VOLUME III, NO. 7
FEBRUARY 15, 1950

HUMAN DIFFERENCES

THE differences among human beings are seldom discussed, as such, for just to admit or to claim that there are important differences among men means that, probably, you have a theory to explain what caused them, and today, a theory to explain what causes human differences is enough to start an ideological war. The first principle of a democratic society is the Equality of Man. To discuss human differences without seeming to attack this principle is difficult, although it ought not to be impossible. The subject, however, is usually ignored by popular writers, for the reason that a man who writes about human differences, unless he is wiser than most, usually sounds as though he thinks he is a bit better than the rest of mankind, and a writer who takes this view has little chance of remaining "popular."

But much may be lost by a society which fails to recognize and admit human differences. It may even lose its grasp of the real meaning of Equality, and it will certainly lose its appreciation of the many forms of human distinction which do not affect the validity of the political principles of an equalitarian society, and may even give them indirect support.

This sort of self-destruction through enthusiastic excess has happened before in history. In past centuries, certain Christian leaders were determined to honor God above all things, regardless of the consequences. One of the attributes commonly claimed for the Deity is Omniscience, and it was argued by these enthusiasts, among them St. Augustine, that an Omniscient Creator would surely know from the moment of creation of each soul just what that soul would do in all subsequent moments of its existence. A soul free to make choices independent of the foreknowledge of God would also be a soul free from God's will and God's omniscience, and this would amount to an intolerable challenge to God's eminence and supremacy: He is made less glorious by the existence of independently acting souls, who become His virtual competitors in creative activity. To avoid this blasphemous conclusion, the theologians intent upon glorifying God declared that souls are *not* free, neglecting to realize that prayer and praises of God by souls who can't do anything else are no more meritorious than the sinning and wickedness of others who can't help what they are doing, either. Thus, by leaving no power of choice to humans, the predestinarians defeated their own purpose. In the course of history, men rejected both the predestinarians and their predestining God.

Today, we have a political instead of a theological order of society, and instead of an all-powerful God to worship, we have the impersonal principle of Equality as the basis of our social relationships. This principle is plainly the opposite of the idea of Predestination. It asserts that when a man—any human being—is born, he comes into the world with exactly the same rights and potentialities as anyone else. These rights, as the Declaration of Independence says, are "unalienable." Each man has them simply by being human. The principle of equality recognizes no supernatural privileges or condemnations and accepts no hereditary or class distinctions.

Will this principle stand against the facts of life? It will, if we acknowledge at the outset that it is a metaphysical proposition about the nature of man. It amounts to the postulate that there is some kind of spiritual *essence* in all human beings, and that justice among men means the treatment of men by one another with full respect for the essential qualities of all.

It is difficult to see how the principle of equality can survive criticism unless its

metaphysical character be granted, for, resting upon any other support, the idea of equality seems shaky indeed. We are certainly not equal biologically, and the mental testers have produced ample evidence to prove the wide variance of intellectual capacity among human beings. Moral differences are less easily determined, yet people do differ in honesty and their desire to tell the truth. Where, then, does the equality lie, if not in what is constant in these various qualities, as distinguished from what is variable-namely, in the common capacity *to grow* in all these directions?

Unless this view be adopted, the advocate of political democracy is forced into the position of claiming that human differences, if they exist at all, are extremely superficial, which is a brave position to take, but one difficult to defend. In fact, that it has to be defended with such vigor is alone evidence of the weakness of the position. For if clever people were not continually taking advantage of other men—using them, exploiting and betraying them—democracy would not have so much of a struggle to maintain itself.

The clever man knows that he possesses *something* in larger measure than others, and the pieties of scientific special pleading for the physical and intellectual equality of mankind are not going to make him change his mind. But insistence upon the moral principle that all men have the right to grow, and that they are equal in this right, may reach and touch his own moral sensibilities. At least, the idea of the equal potentialities of man contradicts no obvious fact of experience.

There are other uses of human distinction besides taking advantage of one's fellows. Great men, who in one sense become living arguments against the idea of equality, in another sense enrich the meaning of this principle. A morally great man seldom if ever wants more of anything than any other man. He has no competitive attitude and no acquisitive habits. As a result, lesser men never have to defend their equality against him. This level of human relationships lies above the political order, for political institutions are essentially protective of human rights and designed to set limits to aggressive activities.

The great man works for equality by sharing his greatness. Actually, all human generosity, all spontaneous giving, contributes to this higher equality of man. The only limit to the good that is shared in this way arises from the fact that its flow can never be regulated by law. A Plato or a Jesus could not be ordered to distribute his wisdom among the people, on the ground that the equality of man necessitates such sharing. Any confusion between the equality established by law and the equality sought by such men is completely ridiculous.

It seems evident that a civilization in which the idea of equality has only a protective significance is a civilization that has endured so many excesses of tyranny and oppression that any idea of human distinction at once appears as a sinister threat to human freedom. The syllogism runs something like this: A man distinguished from his fellows by learning, refinement, and exceptional moral courage is not willing to behave as most other men behave; such a man, therefore, is a snob and an aristocrat. But snobs and aristocrats are known to be political tyrants. It follows that the man who values these distinctions, and tries to develop them in others, is a potential tyrant and a threat to the equality of man.

In other words, the historical abuses which have resulted from the differences among men have led to rather complicated results, both in politics and in social and educational ideas. First, they led to a series of revolutionary changes in the theory and practice of political power. The old theory was that a king is a man distinguished by heredity and by divine appointment from other men, with both the right and the capacity to rule over them. This theory was overthrown by the various revolutions of the past 150 years, and for it was substituted the doctrine of natural rights, the equality of man, and the sovereignty of the

people. The idea of equality, however, has suffered some corruption into the view that mediocrity is politically desirable. There have been two rival theories since—the racial doctrine of blood sovereignty of the Nazis, and the doctrine of class sovereignty of the Communists, the latter having later become the sovereignty of the Collectivist State. Both these theories were practical attacks on the equality of the individual man; in them, only men as Nazis, or as Communists, enjoyed rights, and these rights were not essentially *human*—belonging to all men—but were the rights of men who were born to a special race, or who had adopted a special ideology.

The ideas of human equality and human potentiality were vulnerable to these attacks for the reason that men no longer felt strong convictions about them. They had lost their character as metaphysical realities, and with their philosophical meaning went also the idea of non-political distinction. Political philosophy is concerned with the minimum of human rights and qualities—the bare subsistence level of these principles, without which no self-governing political community can survive at all. But a democracy never merely "survives." Democracy assumes a rich moral existence on the part of the people—it is by definition the political framework for the free exercise of more than political virtues and excellences in human life. In order to survive, democracy has to *thrive,* and it is this which certain political philosophers seem to forget, or seem never to have learned.

In illustration, there is the recent *Patterns of Anti-Democratic Thought,* by David Spitz (Macmillan, 1949). In some ways, Mr. Spitz achieves brilliance of analysis, yet the fact that he manages to include among the anti-democrats several contemporary thinkers who have devoted themselves to fostering independent human distinction suggests that some basic factor in the success of democracy has been left out of consideration entirely. Ortega y Gasset, Albert Jay Nock and Irving Babbitt, whatever else one may say of them, have been constructive forces in the world of education and of thought generally. The world is richer in clarity of thinking, stronger in integrity and moral discipline because of their influence, and no democracy, no self-government, is possible without these qualities. It seems a pity that such men should have to be tarred with the "antidemocratic" brush, when the salt and savor of human intercourse so much depends upon the sort of penetration which their minds have afforded. Further, these men were primarily concerned with the distinctions which grow from self-discipline, as contrasted to those which come by original endowment. Reactionary political systems insist upon the importance of *unearned* distinctions—the distinctions of family or race, inherited wealth, or accepted belief. The interest of educators in human differences is a radically different view.

It is true that these educators, Mr. Nock in particular, have noticed that some individuals seem to take to self-discipline more easily than others. The great democrat, Thomas Jefferson, noticed it, too. This is one of the mysteries of human life, but we shall never solve the mysteries by denying their existence.

It is easy to define the abstract theory of democracy, and then to extract from the theories of educators—men more devoted to the organic processes of cultural growth than to the contractual relationships of politics—quotations which seem "anti-democratic" in content. It is easy to *say* what democracy is, but difficult indeed to contribute to its health.

A political system may declare for the dignity and equality of man in its constitution and its laws, but unless enough people actually manifest their dignity and develop vision enough to understand the moral foundations on which political equality rests, the system will not work. It is never "anti-democratic" to point this out.

Letter from SWITZERLAND

GENEVA.—Four years ago, the Oxford Movement, known here as *le Réarmament Moral*, attracted the attention of certain Swiss who had visited its center at Mackinac, Michigan. In response to their request to Mr. Frank Buchman, the movement's founder and leader, a Swiss center was started. In November, 1946, the ancient and luxurious Caux-palais was bought by the promoters for 1,050,000 Swiss francs.

This *soi-disant* religio-moral movement which, it is claimed, is supported entirely by unsolicited contributions, pays no salaries. It extends free hospitality to the sympathizers and well-wishers who come in hordes to stay in its spacious buildings and attend the daily meetings, concerts, and theatrical performances. Resident-visitors who care to repay may offer their services as manual labourers, professionals, artists, etc.

The movement acquired not only the Caux-palais, whose immense ballroom has been transformed into a modern theater, but also the Hotel Régina, the Grand Hotel, and the Alpina Pension. Expenses of alterations, installations and repairs alone have run into millions. The daily cost of operating the establishment is said to average 15,000 Swiss francs.

By June, 1947, the "Foundation pour le Réarmament Moral," because of its extensive financial engagements, attracted the notice of the Department of the Interior at Berne. The Foundation is now required to submit a detailed yearly report of its finances and activities. It was found, we are told, to be entering increasingly into politics, under cover of its quasi-religious meetings, making its influence felt among some of the high-ranking army officials.

At first it was thought that the movement had the backing of certain American millionaires. The fact is that only 25 per cent of its funds came from America—and not at all from a "few millionaires." Over 50 per cent was contributed in Switzerland, while, because of international restrictions, certain countries made concessions to allow money to be sent to Switzerland.

Some devotees have donated their entire fortunes, while others turn over their income. There are those who sell their property, their jewelry and securities, while not a few have renounced their life-insurance policies in favour of the Center. Gifts in kind have not been wanting. This is not gossip such as circulates so freely about movements of this kind, but is based upon facts furnished to the press by Monsieur Daniel Mottu, head of the movement's bureau of information. He has announced that the Finns have given four hundred chairs; workers of Sheffield have contributed coffee- and teapots. From Denmark is sent butter, while the Norwegians are sending paper. Three tons of sugar came from Jamaica; Kenya sent tea and coffee. Egypt furnishes cotton, and Italy, rice. Miners of the Ruhr have promised three hundred tons of coal, and other workers of this same district have promised an additional eight hundred tons. This coal is carried to the Swiss frontier free of charge by a Rhine steamship company.

The Swiss, who allow complete religious freedom, and who forbid any kind of proselytizing in their schools and colleges, take no note of this religious enthusiasm, as such, but when it comes to a question of money, they are very vigilant! And, today, the question, *Whence all this wealth?* is exciting comment in the press. How can a movement supposed to exist for the amelioration of mankind's condition—a movement declared by the Canton de Vaud to be a "public service," and therefore exempted from paying taxes—how can such a movement spend millions so lavishly? How is it that men and women supposed to be consecrated to service of mankind live in such luxury? What really lies behind this voluntary contribution—*of money?* Finally, what is the movement's bona fide aim? The only answer thus far vouchsafed is in terms of Mr. Buchman's declaration: "If each loved enough, if each shared unselfishly enough—everyone would have enough."

In the meantime, the strength of the movement is steadily growing as it opposes itself to the widespread Soviet propaganda, advocating in its stead a socialism based upon the precepts of Jesus. With the expansion of its influence, grave alarm is felt by those who see in its appeal to religious fanaticism a potential threat to the freedom of moral conscience—a freedom ingrained in every Swiss boy and girl from early childhood.

SWITZERLAND CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
THE STRUGGLE WITH MYSTERY

THE one command which neither gods nor tyrants have been able to enforce upon human beings is the command not to think. Men may be frightened by the command, and think poorly; or they may be awed by it, and think timidly and ineffectually, but think they must. In time, as their thinking grows stronger, they gain the courage and the assurance to reject the command entirely.

The history of European thought is the history of men's efforts to overcome the obstacles to clear and independent thinking. We may laugh at the scholastic philosophers of the Middle Ages, because we no longer think as they did, but we ought to recognize that their struggles were the same as our own—they wanted to fit the premises of their time into a rational structure of meaning. They slowly invaded the assumptions of Revelation, trying to make them amenable to reason—less defiant of common sense and the human feeling for justice. They were strenuously engaged in the attempt to "vindicate the ways of God to man." Only after they failed, as Western culture in its entirety failed in this attempt, were new premises established, and the task of "rationalization" begun in other directions.

Space and Spirit, by Edmund Whittaker (Henry Regnery, Chicago, 1948), is a brief but comprehensive reconsideration of medieval rationalism in the light of modern physics. Mr. Whittaker is himself a mathematician and seems to have an excellent grasp of some of the intellectual issues of this comparison. He is, one may say, a non-theological Thomist—that is, he is impressed by the depth of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas—and builds his book around Thomas' "Five Ways" or "proofs" of the existence of God. But he is no propagandist who writes tendentiously on behalf of Catholicism. His book is honest, and in many ways informing, even if its conclusions at times seem superficial.

Briefly, *Space and Spirit* traces the conception of Deity and its foundation in human thought from Aristotle to Einstein. The author finds in Thomas Aquinas the particular virtue of starting in his "proofs" of God from observation of the natural world, instead of beginning with assumptions taken from Revelation. Mr. Whittaker seems to think that Thomas, therefore, might supply modern scientists with the basis for belief in God. The physicists, he says, "have an instinctive sympathy with St. Thomas' rejection of the idealistic aspects of Neoplatonism, his conception of man as a part of Nature, his assertion of the meaning and value of the concrete things of sense, his reliance on experience, and his belief in the fundamental rationality of the universe."

Those who are interested in the Thomist "proofs of God" will have to secure Mr. Whittaker's book and read them; here, we can only point out that Thomas was so close to being a pantheist that for a century or so his books were regarded as heretical; and that, so far as the fifth proof is concerned, Mr. Whittaker finds it necessary to cite modern physics to show that Thomas is *not* making a pantheistic argument. Using modern science to protect Thomas Aquinas from the charge of pantheism is doubtless the neatest theological trick of the century, even though it is also, as a theologian might say, "a work of supererogation" for both Thomas and Science.

What is of interest in Mr. Whittaker's book is its fairly clear demonstration that modern physics has grown up to the point where it is ready to acknowledge its need for metaphysical foundations. So long as the major concepts of physics—force, matter, gravitation, causality—were taken for granted as "brute facts" requiring no further explanation, physicists felt no need of metaphysical support. But science is a method of explanation, and when, in its progress, it breaks down the "brute facts" into subtler elements—into mathematical equations and virtual *concepts* of the

nature of things—these "facts," which are the dogmatic or "revealed" basis of physical science, no longer serve as premises that need not be questioned.

It was the same in the Middle Ages. So long as the authority of the Church prevailed against thinking about the revealed dogmas of religion, metaphysics was unnecessary. Metaphysics is the pursuit, by *rational* inquiry, of the nature of being. If you tell a child that a building fell upon a man and killed him because it was the will of God, the child may accept the answer for a while. But when the child grows up, it will occur to him that having a building collapse on a man is not very reasonable, and he will ask, "*Why* did God will that?"

Such questions come at the beginning of what historians call Natural Theology. Men want a reasonable God. A reasonable man finds it difficult to pray to a God who does unreasonable things. So, the reasonable men among the theologians exerted themselves to make over the concept of God into something reasonable. Aquinas probably came the closest to achieving this of any of the Medieval thinkers, with the result that he also came the closest to eliminating the personal aspect of the Godidea, which is why he was accused of being a pantheist.

The founders of modern atheism, coming several centuries later, and having less patience with or interest in this problem than Thomas, took the easy way out: they eliminated God. Some did it cautiously, like Newton and Descartes, by giving God nothing to do; others, like Lamettrie and d'Holbach, did it boldly and openly by asserting that Nature could do by herself any of the things that the theologians said belonged in God's department. It is fair to say that God, whether by theologians or atheists, was reasoned out of existence.

Today, the world is looking around for First Principles, again, and it is natural that people familiar with the history of Western thought should turn hopefully to the ones that the West formerly accepted. Mr. Whittaker is obviously interested in Thomas Aquinas because the great thirteenth-century scholastic seems to him to qualify on two counts as the soundest metaphysician the West developed. First, Aquinas insists upon being as much of a rationalist as he can, and second, he turns to the world of nature for material to reason about, in order to arrive at first principles. "We may be assured," Mr. Whittaker writes, "that if he [Thomas] were alive now, he would start from the science of Nature as we know it, a science that is immensely richer than was dreamt of in his day, and that he would show how it could be gathered into the framework of divine knowledge."

But *Space and Spirit* has other heroes besides St. Thomas. As a mathematician, Mr. Whittaker is much attracted to the revival of Pythagoreanism by Robert Greathead of Lincoln (1175-1253), and by his more famous pupil, Roger Bacon. In the works of these two, he finds "the direct ancestral form of modern science." Aristotle, whose method was largely followed by Thomas Aquinas, was no mathematician, and mathematical interpretations of the universe derive from Pythagorean and Platonic rather than Aristotelian sources. Bacon held that speculation about the forms and species of Aristotle could never lead to knowledge, but that observation of nature would disclose fixed and universal laws, which, in turn, would form the structure of metaphysics. Mathematics is indeed the foundation of modern science, and progress in physical science has been almost identified with progress in mathematics. This brings us to Mr. Whittaker's dislike of the Neoplatonists, who also embraced the mathematics of Pythagoras. Of Proclus, the systematizer of the Platonic tradition, the author says:

> Proclus, who was the most eminent mathematician of his day, arranged the doctrines of Neoplatonism in an orderly sequence of 211 propositions, proved in the syllogistic manner of Euclidian geometry; in spite of much that was essentially mystical and some things that are still

obscure in subject matter, it may be said that no form of religion has ever been more clearly expounded.

Why, then, should the influence of the Neoplatonists be frowned upon by Mr. Whittaker? His reason is that, as he puts it, Neoplatonists despised the material world as "the lowest and vilest element of the scheme of things." They had, he claims, no interest in experimental science and lived in a sterile atmosphere of speculation about the emanations of the One. This disregard of nature, according to Mr. Whittaker, was "the true explanation of the historical fact that mathematics made no progress for nearly a thousand years."

However, the only evidence that he offers to support this condemnation is a quotation from Plotinus that he "blushed" because he had a body. Out of context, and to a modern reader, this is enough to make all Neoplatonism ridiculous, if such evidence be accepted without further investigation. It is true that Plotinus was a mystic—a naturalist of the spirit rather than of the body. But it is untrue that the Neoplatonists took *no* interest in science. It happens that they were the principal investigators of their time in the field now known as psychic research, and that only in the past fifteen or twenty years the treatises of Plotinus on psychology have thrown considerable light on the problems raised by modern Spiritualism. Iamblichus, another Neoplatonist, wrote at length on questions of psychical phenomena, so that it is a serious mistake to say that the Neoplatonists had no interest in science. Rather, it should be said that they had great interest and skill in a division of human experience which modern investigators wholly ignored until about seventy-five years ago. Mr. Whittaker has inherited the conventional nineteenth-century disapproval of the Neoplatonists for their devotion to theurgy or magic—which they regarded as the most important science of all—and as a result he charges them with stultifying research. This is hardly just.

Space and Spirit is an informing book which explores the common philosophical elements in medieval metaphysics and the implications of modern physics. Non-technical readers will not remember very much of what Mr. Whittaker has to say, but they may find that some of his perspectives open up new areas of reflection.

COMMENTARY
FRONTIER THINKING

FRONTIERS for this week presents an article discussing "New Ideas at Work." There will be other articles with this title, appearing whenever material of similar excellence becomes available.

Really important ideas, of course, are never "new," for they always embody basic principles. Yet the ability to see how principles may be applied to the changing human situation always releases new energies and opens up new channels of thought. In this sense, new ideas are constantly being put to work by people with both originality and determination.

These are days when an increasing number of people are oppressed by a sense of "confinement." The growing rigidities of our culture seem to impose strict limitations upon human activity—most of all upon activity which deviates, if only a little, from conventional ways of doing things. The economic limitations are the most obvious. When all the devices for economic efficiency are geared to the goal of profit-taking, the objective of sharing excellence of production finds many obstacles to overcome. Meanwhile tax experts, acting in what they regard as the public interest, devote themselves to obtaining for the public purse as much as possible of the income of profit-seeking enterprise, in order to meet the growing public expenses which, incidentally, are largely created by an intensely acquisitive way of life. These factors of economic history impose unique burdens upon non-acquisitive enterprise. To survive, the latter must practice much more than "normal" commercial efficiency.

There are other rigidities, such as the barriers met by a man with "radical" ideas in seeking employment, and the difficulty with which any unorthodox doctrine—in medicine, for example—obtains a fair hearing.

A situation of this sort calls for pioneering that need not fit into any familiar pattern. Today, any man, woman or child who strikes out to create new forms for the direct expression of human integrity is a pioneer. The key question is always: What is the individual doing about his environment? The people who put new ideas to work see their environment as something to use or break out of; they make new circumstances, instead of submitting to the present ones.

What human beings accomplish in these directions is a testament to the power of the imagination. Simply to know what others have done and are doing sometimes helps to discover new resources in ourselves.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

IN visualizing the qualifications for an "ideal school," we have already considered several reasons for helping children to belong to the "natural" world—to acquire a feeling for the simple though profound story of those portions of the earth not invaded by industrialization, yet fundamental to human sustenance and understanding. Most artists develop an early love for the materials they use, even before producing their creations. An understanding and appreciation of Nature's intricate balances, her intelligence and regular processes, similarly, is the best background for a grasp of the agrarian economy, upon which so much else depends. First, then, comes Nature herself, the most ennobling source of religion, philosophy and science. Next, the learning of how to work on with Nature, to provide what man needs to live.

It seems increasingly clear to us, in the light of the educational experiments previously referred to, that a capacity for producing from the land is one of the most soul-satisfying acquirements of a youth's early training. In this context, an initial "love of nature" becomes a respect for the materials which will be used—soil, water, sunlight, seeds and rain.

Perhaps an unnatural separation in our culture habitually takes place between these two aspects of education. For instance, the Boy Scouts and similar organizations presumably "study nature," while agricultural training schools delve into the latest technical developments in production of food from the land. But neither point of emphasis can gain its full meaning without the balance provided by the other. As we have before suggested, teaching children something of the life of the fisherman or farmer, by helping him learn to produce from the land and from ocean on a small scale, is both a way of deepening the meaning of nature study and of providing roots in the basic economy of our society. If sufficient attention is paid to balancing these two sorts of activity for children, we may hope to reach something close to ideal conditions for the beginning of community living.

The rhythms of nature, her complicated patterns of balanced interaction, have been the inspiration not only of a Pythagoras or a Copernicus; they have also been the very substance of the *lives* of the majority of all men who have ever lived—of all those who have learned how to encourage yields of crops from the land and harvests from the sea. The child who shares some of these basic experiences, in however small a way, makes contact with millions of men of past and present whom he will never meet—but with whom he shares direct experience of man's struggle and evolution on earth.

Cooperation and democracy are not processes accomplished in a vacuum. Every dictatorship can boast of cooperation of some sort. Our quarrels with extreme totalitarianisms have not arisen because their subjects were insufficiently "cooperative," but rather because we did not like the framework *within* which they "cooperated." The democratic ideal of education is involved with a belief that the right sort of learning is accomplished by drawing forth, from each individual, capacities for intelligent self-reliance, while successful education in a totalitarian regime consists in seeing that all youths learn to accept the fact that the locus of effective power resides outside themselves. It is not mere coincidence that the "total" wars of history have all come after the Industrial Revolution. Not only did the Industrial Revolution furnish the techniques for waging more extensive and more effective warfare, but also the *type of education,* half-consciously devised to "break people in" for the industrial process, was an effective conditioner for the acceptance of external centralization of power. A predominantly agrarian citizenry is never eagerly warlike, for its members, in order to be successful farmers, have to develop so much self-reliance

that it is almost impossible for them to act, for long, as an unquestioning, belligerent *collectivity*. Nor is it likely that the man who lives close to nature will easily accept any waste of human life. His psychological world is suffused with a feeling of the necessity for achieving cooperative "economy" between various departments of nature, and such a conditioning in conservation must carry over, to some extent, when he comes to evaluate ways and means of regulating social and international affairs.

But to turn more specifically to a visualization of a small school whose founders are determined not to overlook anything important: What must be achieved is some sort of cooperative endeavor between teachers and pupils to establish satisfactory conditions of community living. Last week we repeated from Louis Adamic the story of the beginnings of Black Mountain College, hoping to suggest some of the values which may be expected to emerge in the proper environment. The key to the success of this phase of educational endeavor would have to be, as it was at Black Mountain, a pooling of resources. Those students and teachers combined their small financial means to make a general stock pile; disbursements became a matter for community concern—of pupils as much as of teachers—which is quite a departure from the mechanisms of spending associated with our more orthodox centers of learning. At Black Mountain, too, all available books were brought to the community library. Finally, and of the greatest importance, were the communally undertaken tasks of maintaining the buildings and property. Here the pupils and teachers worked together side by side in a manner reminiscent of Sevagram. Part of the success which may be claimed for the Summerhill School in England must also derive from this practice. It affords opportunity for the teachers to become something much more than vague theoreticians, and encourages young persons to integrate their abstract learning with a mastery of basic skills.

Some degree of agrarian economy within a school, too, affords a solid foundation for development of an understanding self-government in matters of school planning. Unless pupils are made aware of the basic resources which sustain human life and participate in their use, they cannot be said to have, from the beginning, roots of their own in the social process.

FRONTIERS

New Ideas at Work

I

A MAN who is aggressively critical of the social and economic system which surrounds him is faced by certain practical difficulties, one being the problem of earning a living without participating in processes which he roundly condemns on paper and in speech. This, of course, is a moral problem, and easily ignored by those who maintain that nothing short of a complete change in the social order can establish the good society.

The constructive movements of history, however, have always been gradual—organic in development, educational in influence. Violent revolutions, conceivably, have at times been necessary, in the sense that they became inevitable, but it was never the violence and the bloodshed which contributed the worth-while elements resulting from the change. So the reformer or revolutionary, if he expects to accomplish anything at all, must also be a full-time educator—a teacher, that is, in everything he does. And the radical who determines to be a teacher has to start in *doing* what he believes in.

The socialist writer and critical economist, Scott Nearing, must have come to some such conclusion as this, for in the disordered years after 1929 he formulated to himself a basic question: "Could an outcast from a dying social order live frugally and decently and at the same time have sufficient leisure and energy to assist in the speedy liquidation of the old social order and its replacement by a more workable social system?"

The beauty of the answer Mr. Nearing found to this question is that it is profoundly educational, regardless of whether you happen to agree that the present social order is "dying," and whether or not you would choose the same pattern of life that he has evolved. For this answer is not verbal, and it is not "ideological." It is an answer built of practical activities which, by any sensible standard of comparison, have created a personal and social existence immeasurably richer than the lives of any of those who merely "adjust" to circumstances.

The scene of the Nearing enterprise is in southern Vermont, near Jamaica, where, in 1932, a piece of land was secured. The objective was to set up an "independent economy" involving a small capital outlay and small overhead costs, which would yield a modest living in exchange for half-time work, with the rest of the time left for research, reading, writing, and speaking. The following story is constructed from Mr. Nearing's own words, partly from an article in the London *Vegetarian News*, and partly from a letter.

Our first plans called for a forestry project as a source of cash income. A little experience in the region convinced us that the production of maple syrup and sugar offered a more logical and dependable source of cash income. Consequently, since 1935, we have relied increasingly on maple. We have built up a semi-self-sufficient homestead, with its capital plant and its established routine. The place is a going concern, which has paid its own way almost from the beginning. During the past decade, in addition to meeting expenses, the income from the enterprise has provided a modest but adequate cash income. By and large, we expect that our year will be divided, with rough equality, between bread-labor, professional activity and association.

We operate on a formula of limited objectives. We are not trying to make money. That is a game in which the sky is the limit. Instead, we ask ourselves: "What is the least cash we can get by on during the next twelve months?" When we have fixed that amount, taking into consideration all plans and purposes, and know how much cash we must have, we produce enough of our cash crop to equal that amount and to provide a safe margin. Then we stop production till the next budget year.

We have not solved the problem of living. Far from it. But we have gone far enough to

convince ourselves that no family group possessing a normal share of vigor, energy, purpose, imagination and determination need continue to wear the yoke of a competitive, acquisitive, predatory culture.

The maple industry is in large measure a pre-industrialist household craft which provides us with our cash income, but it does not loom large in our economy. Our "economic independence" is a very different matter, consisting of the following ingredients:

1. Semi-self-containment, carrying with it freedom from the market and from wagery. The price-profit economy presupposes the exchange of labor-power for cash (exploitation); the payment of a part of the cash in taxes in exchange for regimentation, and the expenditure of the remainder in the market, for food, clothing, gadgets and other commodities. The individual who accepts this formula is at the mercy of the labor market, the State, and the commodity market.

Self-containment is based on the production of goods which we consume ourselves, without the intervention of the market. In our case we raise food and eat it, cut fuel and burn it, construct buildings and inhabit them, thus eliminating transport, middlemen and handling costs.

About three quarters of our income is the immediate result of our own productive forces. That means that for each four dollars' worth of goods we consume, only one dollar takes a cash form. The other three dollars' worth comes to us directly on a use basis. By this means, we have freed ourselves largely from direct dependence upon price-profit economy.

2. We barter part of our crop, which consists of maple products, for the cash crops of other primary producers of fruits, nuts, oils, thus by-passing the commodity market with its heavy overhead costs.

3. We buy only for cash. We never borrow. If we do not have the money, we do without. Thus we free ourselves from interest-slavery, which is one of the heaviest economic burdens of many primary producers.

4. We keep no animals and use almost no animal products—no meat, no dairy products, little leather, and no furs. Our food consists, roughly, of half fruit and fruit juices; one-third vegetables; ten per cent fats (vegetable oils and nuts), and five per cent protein (from whole wheat, soy beans, and nuts). By these means we have freed ourselves from the slaughter-house dietary; from the exploitation of animals for the service of man, and the corresponding enslavement to animals of all those who practice animal husbandry; and from the high protein diet, with its multiple threats to health.

5. We practice organic agriculture. We are rebuilding and revitalizing our soil. We use no commercial fertilizers and no poisonous dusts or sprays. We buy few processed or packaged foods, but live directly on the whole products of our healthy soil, and for the most part we use these products uncooked.

6. We aim to eat foods in season. By this means, we get edibles when they are at their best in terms of nutrition.

7. We have resisted all attempts of the profiteers to sell us habit-forming drugs. We use no alcohol, tobacco, coffee, tea or cola products. Instead, we raise our own herbs, and when hot drinks are in order, use mint, camomile and other teas which are not habit-forming.

8. We are making a consistent effort in our neighborhood to subordinate the acquisitive urge and to practice mutual aid. Last fall one of our neighbors harvested an unexpectedly large pear crop. Instead of taking it to market, he passed it around the neighbors, because the pears are not his cash crop and were a surplus in his household economy. By this device, surpluses go directly to

those who need them, without the intervention of money or of a market.

9. We have been reasonably successful in freeing ourselves from the four besetting evils of a competitive, industrialized social pattern—from greed for things (including money and gadgets) and for power to push around our fellow human beings; from the hurry and noise connected with the drive to get ahead of other people; from the anxiety and fear which are inevitable accompaniments of the struggle for wealth and power; from the multiplicity, complexity and frustrating confusion which result from the crowding of multitudes of people into small areas.

10. We attempt to live a rounded day and a rounded year, each able-bodied adult doing a share of bread-labor, carrying on a hobby or vocation or profession in which he believes and to which he can devote surplus time and energy, and giving some time to association with his fellows.

Man does not live by bread alone, nor is the care of the food-body the central theme of his life. But subsistence, in the form of goods and services, is a necessary prerequisite to those constructive and creative efforts which, through the agency of the crafts, arts and sciences, have built up man's social environment. The ultimate end of the economy is the stimulation of human will and genius to efforts which, in the last analysis, will improve the social environment, keep it fluidic, and thus enlarge opportunities for the building of individual character. . . .

The works of the mind produced by Mr. Nearing during recent years give evidence that this enterprise is serving its intended "end." In the past six years, he has written six books on contemporary problems and affairs, and in addition he writes a monthly (now a quarterly) newsletter of political and social commentary, *World Events.* The books are: *Democracy Is Not Enough, United World, The Tragedy of Empire, War or Peace?, The Soviet Union as a World Power,* and *The Revolution of Our Time,* all issued by the Island Press in New York, a "one-member-one-vote" cooperative publishing house established by authors and book-lovers. The Nearing homestead in Vermont began as a pioneering venture in putting new ideas to work, and it seems to have proved itself on all counts.