they're on an overhead shelf in the storeroom. You want to see them?"

"Yes," I said, and followed him.

In a corner of the storeroom, near a window covered with dust, I looked up to the overhead shelf and saw the roll of canvases. They were in the same place I had last seen them. He handed the roll to me.

"Sure was too bad about Miss Blackstone," George reflected, looking absently at an old discolored calendar on the wall that had been issued years earlier as a souvenir of the national bicentennial. "You know she came up here to this country about two years before the panic. Came up here to paint, from somewhere around San Francisco. She had quite a reputation down there as an artist. She moved into that little cabin down on Bear Creek near the old Carson place. Wasn't much of a place but she fixed it up nice. Bought a wood stove from me that first winter she was here. After about six months, when things got bad, she didn't sell much of her work anymore. So she put in a large garden, like most folks did. She hung on for a couple of years, doing for herself, and painting when she could. One day she came in here with that roll of canvases and said she wanted to trade them for scrip. Well, you understand, I never did know anything about art. Clara was against giving any scrip on them at first. Not practical, she said. People needed practical things in order to hang on. But when Clara had a little time to think about it, she gave in and said it would be all right, just one time. So I took in this roll here. I've never sold any of them. So I just put them away in here.

Nobody ever looked at them but you, Tom."

I unrolled the sheaf of canvases, which were about three by four, and leafed through them, looking for the special one. George went on talking:

"Next time she came in the store I swear she had lost twenty pounds—sort of withering away, Clara said—and she no longer had that quickness about her eyes, but looked tired. She wanted to trade her books, all of her art books, for scrip," he said, pointing to several shelves of books underneath the window. "I haven't sold any of them, either. Maybe you'd be interested in those books, Tom. I'd make you a good deal on them." He took off his spectacles and polished them with an old red handkerchief. "Well, anyway, it wasn't long after that they found her down at her cabin, frozen to death. Had four feet of snow on the ground then, a terrible winter. She'd run out of firewood. Had even burned up some of her furniture in the wood stove trying to keep warm. When they found her she was wrapped in blankets and rugs, and they were all frozen so stiff they couldn't get them off her. They had to build a fire in the stove and let those blankets and rugs thaw out before they could unwrap her. The ground was frozen solid for three weeks. When they buried her they had to dig her grave with a pickaxe, the ground was so hard and frozen. Most people figured she had too much pride to ask for help. She was a proud woman; didn't want to be a bother to anyone. I would have taken her some wood. Other folks would have, too." He seemed to be considering his words, as though a hidden significance lay in them.

I turned up another canvas and there it was. There was in the contemplation of it as in the experience of life the fascination and excitement of discovery, and joy. "Oh God," I said, "how beautiful it is!" I said this not to God, not to George, not even to myself; it was exclamatory, involuntary.

George stared at me. He moved his lips but no words came out. It occurred to me then he might be offended because I had not commented on his story, and that perhaps he thought I had not been listening at all.

"I want it," I said. "How much?"

"Is \$10.00 all right?"

We settled the bill then; I paid him for everything I had bought. Then I rolled up the canvas and tied it with a piece of string.

"I can let you have those art books cheap," he repeated, glancing at the canvas tucked under my arm. His eyes settled on my face again and he squinted, looking for something. He was almost staring.

"I'll give you \$25.00 for the lot," I told

him.

"All right," he agreed. I paid him. "You want me to help you load them into your buckboard?"

"No, I'll get them next time I come over. You can hold them for me." I knew my family at home would think the painting I had bought a luxury. I intended to counter any criticism of it with the trout I would take back for dinner tonight, a kind of compensation for my extravagance. But I could not very well take home a buckboard full of art books on the same day.

"Sure," George replied, "they'll be here when you want them," and from his expression I knew he had guessed my motive.

Clara was outside, washing fresh vegetables at the hand pump. I put the shotgun shells and the rolled up canvas into the buckboard, underneath the box. George handed me the jar of honey. "Tell your folks hello," he said, and untied the mule from the rail.

I drove the buckboard out to the road looking over the mule's ears again, pointed toward home. The gentle rocking motion of the wagon down the grade brought over me a kind of reverie and my thoughts turned back to George and Clara. I remembered a story my brother Bill had told me about them, an incident that had happened two years after the panic. When the stores around the county had begun to issue their own scrip a county government already in its terminal stages had made a feeble effort to impose and collect a tax. One day a tax collector had appeared at Fishers' Store. He had come up from Placerville, riding a mule. He wore an old black suit, shiny and threadbare, with a deputy's badge pinned to his coat lapel. Brushing the dust from his clothes, he explained to George the purpose of his visit. The county was going to levy a gross tax on income, payable in store scrip, as the county had certain outstanding fiscal obligations that had to be met.

"We can't pay in county bonds or in the old money," the collector explained, "because the county can't sell its bonds anymore and the old money won't circulate. Besides the old obligations due, the county needs funds for current expenses, too," he continued. Then he paused, studying George, as though measuring him. "The federal government is no better off, you know. Their bonds won't sell or trade, either way."

Clara stood off to one side polishing the roulette table, listening carefully.

The collector went on to say that the county had no legal or moral objections to scrip circulating as money but that it had to be taxed. Then he motioned toward the roulette table, and his voice seemed to take on a more aggressive tone.

"We're requiring all the stores with game of chance to buy a gambling license now for a flat fee of \$100.00. We don't care what type of game you run or what you make on it, but you have to get a license to legally operate that game." He paused to let his words have their effect. He stood beside the counter, looking expansively around the store.

George had already considered whether there might be a practical side to it, his first response to any problem, and had decided it was impossible. As the collector had spoken, George had simply stared at the floor between his feet, that squint on his face, formulating his reply, summoning up the evidence of opinion and judgment, the stock-in-trade of the trader. But his silence and his inscrutability annoyed the collector, who was waiting impatiently for some response.

Finally George spoke: "The way I see it, the panic was caused by too much debt with no real backing for the old money. The backing was only a promise. And you can't force people to believe a promise. When the bankruptcies came and practically everything went belly-up, people had to learn to do for themselves. My scrip is good because it can be traded for goods in my store," and he waved his arm at the shelves, "and people know it has all this backing behind it, not debt. Now you walk in here and want to take my property; that's what it amounts to, that's what it finally comes down to, and without any fair exchange. That's the way I see it."

Clara had moved from the roulette table and was standing at the other end of the counter, dusting the shelves. The collector moved to interrupt George, his jaw tensed and his eyes narrowing.

But before he could speak George held a palm up, extended toward him. "One more thing," George went on, "that gets to the bottom of this whole thing: when a paper money has no real backing behind it, you can make all of it you like, on nothing more than whim. But when there is real backing behind it you can't multiply it at whim, because if you do you have to produce more of the goods or value to back it with, and those values and goods, as well as the paper money, are rightly a measure of wealth produced. But you can't multiply value or goods by whim. Do you see?"

The collector fixed George with his eyes: there was a menacing attitude about him now. "I didn't come all the way up here to talk about the damned past," and he reached into his hip pocket and produced a huge padlock, the tangible threat, and said he had the authority to padlock any store in the county that refused to cooperate. "You can't argue against the necessity of preserving local government in times like these," and there was the

ring of a challenge in his voice.

Clara had moved quietly behind the counter, leaned over, and emerged a moment later with a shotgun cradled in her arms, leveled directly at his belly. "Now I won't argue with you about it," she said, and it was spoken almost casually, incongruously. "I have my own views and I doubt if you would understand them. This is our store and no one has any claim on it. I'll say this to you just one time, and one time only: get out!" She raised the shotgun to shoulder level.

The collector looked blankly at George. "You'd better go," George said, his face impassive.

The collector walked out to the porch, looking behind him, Clara following. Swinging himself up on the mule's back, he recovered himself momentarily and glared at her, enraged at what he considered an intolerable insult to his authority. "You can't do this to me. I'll be back, damn you," he fairly hissed at her. And his parting words, as he gave the mule a vicious kick, were: "To hell with both of you!"

Clara then raised the shotgun over his head, into the trees, and fired both barrels. The terrified mule flattened its ears against its head and disappeared down the road, the collector hanging on desperately. He never came back.

* * *

I was almost home. I could see my brother Bill down the hill splitting wood as I drove in with the buckboard. Fern was with him, stacking and cording wood. Last week we had cut down two large sugar pines and three oak trees; now the wood had to be split for the fireplace and stoves. If we were to have a cold winter we would need at least eight cord. I unhitched the mule and turned her out to pasture. I waved hello to Bill and Fern and unloaded the buckboard.

Mother was in the kitchen washing and boiling jars, getting ready for the canning. "Did you get the honey?" she asked, a hint of anxiety in her voice. I knew she planned on using it when she cooked the peach preserves. A lock of gray hair had fallen over her cheek, deep lines creased her face, and she looked tired. She wiped her hands on her apron.

"Here it is." I handed it to her. Her face relaxed some. Then I handed her the trout, still cool and wrapped in the madrone leaves.

She smiled when she saw them. "Oh, these are nice. We'll have them for dinner tonight. Were they expensive?"

"No," I said. "I paid for them with my own scrip." I had the rolled up canvas under my arm and I could see her glancing at it.

"You left the peaches with Mr. Fish-

er?" She saw the card of trout flies in my shirt pocket and I could tell she approved of them. "You must have traded that coin you found the other day. What else did you get?"

"Ralph Johnson said he would like to trade us for some peaches. He wants to make some brandy," I said first, and she nodded in reply. "What else did I get? I got a painting for myself," putting a subtle emphasis on *myself*, "and some shotgun shells. The painting is one that Isabel Blackstone did. She sold some to George several years ago."

She did not reply, but neither was there any indication that she disapproved. "Don't forget you have to help Bill with the hand pumping at the well today. The water tank is nearly empty. You have to irrigate the peach seedlings, too." She was reminding me of my chores, the everlasting chores.

"I know, Mother. Don't fret about it. I'll get it done. I'm going to my room for a minute, then I'll go down and water the seedlings." She had arranged the trout on a large white platter beside the kitchen sink. They reminded me of an exquisite still-life, catching the reflected sunlight from the window, the subtle tones and shading of colors.

I went into my room. I put the card of trout flies on top of one of the bookcases. Then I unrolled the canvas and spread it out on the table, bending over to look more carefully. In the margin of the canvas Isabel Blackstone had written, in a hand once motivated by an intensely personal insight, a hand later to be stilled forever by a fatal coldness, the title of the picture, simply the word, *Money*. The background of the picture was an abstraction of space with no points of reference or perspective. Everything of interest was in the foreground, looming large and compelling. The picture showed two hands, exquisitely done in every detail of gesture, one giving and the other receiving a gold coin. That was all. It conveyed the whole feeling, meaning and drama of money, representing the practical demonstration of an ideal, and of its symbol, subtly and simply expressed.

I stood quietly for a moment, aware only of the picture before me and my thoughts. Then I heard the sounds of the other world: Mother was in the kitchen fussing with the canning jars, and from outside down the hill, the sound of the ax where Bill was splitting wood. I turned and and looked once more at the picture and then I opened the door and went outside to do my chores. □



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SAKHAROV AND SOLZHENITSYN

In an era notable for its lack of heroes, it is inspiring to witness the example of Andrei Sakharov and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. In the face of a new wave of Stalinist repression, both have steadfastly refused to recant. On the contrary, with each passing day they seem to grow bolder in asserting fundamental human rights.

In the final week of August, each held a press conference with Western reporters. Both have strongly urged the U.S. Congress not to reduce tariffs on Soviet goods until the Soviet government permits free emigration. Solzhenitsyn has boldly announced that despite death threats from the KGB, he will go on publishing his works abroad. And he announced the existence of an underground plan that, in the event of his death, would release his major, unpublished works all over the world. Further, he announced that he will remain living in Moscow, without government permission.

Sakharov, a leading Soviet physicist, one of the founders of the Committee for Human Rights, has been taking an increasingly activist role. Last December 5th he took the place of imprisoned dissident Pyotr Yakir in leading the annual protest against loss of the rights guaranteed in the Soviet constitution. In August, following an interview with a Swedish radio correspondent, Sakharov was warned by Soviet first deputy prosecutor Malyarov to cease his activism. Sakharov memorized the conversation and sent a transcript to the *NEW YORK TIMES*! Then, like Solzhenitsyn, he invited newsmen to his apartment for a press conference.

For once, the response from the West has been something to be proud of. Especially impressive was the forthright, uncompromising stand taken by Philip Handler, president of the National Academy of Sciences. In a cable to the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Handler warned that planned binational scientific projects could not take place if Sakharov were harassed any further. In an interview, Handler said it was his "very real belief" that American scientists would refuse to take part in joint projects if the harassment continued. Nor was the NAS cable the only one; as early as last April the American Physical Society had sent an "unprecedented" letter to the Soviet

Academy protesting Soviet restrictions on emigration as a "barrier to the free flow of science and scientists."

Temporarily, at least, the protests seemed to have had an effect. For the first time in years the Soviets stopped jamming Western radio broadcasts, and the press campaign against Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn was halted. The Soviet reaction seemed to indicate the urgency of that government's interest in expanded trade and scientific exchanges with the United States. I don't wish to argue here the issue of whether the U.S. government is justified in not reducing tariffs on Soviet goods, unless free emigration is permitted. Instead, I want to focus on some of the implications of the Sakharov/Solzhenitsyn affair.

The most important lessons concern the renewed illustrations of the essential link between personal "civil" liberty and economic liberty. Advocates of government sponsorship, government control, or nationalization have yet to learn the lessons made so plain by the Soviet dissidents:

• Government control of the media:

In the Soviet version of public ownership of the media, the State owns the pringing presses, paper, ink, etc. Only the use of clandestine typewriters and carbon paper permitted the now-defunct *CHRONICLE OF CURRENT EVENTS* to report the truth for a few years. Freedom of the press is meaningless without the freedom of individuals to own the means of printing and publishing.

• **Government control of the arts:** In the Soviet bloc only writers and composers who belong to State-controlled unions are allowed to publish. Solzhenitsyn was expelled in 1969, and the expulsion of political dissidents (Amalrik, Maximov, etc.) continues to this day. There are advantages, of course, to shutting up and mouthing the Party line, such as a guaranteed job (no worries about "Will it sell?"). Among those joining in the published attacks on Sakharov were 12 Soviet composers, including Dmitri Shostakovich and Aram Khachaturian. The naive American supporters of the National Endowment for the Arts mouth platitudes about the independence of their subsidies from political control. As the subsidy total continues to double and triple each year, can anyone seriously believe that political factors *won't* (or don't already) affect the choice of who gets supported? Would Congress any more readily support "anti-American" artists than the USSR would support "anti-Soviet" writers and composers?

• Government control of science and education:

"To be a Soviet scientist means to be a Soviet patriot—there is no other way," states *PRAVDA*. The same argument that applies to artists also applies to other professions, such as science: he who pays the piper calls the tune. Yet it is precisely in science where the need for freedom—and for truth—conflicts most disastrously with State control. The decades of Lysenkoism bear witness to this sad lesson. Yet in America the proponents of science

