Zen
AND THE ART OF
Motorcycle
Maintenance

robert m. pirsig

Zen AND THE ART OF Motorcycle Maintenance

An Inquiry into Values

HARPERPERENNIAL MODERNCLASSICS

HARPERPERENNIAL MODERNCLASSICS

Special thanks should go to Stuart Cohen, who provided an office to write it in, and Mrs. Abigail Kenyon, for critical help with the early chapters.

Letters and interview responses used by permission of Robert M. Pirsig.

Letters and documents used by permission of James D. Landis and William Morrow and Company, Inc.

P.S.™ is a trademark of HarperCollins Publishers.

First Quill edition published 1999.

First Harper Perennial Modern Classics edition published 2005.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available upon request.

ISBN-10: 0-06-083987-2
ISBN-13: 978-0-06-083987-1

05 06 07 08 09 ❖/RRD 10 9 8 7 6 5 4

For my family

1

I can see by my watch, without taking my hand from the left grip of the cycle, that it is eight-thirty in the morning. The wind, even at sixty miles an hour, is warm and humid. When it's this hot and muggy at eight-thirty, I'm wondering what it's going to be like in the afternoon.

In the wind are pungent odors from the marshes by the road. We are in an area of the Central Plains filled with thousands of duck hunting sloughs, heading northwest from Minneapolis toward the Dakotas. This highway is an old concrete two-laner that hasn't had much traffic since a four-laner went in parallel to it several years ago. When we pass a marsh the air suddenly becomes cooler. Then, when we are past, it suddenly warms up again.

I'm happy to be riding back into this country. It is a kind of nowhere, famous for nothing at all and has an appeal because of just that. Tensions disappear along old roads like this. We bump along the beat-up concrete between the cattails and stretches of meadow and then more cattails and marsh grass. Here and there is a stretch of open water and if you look closely you can see wild ducks at the edge of the cattails. And turtles. . . . There's a red-winged blackbird.

I whack Chris's knee and point to it.

"What!" he hollers.

"Blackbird!"

He says something I don't hear. "What?" I holler back.

He grabs the back of my helmet and hollers up, "I've seen *lots* o those, Dad!"

"Oh!" I holler back. Then I nod. At age eleven you don't ge very impressed with red-winged blackbirds.

You have to get older for that. For me this is all mixed with memories that he doesn't have. Cold mornings long ago when the marsh grass had turned brown and cattails were waving in the northwest wind. The pungent smell then was from muck stirred up by hip boots while we were getting in position for the sun to come up and the duck season to open. Or winters when the sloughs were frozen over and dead and I could walk across the ice and snow between the dead cattails and see nothing but grey skies and dead things and cold. The blackbirds were gone then. But now in July they're back and everything is at its alivest and every foot of these sloughs is humming and cricking and buzzing and chirping, a whole community of millions of living things living out their lives in a kind of benign continuum.

You see things vacationing on a motorcycle in a way that is completely different from any other. In a car you're always in a compartment, and because you're used to it you don't realize that through that car window everything you see is just more TV. You're a passive observer and it is all moving by you boringly in a frame.

On a cycle the frame is gone. You're completely in contact with it all. You're *in* the scene, not just watching it anymore, and the sense of presence is overwhelming. That concrete whizzing by five inches below your foot is the real thing, the same stuff you walk on, it's right there, so blurred you can't focus on it, yet you can put your foot down and touch it anytime, and the whole thing, the whole experience, is never removed from immediate consciousness.

Chris and I are traveling to Montana with some friends riding up ahead, and maybe headed farther than that. Plans are deliberately

indefinite, more to travel than to arrive anywhere. We are just vacationing. Secondary roads are preferred. Paved county roads are the best, state highways are next. Freeways are the worst. We want to make good time, but for us now this is measured with emphasis on "good" rather than "time" and when you make that shift in emphasis the whole approach changes. Twisting hilly roads are long in terms of seconds but are much more enjoyable on a cycle where you bank into turns and don't get swung from side to side in any compartment. Roads with little traffic are more enjoyable, as well as safer. Roads free of drive-ins and billboards are better, roads where groves and meadows and orchards and lawns come almost to the shoulder, where kids wave to you when you ride by, where people look from their porches to see who it is, where when you stop to ask directions or information the answer tends to be longer than you want rather than short, where people ask where you're from and how long you've been riding.

It was some years ago that my wife and I and our friends first began to catch on to these roads. We took them once in a while for variety or for a shortcut to another main highway, and each time the scenery was grand and we left the road with a feeling of relaxation and enjoyment. We did this time after time before realizing what should have been obvious: these roads are truly different from the main ones. The whole pace of life and personality of the people who live along them are different. They're not going anywhere. They're not too busy to be courteous. The hereness and nowness of things is something they know all about. It's the others, the ones who moved to the cities years ago and their lost offspring, who have all but forgotten it. The discovery was a real find.

I've wondered why it took us so long to catch on. We saw it and yet we didn't see it. Or rather we were trained *not* to see it. Conned, perhaps, into thinking that the real action was metropolitan and all this was just boring hinterland. It was a puzzling thing. The truth knocks on the door and you say, "Go away, I'm looking for the truth," and so it goes away. Puzzling.

But once we caught on, of course, nothing could keep us off

these roads, weekends, evenings, vacations. We have become re secondary-road motorcycle buffs and found there are things you lea as you go.

We have learned how to spot the good ones on a map, for exam ple. If the line wiggles, that's good. That means hills. If it appears t be the main route from a town to a city, that's bad. The best one always connect nowhere with nowhere and have an alternate that ge you there quicker. If you are going northeast from a large town yo never go straight out of town for any long distance. You go out an then start jogging north, then east, then north again, and soon yo are on a secondary route that only the local people use.

The main skill is to keep from getting lost. Since the roads ar used only by local people who know them by sight nobody complain if the junctions aren't posted. And often they aren't. When they ar it's usually a small sign hiding unobtrusively in the weeds and that' all. County road-sign makers seldom tell you twice. If you miss tha sign in the weeds that's *your* problem, not theirs. Moreover, you dis cover that the highway maps are often inaccurate about county roads And from time to time you find your "county road" takes you onto two-rutter and then a single rutter and then into a pasture and stops or else it takes you into some farmer's backyard.

So we navigate mostly by dead reckoning, and deduction from what clues we find. I keep a compass in one pocket for overcast days when the sun doesn't show directions and have the map mounted in a special carrier on top of the gas tank where I can keep track of miles from the last junction and know what to look for. With those tools and a lack of pressure to "get somewhere" it works out fine and we just about have America all to ourselves.

On Labor Day and Memorial Day weekends we travel for miles on these roads without seeing another vehicle, then cross a federal highway and look at cars strung bumper to bumper to the horizon. Scowling faces inside. Kids crying in the back seat. I keep wishing there were some way to tell them something but they scowl and appear to be in a hurry, and there isn't. . . .

I have seen these marshes a thousand times, yet each time they're new. It's wrong to call them benign. You could just as well call them cruel and senseless, they are all of those things, but the *reality* of them overwhelms halfway conceptions. There! A huge flock of red-winged blackbirds ascends from nests in the cattails, startled by our sound. I swat Chris's knee a second time . . . then I remember he has seen them before.

"What?" he hollers again.

"Nothing."

"Well, *what*?"

"Just checking to see if you're still there," I holler, and nothing more is said.

Unless you're fond of hollering you don't make great conversations on a running cycle. Instead you spend your time being aware of things and meditating on them. On sights and sounds, on the mood of the weather and things remembered, on the machine and the countryside you're in, thinking about things at great leisure and length without being hurried and without feeling you're losing time.

What I would like to do is use the time that is coming now to talk about some things that have come to mind. We're in such a hurry most of the time we never get much chance to talk. The result is a kind of endless day-to-day shallowness, a monotony that leaves a person wondering years later where all the time went and sorry that it's all gone. Now that we do have some time, and know it, I would like to use the time to talk in some depth about things that seem important.

What is in mind is a sort of Chautauqua—that's the only name I can think of for it—like the traveling tent-show Chautauquas that used to move across America, *this* America, the one that we are now in, an old-time series of popular talks intended to edify and entertain, improve the mind and bring culture and enlightenment to the ears and thoughts of the hearer. The Chautauquas were pushed aside by faster-paced radio, movies and TV, and it seems to me the change was not entirely an improvement. Perhaps because of these changes the stream of national consciousness moves faster now, and is broader,

but it seems to run less deep. The old channels cannot contain it a in its search for new ones there seems to be growing havoc a destruction along its banks. In this Chautauqua I would like not cut any new channels of consciousness but simply dig deeper into ones that have become silted in with the debris of thoughts gro stale and platitudes too often repeated. "What's new?" is an intere ing and broadening eternal question, but one which, if pursued exc sively, results only in an endless parade of trivia and fashion, the silt tomorrow. I would like, instead, to be concerned with the questi "What is best?," a question which cuts deeply rather than broadly question whose answers tend to move the silt downstream. There eras of human history in which the channels of thought have been t deeply cut and no change was possible, and nothing new ever ha pened, and "best" was a matter of dogma, but that is not the situati now. Now the stream of our common consciousness seems to obliterating its own banks, losing its central direction and purpo flooding the lowlands, disconnecting and isolating the highlands a to no particular purpose other than the wasteful fulfillment of its ov internal momentum. Some channel deepending seems called for.

Up ahead the other riders, John Sutherland and his wife, Sylvia, ha pulled into a roadside picnic area. It's time to stretch. As I pull r machine beside them Sylvia is taking her helmet off and shaking h hair loose, while John puts his BMW up on the stand. Nothing is sai We have been on so many trips together we know from a glance ho one another feels. Right now we are just quiet and looking around.

The picnic benches are abandoned at this hour of the mornin We have the whole place to ourselves. John goes across the grass to cast-iron pump and starts pumping water to drink. Chris wande down through some trees beyond a grassy knoll to a small stream. am just staring around.

After a while Sylvia sits down on the wooden picnic bench an straightens out her legs, lifting one at a time slowly without lookir

up. Long silences mean gloom for her, and I comment on it. She looks up and then looks down again.

"It was all those people in the cars coming the other way," she says. "The first one looked so sad. And then the next one looked exactly the same way, and then the next one and the next one, they were all the same."

"They were just commuting to work."

She perceives well but there was nothing unnatural about it. "Well, you know, *work*," I repeat. "Monday morning. Half asleep. Who goes to work Monday morning with a grin?"

"It's just that they looked so *lost*," she says. "Like they were all dead. Like a funeral procession." Then she puts both feet down and leaves them there.

I see what she is saying, but logically it doesn't go anywhere. You work to live and that's what they are doing. "I was watching swamps," I say.

After a while she looks up and says, "What did you see?"

"There was a whole flock of red-winged blackbirds. They rose up suddenly when we went by."

"Oh."

"I was happy to see them again. They tie things together, thoughts and such. You know?"

She thinks for a while and then, with the trees behind her a deep green, she smiles. She understands a peculiar language which has nothing to do with what you are saying. A daughter.

"Yes," she says. "They're beautiful."

"Watch for them," I say.

"All right."

John appears and checks the gear on the cycle. He adjusts some of the ropes and then opens the saddlebag and starts rummaging through. He sets some things on the ground. "If you ever need any rope, don't hesitate," he says. "God, I think I've got about *five* times what I need here."

"Not yet," I answer.

"Matches?" he says, still rummaging. "Sunburn lotion, comb shoelaces . . . *shoelaces*? What do we need shoelaces for?"

"Let's not start *that*," Sylvia says. They look at each other dea pan and then both look over at me.

"Shoelaces can break anytime," I say solemnly. They smile, b not at each other.

Chris soon appears and it is time to go. While he gets ready a climbs on, they pull out and Sylvia waves. We are on the highw again, and I watch them gain distance up ahead.

The Chautauqua that is in mind for this trip was inspired by these tw many months ago and perhaps, although I don't know, is related to certain undercurrent of disharmony between them.

Disharmony I suppose is common enough in any marriage, b in their case it seems more tragic. To me, anyway.

It's not a personality clash between them; it's something else, t which neither is to blame, but for which neither has any solution, a for which I'm not sure I have any solution either, just ideas.

The ideas began with what seemed to be a minor difference opinion between John and me on a matter of small importance: ho much one should maintain one's own motorcycle. It seems natu and normal to me to make use of the small tool kits and instructi booklets supplied with each machine, and keep it tuned and adjust myself. John demurs. He prefers to let a competent mechanic ta care of these things so that they are done right. Neither viewpoint unusual, and this minor difference would never have become mag fied if we didn't spend so much time riding together and sitting country roadhouses drinking beer and talking about whatever com to mind. What comes to mind, usually, is whatever we've been thin ing about in the half hour or forty-five minutes since we last talked each other. When it's roads or weather or people or old memories what's in the newspapers, the conversation just naturally builds ple antly. But whenever the performance of the machine has been on t mind and gets into the conversation, the building stops. The conv

sation no longer moves forward. There is a silence and a break in the continuity. It is as though two old friends, a Catholic and Protestant, were sitting drinking beer, enjoying life, and the subject of birth control somehow came up. Big freeze-out.

And, of course, when you discover something like that it's like discovering a tooth with a missing filling. You can never leave it alone. You have to probe it, work around it, push on it, think about it, not because it's enjoyable but because it's on your mind and it won't get off your mind. And the more I probe and push on this subject of cycle maintenance the more irritated he gets, and of course that makes me want to probe and push all the more. Not deliberately to irritate him but because the irritation seems symptomatic of something deeper, something under the surface that isn't immediately apparent.

When you're talking birth control, what blocks it and freezes it out is that it's not a matter of more or fewer babies being argued. That's just on the surface. What's underneath is a conflict of faith, of faith in empirical social planning versus faith in the authority of God as revealed by the teachings of the Catholic Church. You can prove the practicality of planned parenthood till you get tired of listening to yourself and it's going to go nowhere because your antagonist isn't buying the assumption that anything socially practical is good per se. Goodness for him has other sources which he values as much as or more than social practicality.

So it is with John. I could preach the practical value and worth of motorcycle maintenance till I'm hoarse and it would make not a dent in him. After two sentences on the subject his eyes go completely glassy and he changes the conversation or just looks away. He doesn't want to hear about it.

Sylvia is completely with him on this one. In fact she is even more emphatic. "It's just a whole other thing," she says, when in a thoughtful mood. "Like garbage," she says, when not. They want *not* to understand it. Not to *hear* about it. And the more I try to fathom what makes me enjoy mechanical work and them hate it so, the more

elusive it becomes. The ultimate cause of this originally minor diffe ence of opinion appears to run way, way deep.

Inability on their part is ruled out immediately. They are bo plenty bright enough. Either one of them could learn to tune motorcycle in an hour and a half if they put their minds and energy it, and the saving in money and worry and delay would repay the over and over again for their effort. And they ***know*** that. Or mayb they don't. I don't know. I never confront them with the questio It's better to just get along.

But I remember once, outside a bar in Savage, Minnesota, on really scorching day when I just about let loose. We'd been in the b for about an hour and we came out and the machines were so hot yo could hardly get on them. I'm started and ready to go and there John pumping away on the kick starter. I smell gas like we're next a refinery and tell him so, thinking this is enough to let him know h engine's flooded.

"Yeah, I smell it too," he says and keeps on pumping. And h pumps and pumps and jumps and pumps and *I* don't know what mo to say. Finally, he's really winded and sweat's running down all ov his face and he can't pump anymore, and so I suggest taking out th plugs to dry them off and air out the cylinders while we go back f another beer.

Oh my God no! He doesn't want to get into all that stuff.

"All what stuff?"

"Oh, getting out the tools and all that stuff. There's no reas why it shouldn't start. It's a brand-new machine and I'm followi the instructions perfectly. See, it's right on full choke like they say."

"Full ***choke***!"

"That's what the instructions say."

"That's for when it's ***cold***!"

"Well, we've been in there for a half an hour at least," he says.

It kind of shakes me up. "This is a hot day, John," I say. "A they take longer than that to cool off even on a freezing day."

He scratches his head. "Well, why don't they tell you that in t

instructions?" He opens the choke and on the second kick it starts. "I guess that was it," he says cheerfully.

And the very next day we were out near the same area and it happened again. This time I was determined not to say a word, and when my wife urged me to go over and help him I shook my head. I told her that until he had a real felt need he was just going to resent help, so we went over and sat in the shade and waited.

I noticed he was being superpolite to Sylvia while he pumped away, meaning he was furious, and she was looking over with a kind of "Ye gods!" look. If he had asked any single question I would have been over in a second to diagnose it, but he wouldn't. It must have been fifteen minutes before he got it started.

Later we were drinking beer again over at Lake Minnetonka and everybody was talking around the table, but he was silent and I could see he was really tied up in knots inside. After all that time. Probably to get them untied he finally said, "You know . . . when it doesn't start like that it just . . . really turns me into a *monster* inside. I just get paranoic about it." This seemed to loosen him up, and he added, "They just had this *one* motorcycle, see? This *lemon*. And they didn't know what to do with it, whether to send it back to the factory or sell it for scrap or what . . . and then at the last moment they saw *me* coming. With eighteen hundred bucks in my pocket. And they knew their problems were over."

In a kind of singsong voice I repeated the plea for tuning and he tried hard to listen. He really tries hard sometimes. But then the block came again and he was off to the bar for another round for all of us and the subject was closed.

He is not stubborn, not narrow-minded, not lazy, not stupid. There was just no easy explanation. So it was left up in the air, a kind of mystery that one gives up on because there is no sense in just going round and round and round looking for an answer that's not there.

It occurred to me that maybe I was the odd one on the subject, but that was disposed of too. Most touring cyclists know how to keep their machines tuned. Car owners usually won't touch the engine, but

every town of any size at all has a garage with expensive lifts, spec tools and diagnostic equipment that the average owner can't affo And a car engine is more complex and inaccessible than a cycle engi so there's more sense to this. But for John's cycle, a BMW R60, I bet there's not a mechanic between here and Salt Lake City. If h points or plugs burn out, he's done for. I *know* he doesn't have a s of spare points with him. He doesn't know what points are. If it qu on him in western South Dakota or Montana I don't know what he going to do. Sell it to the Indians maybe. Right now I know wh he's doing. He's carefully avoiding giving any thought whatsoever the subject. The BMW is famous for not giving mechanical problem on the road and that's what he's counting on.

I might have thought this was just a peculiar attitude of thei about motorcycles but discovered later that it extended to oth things. . . . Waiting for them to get going one morning in the kitchen I noticed the sink faucet was dripping and remembered tha it was dripping the last time I was there before and that in fact it ha been dripping as long as I could remember. I commented on it an John said he had tried to fix it with a new faucet washer but it hadn worked. That was all he said. The presumption left was that that wa the end of the matter. If you try to fix a faucet and your fixing doesn work then it's just your lot to live with a dripping faucet.

This made me wonder to myself if it got on their nerves, thi drip-drip-drip, week in, week out, year in, year out, but I could no notice any irritation or concern about it on their part, and so con cluded they just aren't bothered by things like dripping faucets. Som people aren't.

What it was that changed this conclusion, I don't remember . . some intuition, some insight one day, perhaps it was a subtle chang in Sylvia's mood whenever the dripping was particularly loud and sh was trying to talk. She has a very soft voice. And one day when sh was trying to talk above the dripping and the kids came in and inter rupted her she lost her temper at them. It seemed that her anger a the kids would not have been nearly as great if the faucet hadn't also

been dripping when she was trying to talk. It was the combined dripping and loud kids that blew her up. What struck me hard then was that she was *not* blaming the faucet, and that she was *deliberately* not blaming the faucet. She wasn't ignoring that faucet at all! She was *suppressing* anger at that faucet and that goddamned dripping faucet was just about *killing* her! But she could not admit the importance of this for some reason.

Why suppress anger at a dripping faucet? I wondered.

Then that patched in with the motorcycle maintenance and one of those light bulbs went on over my head and I thought, Ahhhhhhhh!

It's not the motorcycle maintenance, not the faucet. It's all of technology they can't take. And then all sorts of things started tumbling into place and I knew that was it. Sylvia's irritation at a friend who thought computer programming was "creative." All their drawings and paintings and photographs without a technological thing in them. Of course she's not going to get mad at that faucet, I thought. You always suppress momentary anger at something you deeply and permanently hate. Of course John signs off every time the subject of cycle repair comes up, even when it is obvious he is suffering for it. That's technology. And sure, of course, obviously. It's so simple when you see it. To get away from technology out into the country in the fresh air and sunshine is why they are on the motorcycle in the first place. For me to bring it back to them just at the point and place where they think they have finally escaped it just frosts both of them, tremendously. That's why the conversation always breaks and freezes when the subject comes up.

Other things fit in too. They talk once in a while in as few pained words as possible about "it" or "it all" as in the sentence, "There is just no escape from it." And if I asked, "From what?" the answer might be "The whole thing," or "The whole organized bit," or even "The system." Sylvia once said defensively, "Well, *you* know how to *cope* with it," which puffed me up so much at the time I was embarrassed to ask what "it" was and so remained somewhat puzzled. I

thought it was something more mysterious than technology. But n
I see that the "it" was mainly, if not entirely, technology. But, t
doesn't sound right either. The "it" is a kind of force that gives r
to technology, something undefined, but inhuman, mechanical, li
less, a blind monster, a death force. Something hideous they are ru
ning from but know they can never escape. I'm putting it way t
heavily here but in a less emphatic and less defined way this is what
is. Somewhere there are people who understand it and run it but tho
are technologists, and they speak an inhuman language when descri
ing what they do. It's all parts and relationships of unheard-of thin
that never make any sense no matter how often you hear about ther
And their things, their monster keeps eating up land and pollutin
their air and lakes, and there is no way to strike back at it, and hard
any way to escape it.

That attitude is not hard to come to. You go through a heav
industrial area of a large city and there it all is, the technology. I
front of it are high barbed-wire fences, locked gates, signs saying N
TRESPASSING, and beyond, through sooty air, you see ugly strang
shapes of metal and brick whose purpose is unknown, and whose mas
ters you will never see. What it's for you don't know, and why it
there, there's no one to tell, and so all you can feel is alienated
estranged, as though you didn't belong there. Who owns and under
stands this doesn't want you around. All this technology has somehow
made you a stranger in your own land. Its very shape and appearanc
and mysteriousness say, "Get out." You know there's an explanation
for all this somewhere and what it's doing undoubtedly serves man
kind in some indirect way but that isn't what you see. What you see i
the NO TRESPASSING, KEEP OUT signs and not anything serving peo
ple but little people, like ants, serving these strange, incomprehensible
shapes. And you think, even if I were a part of this, even if I were not
a stranger, I would be just another ant serving the shapes. So the fina
feeling is hostile, and I think that's ultimately what's involved with
this otherwise unexplainable attitude of John and Sylvia. Anything to
do with valves and shafts and wrenches is a part of *that* dehumanized

world, and they would rather not think about it. They don't want to get into it.

If this is so, they are not alone. There is no question that they have been following their natural feelings in this and not trying to imitate anyone. But many others are also following their natural feelings and not trying to imitate anyone and the natural feelings of very many people are similar on this matter; so that when you look at them collectively, as journalists do, you get the illusion of a mass movement, an antitechnological mass movement, an entire political antitechnological left emerging, looming up from apparently nowhere, saying, "Stop the technology. Have it somewhere else. Don't have it here." It is still restrained by a thin web of logic that points out that without the factories there are no jobs or standard of living. But there are human forces stronger than logic. There always have been, and if they become strong enough in their hatred of technology that web can break.

Clichés and stereotypes such as "beatnik" or "hippie" have been invented for the antitechnologists, the antisystem people, and will continue to be. But one does not convert individuals into mass people with the simple coining of a mass term. John and Sylvia are not mass people and neither are most of the others going their way. It is against being a mass person that they seem to be revolting. And they feel that technology has got a lot to do with the forces that are trying to turn them into mass people and they don't like it. So far it's still mostly a passive resistance, flights into the rural areas when they are possible and things like that, but it doesn't always have to be this passive.

I disagree with them about cycle maintenance, but not because I am out of sympathy with their feelings about technology. I just think that their flight from and hatred of technology is self-defeating. The Buddha, the Godhead, resides quite as comfortably in the circuits of a digital computer or the gears of a cycle transmission as he does at the top of a mountain or in the petals of a flower. To think otherwise is to demean the Buddha—which is to demean oneself. That is what I want to talk about in this Chautauqua.

* * *

We're out of the marshes now, but the air is still so humid you look straight up directly at the yellow circle of the sun as if there w smoke or smog in the sky. But we're in the green countryside n The farmhouses are clean and white and fresh. And there's no sm or smog.

2

The road winds on and on . . . we stop for rests and lunch, exchange small talk, and settle down to the long ride. The beginning fatigue of afternoon balances the excitement of the first day and we move steadily, not fast, not slow.

We have picked up a southwest side wind, and the cycle cants into the gusts, seemingly by itself, to counter their effect. Lately there's been a sense of something peculiar about this road, apprehension about something, as if we were being watched or followed. But there is not a car anywhere ahead, and in the mirror are only John and Sylvia way behind.

We are not in the Dakotas yet, but the broad fields show we are getting nearer. Some of them are blue with flax blossoms moving in long waves like the surface of the ocean. The sweep of the hills is greater than before and they now dominate everything else, except the sky, which seems wider. Farmhouses in the distance are so small we can hardly see them. The land is beginning to open up.

There is no one place or sharp line where the Central Plains end and the Great Plains begin. It's a gradual change like this that catches you unawares, as if you were sailing out from a choppy coastal harbor,

noticed that the waves had taken on a deep swell, and turned back
see that you were out of sight of land. There are fewer trees here a
suddenly I am aware they are no longer native. They have be
brought here and planted around houses and between fields in ro
to break up the wind. But where they haven't been planted there
no underbrush, no second-growth saplings—only grass, sometim
with wildflowers and weeds, but mostly grass. This is grassland no
We are on the prairie.

I have a feeling none of us fully understands what four days
this prairie in July will be like. Memories of car trips across them a
always of flatness and great emptiness as far as you can see, extrem
monotony and boredom as you drive for hour after hour, gettin
nowhere, wondering how long this is going to last without a tu
in the road, without a change in the land going on and on to th
horizon.

John was worried Sylvia would not be up to the discomfort
this and planned to have her fly to Billings, Montana, but Sylvia an
I both talked him out of it. I argued that physical discomfort is impo
tant only when the mood is wrong. Then you fasten on to whatev
thing is uncomfortable and call that the cause. But if the mood
right, then physical discomfort doesn't mean much. And when think
ing about Sylvia's moods and feelings, I couldn't see her complaining

Also, to arrive in the Rocky Mountains by plane would be to se
them in one kind of context, as pretty scenery. But to arrive after day
of hard travel across the prairies would be to see them in another way
as a goal, a promised land. If John and I and Chris arrived with thi
feeling and Sylvia arrived seeing them as "nice" and "pretty," ther
would be more disharmony among us than we would get from th
heat and monotony of the Dakotas. Anyway, I like to talk to her an
I'm thinking of myself too.

In my mind, when I look at these fields, I say to her, "See? . .
See?" and I think she does. I hope later she will see and feel a thing
about these prairies I have given up talking to others about; a thing tha
exists here because everything else does not and can be noticed

because other things are absent. She seems so depressed sometimes by the monotony and boredom of her city life, I thought maybe in this endless grass and wind she would see a thing that sometimes comes when monotony and boredom are accepted. It's here, but I have no names for it.

Now on the horizon I see something else I don't think the others see. Far off to the southwest—you can see it only from the top of this hill—the sky has a dark edge. Storm coming. That may be what has been bothering me. Deliberately shutting it out of mind, but knowing all along that with this humidity and wind it was more than likely. It's too bad, on the first day, but as I said before, on a cycle you're *in* the scene, not just watching it, and storms are definitely part of it.

If it's just thunderheads or broken line squalls you can try to ride around them, but this one isn't. That long dark streak without any preceding cirrus clouds is a cold front. Cold fronts are violent and when they are from the southwest, they are the most violent. Often they contain tornadoes. When they come it's best to just hole up and let them pass over. They don't last long and the cool air behind them makes good riding.

Warm fronts are the worst. They can last for days. I remember Chris and I were on a trip to Canada a few years ago, got about 130 miles and were caught in a warm front of which we had plenty of warning but which we didn't understand. The whole experience was kind of dumb and sad.

We were on a little six-and-one-half-horsepower cycle, way overloaded with luggage and way underloaded with common sense. The machine could do only about forty-five miles per hour wide open against a moderate head wind. It was no touring bike. We reached a large lake in the North Woods the first night and tented amid rainstorms that lasted all night long. I forgot to dig a trench around the tent and at about two in the morning a stream of water came in and soaked both sleeping bags. The next morning we were soggy and depressed and hadn't had much sleep, but I thought that if we just

got riding the rain would let up after a while. No such luck. By t
o'clock the sky was so dark all the cars had their headlights on. A
then it really came down.

We were wearing the ponchos which had served as a tent t
night before. Now they spread out like sails and slowed our speed
thirty miles an hour wide open. The water on the road became tw
inches deep. Lightning bolts came crashing down all around us.
remember a woman's face looking astonished at us from the windo
of a passing car, wondering what in earth we were doing on a moto
cycle in this weather. I'm sure I couldn't have told her.

The cycle slowed down to twenty-five, then twenty. Then
started missing, coughing and popping and sputtering until, barel
moving at five or six miles an hour, we found an old run-down filli
station by some cutover timberland and pulled in.

At the time, like John, I hadn't bothered to learn much abo
motorcycle maintenance. I remember holding my poncho over m
head to keep the rain from the tank and rocking the cycle between m
legs. Gas seemed to be sloshing around inside. I looked at the plug
and looked at the points, and looked at the carburetor, and pumpe
the kick starter until I was exhausted.

We went into the filling station, which was also a combinatio
beer joint and restaurant, and had a meal of burned-up steak. Then
went back out and tried it again. Chris kept asking questions tha
started to anger me because he didn't see how serious it was. Final
I saw it was no use, gave it up, and my anger at him disappeared.
explained to him as carefully as I could that it was all over. We weren
going anywhere by cycle on this vacation. Chris suggested things t
do like check the gas, which I had done, and find a mechanic. Bu
there weren't any mechanics. Just cutover pine trees and brush an
rain.

I sat in the grass with him at the shoulder of the road, defeated
staring into the trees and underbrush. I answered all of Chris's ques
tions patiently and in time they became fewer and fewer. And the

Chris finally understood that our cycle trip was really over and began to cry. He was eight then, I think.

We hitchhiked back to our own city and rented a trailer and put it on our car and came up and got the cycle, and hauled it back to our own city and then started out all over again by car. But it wasn't the same. And we didn't really enjoy ourselves much.

Two weeks after the vacation was over, one evening after work, I removed the carburetor to see what was wrong but still couldn't find anything. To clean off the grease before replacing it, I turned the stopcock on the tank for a little gas. Nothing came out. The tank was out of gas. I couldn't believe it. I can still hardly believe it.

I have kicked myself mentally a hundred times for that stupidity and don't think I'll ever really, finally get over it. Evidently what I saw sloshing around was gas in the reserve tank which I had never turned on. I didn't check it carefully because I assumed the rain had caused the engine failure. I didn't understand then how foolish quick assumptions like that are. Now we are on a twenty-eight-horse machine and I take the maintenance of it very seriously.

All of a sudden John passes me, his palm down, signaling a stop. We slow down and look for a place to pull off on the gravelly shoulder. The edge of the concrete is sharp and the gravel is loose and I'm not a bit fond of his maneuver.

Chris asks, "What are we stopping for?"

"I think we missed our turn back there," John says.

I look back and see nothing. "I didn't see any sign," I say.

John shakes his head. "Big as a barn door."

"Really?"

He and Sylvia both nod.

He leans over, studies my map and points to where the turn was and then to a freeway overpass beyond it. "We've already crossed this freeway," he says. I see he is right. Embarrassing. "Go back or go ahead?" I ask.

He thinks about it. "Well, I guess there's really no reason to

go back. All right. Let's just go ahead. We'll get there one way another."

And now tagging along behind them I think, Why should I d thing like that? I hardly noticed the freeway. And just now I forgot tell them about the storm. Things are getting a little unsettling.

The storm cloud bank is larger now but it is not moving in fast as I thought it would. That's not so good. When they come fast they leave fast. When they come in slow like this you can get stu for quite a time.

I remove a glove with my teeth, reach down and feel the alun num side cover of the engine. The temperature is fine. Too warm leave my hand there, not so hot I get a burn. Nothing wrong there

On an air-cooled engine like this, extreme overheating can cau a "seizure." This machine has had one . . . in fact, three of them check it from time to time the same way I would check a patient wh has had a heart attack, even though it seems cured.

In a seizure, the pistons expand from too much heat, becon too big for the walls of the cylinders, seize them, melt to them som times, and lock the engine and rear wheel and start the whole cyc into a skid. The first time this one seized, my head was pitched ov the front wheel and my passenger was almost on top of me. At abo thirty it freed up again and started to run but I pulled off the road an stopped to see what was wrong. All my passenger could think to s was "What did you do *that* for?"

I shrugged and was as puzzled as he was, and stood there wit the cars whizzing by, just staring. The engine was so hot the a around it shimmered and we could feel the heat radiate. When I pu a wet finger on it, it sizzled like a hot iron and we rode home, slowl with a new sound, a slap that meant the pistons no longer fit and a overhaul was needed.

I took this machine into a shop because I thought it wasn important enough to justify getting into myself, having to learn all th complicated details and maybe having to order parts and special too

and all that time-dragging stuff when I could get someone else to do it in less time—sort of John's attitude.

The shop was a different scene from the ones I remembered. The mechanics, who had once all seemed like ancient veterans, now looked like children. A radio was going full blast and they were clowning around and talking and seemed not to notice me. When one of them finally came over he barely listened to the piston slap before saying, "Oh yeah. Tappets."

Tappets? I should have known then what was coming.

Two weeks later I paid their bill for 140 dollars, rode the cycle carefully at varying low speeds to wear it in and then after one thousand miles opened it up. At about seventy-five it seized again and freed at thirty, the same as before. When I brought it back they accused me of not breaking it in properly, but after much argument agreed to look into it. They overhauled it again and this time took it out themselves for a high-speed road test.

It seized on *them* this time.

After the third overhaul two months later they replaced the cylinders, put in oversize main carburetor jets, retarded the timing to make it run as coolly as possible and told me, "Don't run it fast."

It was covered with grease and did not start. I found the plugs were disconnected, connected them and started it, and now there really *was* a tappet noise. They hadn't adjusted them. I pointed this out and the kid came with an open-end adjustable wrench, set wrong, and swiftly rounded both of the sheet-aluminum tappet covers, ruining both of them.

"I hope we've got some more of those in stock," he said.

I nodded.

He brought out a hammer and cold chisel and started to pound them loose. The chisel punched through the aluminum cover and I could see he was pounding the chisel right into the engine head. On the next blow he missed the chisel completely and struck the head with the hammer, breaking off a portion of two of the cooling fins.

"Just stop," I said politely, feeling this was a bad dream. "
give me some new covers and I'll take it the way it is."

I got out of there as fast as possible, noisy tappets, shot tap
covers, greasy machine, down the road, and then felt a bad vibrat
at speeds over twenty. At the curb I discovered two of the four engi
mounting bolts were missing and a nut was missing from the thi
The whole engine was hanging on by only one bolt. The overhe
cam chain-tensioner bolt was also missing, meaning it would ha
been hopeless to try to adjust the tappets anyway. Nightmare.

The thought of John putting his BMW into the hands of one
those people is something I have never brought up with him. May
I should.

I found the cause of the seizures a few weeks later, waiting
happen again. It was a little twenty-five-cent pin in the internal o
delivery system that had been sheared and was preventing oil fro
reaching the head at high speeds.

The question *why* comes back again and again and has become
major reason for wanting to deliver this Chautauqua. Why did the
butcher it so? These were not people running away from technolog
like John and Sylvia. These were the technologists themselves. The
sat down to do a job and they performed it like chimpanzees. Nothin
personal in it. There was no obvious reason for it. And I tried to thin
back into that shop, that nightmare place, to try to remember any
thing that could have been the cause.

The radio was a clue. You can't really think hard about wha
you're doing and listen to the radio at the same time. Maybe they
didn't see their job as having anything to do with hard thought, just
wrench twiddling. If you can twiddle wrenches while listening to the
radio that's more enjoyable.

Their speed was another clue. They were really slopping things
around in a hurry and not looking where they slopped them. More
money that way—if you don't stop to think that it usually takes longer
or comes out worse.

But the biggest clue seemed to be their expressions. They were

hard to explain. Good-natured, friendly, easygoing—and uninvolved. They were like spectators. You had the feeling they had just wandered in there themselves and somebody had handed them a wrench. There was no identification with the job. No saying, "I am a mechanic." At 5 P.M. or whenever their eight hours were in, you knew they would cut it off and not have another thought about their work. They were already trying not to have any thoughts about their work *on* the job. In their own way they were achieving the same thing John and Sylvia were, living with technology without really having anything to do with it. Or rather, they had something to do with it, but their own selves were outside of it, detached, removed. They were involved in it but not in such a way as to care.

Not only did these mechanics not find that sheared pin, but it was clearly a mechanic who had sheared it in the first place, by assembling the side cover plate improperly. I remembered the previous owner had said a mechanic had told him the plate was hard to get on. That was why. The shop manual had warned about this, but like the others he was probably in too much of a hurry or he didn't care.

While at work I was thinking about this same lack of care in the digital computer manuals I was editing. Writing and editing technical manuals is what I do for a living the other eleven months of the year and I knew they were full of errors, ambiguities, omissions and information so completely screwed up you had to read them six times to make any sense out of them. But what struck me for the first time was the agreement of these manuals with the spectator attitude I had seen in the shop. These were spectator manuals. It was built into the format of them. Implicit in every line is the idea that "Here is the machine, isolated in time and in space from everything else in the universe. It has no relationship to you, you have no relationship to it, other than to turn certain switches, maintain voltage levels, check for error condition . . ." and so on. That's it. The mechanics in their attitude toward the machine were really taking no different attitude from the manual's toward the machine, or from the attitude I had when I brought it in there. We were all spectators. And it occurred to me

there *is* no manual that deals with the *real* business of motorcy maintenance, the most important aspect of all. Caring about what y are doing is considered either unimportant or taken for granted.

On this trip I think we should notice it, explore it a little, to se in that strange separation of what man is from what man does we n have some clues as to what the hell has gone wrong in this twentie century. I don't want to hurry it. That itself is a poisonous twentie century attitude. When you want to hurry something, that means y no longer care about it and want to get on to other things. I just wa to get at it slowly, but carefully and thoroughly, with the same attitu I remember was present just before I found that sheared pin. It w that attitude that found it, nothing else.

I suddenly notice the land here has flattened into a Euclidian plar Not a hill, not a bump anywhere. This means we have entererd t Red River Valley. We will soon be into the Dakotas.

3

By the time we are out of the Red River Valley the storm clouds are everywhere and almost upon us.

John and I have discussed the situation in Breckenridge and decided to keep going until we have to stop.

That shouldn't be long now. The sun is gone, the wind is blowing cold, and a wall of differing shades of grey looms around us.

It seems huge, overpowering. The prairie here is huge but above it the hugeness of this ominous grey mass ready to descend is frightening. We are traveling at its mercy now. When and where it will come is nothing we can control. All we can do is watch it move in closer and closer.

Where the darkest grey has come down to the ground, a town that was seen earlier, some small buildings and a water tower, has disappeared. It will be on us soon now. I don't see any towns ahead and we are just going to have to run for it.

I pull up alongside John and throw my hand ahead in a "Speed up!" gesture. He nods and opens up. I let him get ahead a little, then pick up to his speed. The engine responds beautifully—seventy . . . eighty . . . eighty-five . . . we are really feeling the wind now and I

drop my head to cut down the resistance . . . ninety. The speedome needle swings back and forth but the tach reads a steady nine th sand . . . about ninety-five miles an hour . . . and we hold this speed moving. Too fast to focus on the shoulder of the road now . . . I rea forward and flip the headlight switch just for safety. But it is need anyway. It is getting very dark.

We whizz through the flat open land, not a car anywhere, har a tree, but the road is smooth and clean and the engine now ha "packed," high rpm sound that says it's right on. It gets darker a darker.

A flash and *Ka-wham!* of thunder, one right on top of the oth That shook me, and Chris has got his head against my back now. few warning drops of rain . . . at this speed they are like needles. second flash-*WHAM* and everything brilliant . . . and then in the br liance of the next flash that farmhouse . . . that windmill . . . oh, n God, he's *been* here! . . . throttle off . . . this is *his* road . . . a fen and trees . . . and the speed drops to seventy, then sixty, then fifty-fi and I hold it there.

"Why are we slowing down?" Chris shouts.

"Too fast!"

"No, it isn't!"

I nod yes.

The house and water tower have gone by and then a small drai age ditch appears and a crossroad leading off to the horizon. Yes . . that's right, I think. That's exactly right.

"They're way ahead of us!" Chris hollers. "Speed up!"

I turn my head from side to side.

"Why not?" he hollers.

"Not safe!"

"They're gone!"

"They'll wait!"

"Speed up!"

"No." I shake my head. It's just a feeling. On a cycle you trus them and we stay at fifty-five.

The first rain begins now but up ahead I see the lights of a town . . . I knew it would be there.

When we arrive John and Sylvia are there under the first tree by the road, waiting for us.

"What happened to you?"

"Slowed down."

"Well, we know *that*. Something wrong?"

"No. Let's get out of this rain."

John says there is a motel at the other end of town, but I tell him there's a better one if you turn right, at a row of cottonwoods a few blocks down.

We turn at the cottonwoods and travel a few blocks, and a small motel appears. Inside the office John looks around and says, "This *is* a good place. When were you here before?"

"I don't remember," I say.

"Then how did you know about this?"

"Intuition."

He looks at Sylvia and shakes his head.

Sylvia has been watching me silently for some time. She notices my hands are unsteady as I sign in. "You look awfully pale," she says. "Did that lightning shake you up?"

"No."

"You look like you'd seen a ghost."

John and Chris look at me and I turn away from them to the door. It is still raining hard, but we make a run for it to the rooms. The gear on the cycles is protected and we wait until the storm passes over before removing it.

After the rain stops, the sky lightens a little. But from the motel courtyard, I see past the cottonwoods that a second darkness, that of night, is about to come on. We walk into town, have supper, and by the time we get back, the fatigue of the day is really on me. We rest, almost motionless, in the metal armchairs of the motel courtyard, slowly working down a pint of whiskey that John brought with some

mix from the motel cooler. It goes down slowly and agreeably. A
night wind rattles the leaves of the cottonwoods along the road.

Chris wonders what we should do next. Nothing tires this
The newness and strangeness of the motel surroundings excite
and he wants us to sing songs as they did at camp.

"We're not very good at songs," John says.

"Let's tell stories then," Chris says. He thinks for a while. "
you know any good ghost stories? All the kids in our cabin used
tell ghost stories at night."

"You tell *us* some," John says.

And he does. They are kind of fun to hear. Some of ther
haven't heard since I was his age. I tell him so, and Chris wants
hear some of mine, but I can't remember any.

After a while he says, "Do you believe in ghosts?"

"No," I say.

"Why not?"

"Because they are *un*-sci-en-*ti*-fic."

The way I say this makes John smile. "They contain no matte
I continue, "and have no energy and therefore, according to the la
of science, do not exist except in people's minds."

The whiskey, the fatigue and the wind in the trees start mixi
in my mind. "Of course," I add, "the laws of science contain no ma
ter and have no energy either and therefore do not exist except
people's minds. It's best to be completely scientific about the who
thing and refuse to believe in either ghosts or the laws of science. Th
way you're safe. That doesn't leave you very much to believe in, b
that's scientific too."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Chris says.

"I'm being kind of facetious."

Chris gets frustrated when I talk like this, but I don't think
hurts him.

"One of the kids at YMCA camp says he believes in ghosts."

"He was just spoofing you."

"No, he wasn't. He said that when people haven't been burie

right, their ghosts come back to haunt people. He really believes in that."

"He was just spoofing you," I repeat.

"What's his name?" Sylvia says.

"Tom White Bear."

John and I exchange looks, suddenly recognizing the same thing.

"Ohhh, *Indian*!" he says.

I laugh. "I guess I'm going to have to take that back a little," I say. "I was thinking of European ghosts."

"What's the difference?"

John roars with laughter. "He's got you," he says.

I think a little and say, "Well, Indians sometimes have a different way of looking at things, which I'm not saying is completely wrong. Science isn't part of the Indian tradition."

"Tom White Bear said his mother and dad told him not to believe all that stuff. But he said his grandmother whispered it was true anyway, so he believes it."

He looks at me pleadingly. He really *does* want to know things sometimes. Being facetious is not being a very good father. "Sure," I say, reversing myself, "I believe in ghosts too."

Now John and Sylvia look at me peculiarly. I see I'm not going to get out of this one easily and brace myself for a long explanation.

"It's completely natural," I say, "to think of Europeans who believed in ghosts or Indians who believed in ghosts as ignorant. The scientific point of view has wiped out every other view to a point where they all seem primitive, so that if a person today talks about ghosts or spirits he is considered ignorant or maybe nutty. It's just all but completely impossible to imagine a world where ghosts can actually exist."

John nods affirmatively and I continue.

"My own opinion is that the intellect of modern man isn't that superior. IQs aren't that much different. Those Indians and medieval men were just as intelligent as we are, but the context in which they thought was completely different. Within that *context* of thought,

ghosts and spirits are quite as real as atoms, particles, photons quants are to a modern man. In *that* sense I believe in ghosts. Mo man has his ghosts and spirits too, you know."

"What?"

"Oh, the laws of physics and of logic . . . the number system the principle of algebraic substitution. These are ghosts. We believe in them so thoroughly they seem real."

"They seem real to me," John says.

"I don't get it," says Chris.

So I go on. "For example, it seems completely natural to p sume that gravitation and the law of gravitation existed before Is Newton. It would sound nutty to think that until the seventeer century there was no gravity."

"Of course."

"So when did this law start? Has it always existed?"

John is frowning, wondering what I am getting at.

"What I'm driving at," I say, "is the notion that before t beginning of the earth, before the sun and the stars were forme before the primal generation of anything, the law of gravity existed

"Sure."

"Sitting there, having no mass of its own, no energy of its ow not in anyone's mind because there wasn't anyone, not in spa because there was no space either, not anywhere—this law of gravi still existed?"

Now John seems not so sure.

"If that law of gravity existed," I say, "I honestly don't kno what a thing has to do to be *non*existent. It seems to me that law o gravity has passed every test of nonexistence there is. You cannot thin of a single attribute of nonexistence that that law of gravity didn' have. Or a single scientific attribute of existence it did have. And ye it is still 'common sense' to believe that it existed."

John says, "I guess I'd have to think about it."

"Well, I predict that if you think about it long enough you wil find yourself going round and round and round and round until you

finally reach only one possible, rational, intelligent conclusion. The law of gravity and gravity itself *did not exist* before Isaac Newton. No other conclusion makes sense.

"And *what that means,*" I say before he can interrupt, "and *what that means* is that that law of gravity exists *nowhere* except in people's heads! It's a ghost! We are all of us very arrogant and conceited about running down other people's ghosts but just as ignorant and barbaric and superstitious about our own."

"Why does everybody believe in the law of gravity then?"

"Mass hypnosis. In a very orthodox form known as 'education.' "

"You mean the teacher is hypnotizing the kids into believing the law of gravity?"

"Sure."

"That's absurd."

"You've heard of the importance of eye contact in the classroom? Every educationist emphasizes it. No educationist explains it."

John shakes his head and pours me another drink. He puts his hand over his mouth and in a mock aside says to Sylvia, "You know, most of the time he seems like such a normal guy."

I counter, "That's the first normal thing I've said in weeks. The rest of the time I'm feigning twentieth-century lunacy just like you are. So as not to draw attention to myself.

"But I'll *repeat* it for you," I say. "We believe the disembodied words of Sir Isaac Newton were sitting in the middle of nowhere billions of years before he was born and that magically he *discovered* these words. They were always there, even when they applied to nothing. Gradually the world came into being and then they applied to *it*. In fact, those words themselves were what formed the world. That, John, is ridiculous.

"The problem, the contradiction the scientists are stuck with, is that of *mind*. Mind has no matter or energy but they can't escape its predominance over everything they do. Logic exists in the mind. Numbers exist only in the mind. I don't get upset when scientists say

that ghosts exist in the mind. It's that *only* that gets me. Scien
only in your mind too, it's just that that doesn't make it bad. Or g
either."

They are just looking at me so I continue: "Laws of nature ar
man *inventions,* like ghosts. Laws of logic, of mathematics are also hu
inventions, like ghosts. The whole blessed thing is a human inven
including the idea that it *isn't* a human invention. The world ha
existence whatsoever outside the human imagination. It's all a ghost,
in antiquity was so recognized as a ghost, the whole blessed world
live in. It's run by ghosts. We see what we see because these ghosts
it to us, ghosts of Moses and Christ and the Buddha, and Plato,
Descartes, and Rousseau and Jefferson and Lincoln, on and on and
Isaac Newton is a very good ghost. One of the best. Your common se
is nothing more than the voices of thousands and thousands of th
ghosts from the past. Ghosts and more ghosts. Ghosts trying to find th
place among the living."

John looks too much in thought to speak. But Sylvia is excit
"Where do you *get* all these ideas?" she asks.

I am about to answer them but then do not. I have a feeling
having already pushed it to the limit, maybe beyond, and it is time
drop it.

After a while John says, "It'll be good to see the mountai
again."

"Yes, it will," I agree. "One last drink to that!"

We finish it and are off to our rooms.

I see that Chris brushes his teeth, and let him get by with a prom
ise that he'll shower in the morning. I pull seniority and take the be
by the window. After the lights are out he says, "Now, tell me a ghos
story."

"I just did, out there."

"I mean a *real* ghost story."

"That was the realest ghost story you'll ever hear."

"You know what I mean. The other kind."

I try to think of some conventional ones. "I used to know so

many of them when I was a kid, Chris, but they're all forgotten," I say. "It's time to go to sleep. We've all got to get up early tomorrow."

Except for the wind through the screens of the motel window it is quiet. The thought of all that wind sweeping toward us across the open fields of the prairie is a tranquil one and I feel lulled by it.

The wind rises and then falls, then rises and sighs, and falls again . . . from so many miles away.

"Did you ever know a ghost?" Chris asks.

I am half asleep. "Chris," I say, "I knew a fellow once who spent all his whole life doing nothing but hunting for a ghost, and it was just a waste of time. So go to sleep."

I realize my mistake too late.

"Did he find him?"

"Yes, he found him, Chris."

I keep wishing Chris would just listen to the wind and not ask questions.

"What did he do then?"

"He thrashed him good."

"Then what?"

"Then he became a ghost himself." Somehow I had the thought this was going to put Chris to sleep, but it's not and it's just waking me up.

"What is his name?"

"No one you know."

"But what *is* it?"

"It doesn't matter."

"Well, what is it anyway?"

"His name, Chris, since it doesn't matter, is Phaedrus. It's not a name you know."

"Did you see him on the motorcycle in the storm?"

"What makes you say *that*?"

"Sylvia said she thought you saw a ghost."

"That's just an expression."

"Dad?"

"This had better be the last question, Chris, or I'm go become angry."

"I was just trying to say you sure don't talk like anyone el

"Yes, Chris, I know that," I say. "It's a problem. Now sleep."

"Good night, Dad."

"Good night."

A half hour later he is breathing sleepfully, and the wind strong as ever and I am wide-awake. There, out the window dark—this cold wind crossing the road into the trees, the leaves mering flecks of moonlight—there is no question about it, Pha saw all of this. What he was doing here I have no idea. Why he this way I will probably never know. But he has been here, steer onto this strange road, has been with us all along. There is no es

I wish I could say that I don't know why he is here, but afraid I must now confess that I do. The ideas, the things I was sa about science and ghosts, and even that idea this afternoon a caring and technology—they are not my own. I haven't really h new idea in years. They are stolen from him. And he has been wa ing. And that is why he is here.

With that confession, I hope he will now allow me some slee

Poor Chris. "Do you know any ghost stories?" he asked. I co have told him one but even the thought of that is frightening.

I really must go to sleep.

4

Every Chautauqua should have a list somewhere of valuable things to remember that can be kept in some safe place for times of future need and inspiration. Details. And now, while the others are still snoring away wasting this beautiful morning sunlight . . . well . . . to sort of fill time . . .

What I have here is my list of valuable things to take on your next motorcycle trip across the Dakotas.

I've been awake since dawn. Chris is still sound asleep in the other bed. I started to roll over for more sleep but heard a rooster crowing and then became aware we are on vacation and there is no point in sleeping. I can hear John right through the motel partition sawing wood in there . . . unless it's Sylvia . . . no, that's too loud. Damned *chain* saw, it sounds like. . . .

I got so tired of forgetting things on trips like this, I made this up and store it in a file at home to check off when I am ready to go.

Most of the items are commonplace and need no comment. Some of them are peculiar to motorcycling and need some comment. Some of them are just plain peculiar and need a lot of comment. The list is

divided into four parts: Clothing, Personal Stuff, Cooking and C
ing Gear, and Motorcycle Stuff.

The first part, Clothing, is simple:

1. Two changes of underwear.
2. Long underwear.
3. One change of shirt and pants for each of us. I use A
surplus fatigues. They're cheap, tough and don't show
I had an item called "dress clothes" at first but John
ciled "Tux" after this item. I was just thinking of some
you might want to wear outside a filling station.
4. One sweater and jacket each.
5. Gloves. Unlined leather gloves are best because they pre
sunburn, absorb sweat and keep your hands cool. W
you're going for an hour or two little things like this a
important, but when you're going all day long day after
they become plenty important.
6. Cycle boots.
7. Rain gear.
8. Helmet and sunshade.
9. Bubble. This gives me claustrophobia, so I use it only
the rain, which otherwise at high speed stings your face
needles.
10. Goggles. I don't like windshields because they also close y
in. These are some British laminated plateglass goggles t
work fine. The wind gets behind sunglasses. Plastic gogg
get scratched up and distort vision.

The next list if Personal Stuff:

Combs. Billfold. Pocketknife. Memoranda booklet. Pen. Cig
rettes and matches. Flashlight. Soap and plastic soap contain
Toothbrushes and toothpaste. Scissors. APCs for headaches. Inse
repellent. Deodorant (after a hot day on a cycle, your best frien
don't need to tell you). Sunburn lotion. (On a cycle you don't noti
sunburn until you stop, and then it's too late. Put it on early.) Ban

Aids. Toilet paper. Washcloth (this can go into a plastic box to keep other stuff from getting damp). Towel.

Books. I don't know of any other cyclist who takes books with him. They take a lot of space, but I have three of them here anyway, with some loose sheets of paper in them for writing. These are:

a. The shop manual for this cycle.
b. A general troubleshooting guide containing all the technical information I can never keep in my head. This is *Chilton's Motorcycle Troubleshooting Guide* written by Ocee Rich and sold by Sears, Roebuck.
c. A copy of Thoreau's *Walden* . . . which Chris has never heard and which can be read a hundred times without exhaustion. I try always to pick a book far over his head and read it as a basis for questions and answers, rather than without interruption. I read a sentence or two, wait for him to come up with his usual barrage of questions, answer them, then read another sentence or two. Classics read well this way. They must be written this way. Sometimes we have spent a whole evening reading and talking and discovered we have only covered two or three pages. It's a form of reading done a century ago . . . when Chautauquas were popular. Unless you've tried it you can't imagine how pleasant it is to do it this way.

I see Chris is sleeping over there completely relaxed, none of his normal tension. I guess I won't wake him up yet.

Camping Equipment includes:

1. Two sleeping bags.
2. Two ponchos and one ground cloth. These convert into a tent and also protect the luggage from rain while you are traveling.
3. Rope.
4. U. S. Geodetic Survey maps of an area where we hope to do some hiking.

5. Machete.
6. Compass.
7. Canteen. I couldn't find this anywhere when we left. I
the kids must have lost it somewhere.
8. Two Army-surplus mess kits with knife, fork and spoon
9. A collapsible Sterno stove with one medium-sized ca
Sterno. This is an experimental purchase. I haven't us
yet. When it rains or when you're above the timbe
firewood is a problem.
10. Some aluminum screw-top tins. For lard, salt, butter, fl
sugar. A mountaineering supply house sold us these
ago.
11. Brillo, for cleaning.
12. Two aluminum-frame backpacks.

Motorcycle Stuff. A standard tool kit comes with the cycle ar
stored under the seat. This is supplemented with the following:

A large, adjustable open-end wrench. A machinist's hammer. A cold chisel. A taper punch. A pair of tire irons. A tire-patching kit. A bicycle pump. A can of molybdenum disulfide spray for the chain. (This has tremendous penetrating ability into the inside of each roller where it really counts, and the lubricating superiority of molybdenum disulfide is well known. Once it has dried off, however, it ought to be supplemented with good old SAE-30 engine oil.) Impact driver. A point file. Feeler gauge. Test lamp.

Spare parts include:

Plugs. Throttle, clutch and brake cables. Points, fuses, headlight and taillight bulbs, chain-coupling link with keeper, cotter pins, baling wire. Spare chain (this is just an old one that was about shot when I replaced it, enough to get to a cycle shop if the present one goes).

And that's about it. No shoelaces.

It would probably be normal about this time to wonder what sort of U-Haul trailer all this is in. But it's not as bulky, really, as it sounds.

I'm afraid these other characters will sleep all day if I let them. The sky outside is sparkling and clear, it's a shame to waste it like this.

I go over finally and give Chris a shake. His eyes pop open, then he sits bolt upright uncomprehending.

"Shower time," I say.

I go outside. The air is invigorating. In fact—Christ!—it is *cold* out. I pound on the Sutherlands' door.

"Yahp," comes John's sleepy voice through the door. "Um-hmmmm. Yahp."

It feels like *autumn*. The cycles are wet with dew. No rain today. But *cold!* It must be in the forties.

While waiting I check the engine oil level and tires, and bolts, and chain tension. A little slack there, and I get out the tool kit and tighten it up. I'm really getting anxious to get going.

I see that Chris dresses warmly and we are packed and on the road, and it is definitely cold. Within minutes all the heat of the warm clothing is drained out by the wind and I am shivering with big shivers. Bracing.

It ought to warm up as soon as the sun gets higher in the sky. About half an hour of this and we'll be in Ellendale for breakfast. We should cover a lot of miles today on these straight roads.

If it weren't so damn cold this would be just gorgeous riding. Low-angled dawn sun striking what looks almost like frost covering those fields, but I guess it's just dew, sparkling and kind of misty. Dawn shadows everywhere make it look less flat than yesterday. All to ourselves. Nobody's even up yet, it looks like. My watch says six-thirty. The old glove above it looks like it's got frost on it, but I guess it's just residues from the soaking last night. Good old beat-up gloves. They are so stiff now from the cold I can hardly straighten my hand out.

I talked yesterday about caring, I *care* about these mo
riding gloves. I smile at them flying through the breeze bes
because they have been there for so many years and are so old
tired and so rotten there is something kind of humorous about
They have become filled with oil and sweat and dirt and spa
bugs and now when I set them down flat on a table, even whe
are not cold, they won't stay flat. They've got a memory of thei
They cost only three dollars and have been restitched so many
it is getting impossible to repair them, yet I take a lot of tim
pains to do it anyway because I can't imagine any new pair taking
place. That is impractical, but practicality isn't the whole thing
gloves or with anything else.

The machine itself receives some of the same feelings. With
27,000 on it it's getting to be something of a high-miler, an
timer, although there are plenty of older ones running. But ove
miles, and I think most cyclists will agree with this, you pick up ce
feelings about an individual machine that are unique for that one
vidual machine and no other. A friend who owns a cycle of the s
make, model and even same year brought it over for repair, and w
I test rode it afterward it was hard to believe it had come from
same factory years ago. You could see that long ago it had settled
its own kind of feel and ride and sound, completely different fi
mine. No worse, but different.

I suppose you could call that a personality. Each machine *ha*
own, unique personality which probably could be defined as the in
itive sum total of everything you know and feel about it. This pers
ality constantly changes, usually for the worse, but sometimes surp
ingly for the better, and it is this personality that is the real obj
of motorcycle maintenance. The new ones start out as good-looki
strangers and, depending on how they are treated, degenerate rapi
into bad-acting grouches or even cripples, or else turn into health
good-natured, long-lasting friends. This one, despite the murdero
treatment it got at the hands of those alleged mechanics, seems

have recovered and has been requiring fewer and fewer repairs as time goes on.

There it is! Ellendale!

A water tower, groves of trees and buildings among them in the morning sunlight. I've just given in to the shivering which has been almost continuous the whole trip. The watch says seven-fifteen.

A few minutes later we park by some old brick buildings. I turn to John and Sylvia who have pulled up behind us. "That was *cold!*" I say.

They just stare at me fish-eyed.

"Bracing, what?" I say. No answer.

I wait until they are completely off, then see that John is trying to untie all their luggage. He is having trouble with the knot. He gives up and we all move toward the restaurant.

I try again, I'm walking backward in front of them toward the restaurant, feeling a little manic from the ride, wringing my hands and laughing. "Sylvia! Speak to me!" Not a smile.

I guess they really *were* cold.

They order breakfast without looking up.

Breakfast ends, and I say finally, "What next?"

John says slowly and deliberately. "We're not leaving here until it warms up." He has a sheriff-at-sundown tone in his voice, which I suppose makes it final.

So John and Sylvia and Chris sit and stay warm in the lobby of the hotel adjoining the restaurant, while I go out for a walk.

I guess they're kind of mad at me for getting them up so early to ride through that kind of stuff. When you're stuck together like this, I figure small differences in temperament are bound to show up. I remember, now that I think of it, I've never been cycling with them before one or two o'clock in the afternoon, although for me dawn and early morning is always the greatest time for riding.

The town is clean and fresh and unlike the one we woke up in this morning. Some people are on the street and are opening stores and saying, "Good morning" and talking and commenting about

how cold it is. Two thermometers on the shady side of the stree
42 and 46 degrees. One in the sun reads 65 degrees.

After a few blocks the main street goes onto two hard, m
tracks into a field, past a quonset hut full of farm machinery and
tools, and then ends in a field. A man standing in the field is loo
at me suspiciously, wondering what I am doing, probably, as I
into the quonset hut. I return down the street, find a chilly bench
stare at the motorcycle. Nothing to do.

It was cold all right, but not *that* cold. How do John and S
ever get through Minnesota winters? I wonder. There's kind of a
ing inconsistency here, that's almost too obvious to dwell on. If
can't stand physical discomfort and they can't stand technol
they've got a little compromising to do. They depend on technol
and condemn it at the same time. I'm sure they know that and
just contributes to their dislike of the whole situation. They're
presenting a logical thesis, they're just reporting how it is. But th
farmers are coming into town now, rounding the corner in
brand-new pickup truck. I'll bet with them it's just the other
around. They're going to show off that truck and their tractor
that new washing machine and they'll have the tools to fix them
they go wrong, and know how to use the tools. They *value* techn
ogy. And they're the ones who need it the *least*. If all technol
stopped, tomorrow, these people would know how to make out.
would be rough, but they'd survive. John and Sylvia and Chris a
I would be dead in a week. This condemnation of technology
ingratitude, that's what it is.

Blind alley, though. If someone's ungrateful and you tell hi
he's ungrateful, okay, you've called him a name. You haven't solv
anything.

A half hour later the thermometer by the hotel door reads
degrees. Inside the empty main dining room of the hotel I find the
looking restless. They seem, by their expressions, to be in a bett
mood though, and John says optimistically, 'I'm going to put o
everything I own, and then we'll make it all right."

He goes out to the cycles, and when he comes back says, "I sure hate to unpack all that stuff, but I don't want another ride like that last one." He says it is freezing in the men's room, and since there is no one else in the dining room, he crosses behind a table back from where we are sitting, and I am sitting at the table, talking to Sylvia, and then I look over and there is John, all decked out in a full-length set of pale-blue long underwear. He is smirking from ear to ear at how silly he looks. I stare at his glasses lying on the table for a moment and then say to Sylvia:

"You know, just a moment ago we were sitting here talking to Clark Kent . . . see, there's his glasses . . . and now all of a sudden . . . Lois, do you suppose? . . ."

John howls. "CHICKENMAN!"

He glides over the varnished lobby floor like a skater, does a handspring, then glides back. He raises one arm over his head and then crouches as if starting for the sky. "I'm ready, here I go!" He shakes his head sadly. "Jeez, I hate to bust through that nice ceiling, but my X-ray vision tells me somebody's in trouble." Chris is giggling.

"We'll all be in trouble if you don't get some clothes on," Sylvia says.

John laughs. "An exposer, hey? 'The Ellendale revealer!' " He struts around some more, then begins to put his clothes on over the underwear. He says, "Oh no, oh no, they wouldn't do that. Chickenman and the police have an understanding. They know who's on the side of law and order and justice and decency and fair play for everyone."

When we hit the highway again it is still chilly, but not like it was. We pass through a number of towns and gradually, almost imperceptibly, the sun warms us up, and my feelings warm up with it. The tired feeling wears off completely and the wind and sun fell good now, making it real. It's happening, just from the warming of the sun, the road and green prairie farmland and buffeting wind coming together. And soon it is nothing but beautiful warmth and wind and speed and

sun down the empty road. The last chills of the morning are th by the warm air. Wind and more sun and more smooth road.

So green this summer and so fresh.

There are white and gold daisies among the grass in front old wire fence, a meadow with some cows and far in the distan low rising of the land with something golden on it. Hard to k what it is. No need to know.

Where there is a slight rise in the road the drone of the m becomes heavier. We top the rise, see a new spread of land before the road descends and the drone of the engine falls away again. Pra Tranquil and detached.

Later, when we stop, Sylvia has tears in her eyes from the w and she stretches out her arms and says, "It's so beautiful. It' empty."

I show Chris how to spread his jacket on the ground and use extra shirt for a pillow. He is not at all sleepy but I tell him to lie do anyway, he'll need the rest. I open up my own jacket to soak up m heat. John gets his camera out.

After a while he says, "This is the hardest stuff in the world photograph. You need a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree lens, something. You see it, and then you look down in the ground gl and it's just nothing. As soon as you put a border on it, it's gone."

I say, "That's what you don't see in a car, I suppose."

Sylvia says, "Once when I was about ten we stopped like this the road and I used half a roll of film taking pictures. And when t pictures came back I cried. There wasn't anything there."

"When are we going to get going?" Chris says.

"What's your hurry?" I ask

"I just want to get going."

"There's nothing up ahead that's any better than it is rig here."

He looks down silently with a frown. "Are we going to go camp ing tonight?" he asks. The Sutherlands look at me apprehensively.

"Are we?" he repeats.

"We'll see later," I say.

"Why later?"

"Because I don't know now."

"Why don't you know now?"

"Well, I just don't know now why I just don't know."

John shrugs that it's okay.

"This isn't the best camping country," I say. "There's no cover and no water." But suddenly I add, "All right, tonight we'll camp out." We had talked about it before.

So we move down the empty road. I don't want to own these prairies, or photograph them, or change them, or even stop or even keep going. We are just moving down the empty road.