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THE ANATOMY OF UNDERSTANDING

QUESTIONS which look into the nature of human understanding are surely pursuing the most delicate of matters. Since truth is sought by understanding, to grapple with the meaning of "understanding" must be quite as difficult as searching for what is meant by "truth." The following is an illustration of the sort of problem that may be involved.

At a seminar on the subject of "protest" in literature, held last spring by a boys' preparatory school in the West, one of the participants turned to another member of the panel, the poetry editor of a well-known magazine, and asked, "Who were some anti-war poets?"

The poetry editor's face clouded. He wouldn't answer. You could see that the question made an issue for him. He was not about to list the poets on whom the war-protesters could "cash in." Such lists can be compiled, of course, and to some purpose. The War Resisters League put together a 1966 Peace Calendar with nearly ninety poems or fragments of poems, leaving little doubt as to where these poets stood on the question of war. But it comes to this, that if you want to understand a poet you must hear his plea—"Don't make politics out of what I say," as John Beecher wrote in one of his poems. Or, as Emerson said when charged with failing to be a "leader"—"I have other responsibilities." It is not that the artist is *against* a conjunction between the demands of his inner sense of meaning and the arrangements made by men in the world, but that he feels, often without knowing why, that the conjunction must come at the right moment. It cannot be forced without the betrayal of his art. He did not mean *that.* Perhaps he awaits what the Jungians sometimes call a "synchronicity." The artist's natural dislike of moralists has a part here. Righteous impatience does not fit with the rhythms he attends. Yet he sometimes submits to its pull. John Reed remarked, "The revolutionary movement is a great thing, but it sure plays hell with your poetry."

It is a question of distinguishing between what can be done or made "to order," and what is not a manufacture at all, but rather a transport, something which takes place when the tumblers of perception unpredictably fall into place. No one knows which gods preside over such occasions; what seems certain is that we accomplish only imitative, mechanical things without them. *Understanding,* in the full meaning we seek, is hardly present.

A "progressive" culture does all in its power to hide this distinction. Expositors of Socialist Realism have much in common with advertising agencies and public relations men, so far as basic intentions and methods are concerned. Both denature the world of any independent "moments of truth." Either the Party or the Marketing schedule rules. Both are professionals in the limitation of understanding to what can be subjected to *control;* both are secular moralists with systems to establish and promote, reflexes to train. Everything that happens—every innovation, every thought any man thinks—has to be fed into their hopper, to come out in regulated, measured, and negotiable form. You don't pay a public relations man to laze and invite his soul, or wait upon the stars. He must *produce,* just as the poet must write an *anti-war* poem, or support with his soon shallow incantations the "reality" defined by the political or commercial ideologists who are running things.

In *The Tradition of the New,* Harold Rosenberg has a passage on what happens to great scientific discoveries as they are reported to the public by the popularizers. The *meanings* of these discoveries—supposing them to be known

at all—are inevitably converted into the terms of a "promotion." The formula always wins out. The dogma of "progress" is always served. Never can anyone be allowed to be thrown back upon himself—to be left without authoritative interpretation. "Mysteries" remain, of course, but we have close institutional control over them, with frequent progress reports on how they are being handled—atoms, DNA, Moon Probes, etc. No one need meddle, or propose amateur or unauthorized expeditions. Everything has professional attention.

In his Preface to *The Captive Mind* (Knopf, 1953), Czeslaw Milosz describes a more compulsive version of this process of control which he, a Polish poet, watched being installed after the Communists occupied Poland:

> "Socialist realism" is much more than a matter of taste, of preference for one style of painting or music rather than another. It is concerned with the beliefs which lie at the foundation of human existence. In the field of literature it forbids what has in every age been the writer's essential task—to look at the world from his own independent viewpoint, to tell the truth as he sees it, and so to keep watch and ward in the interest of society as a whole. It preaches a proper attitude of doubt in regard to a merely formal system of ethics but itself makes all judgment of values dependent upon the interest of the dictatorship. Human sufferings are drowned in the trumpet-blare; the orchestra in the concentration camp. . . .

Later on Milosz says:

> Dialectical materialism, Russian-style, is nothing more than nineteenth-century science vulgarized to the second power. Its emotional and didactic components are so strong that they change all proportions. Although the Method was scientific at its origins, when it is applied to humanistic disciplines it often transforms them into edifying stories adapted to the needs of the moment. But there is no escape once a man enters these convenient bridges. Centuries of human history, with their thousands upon thousands of intricate affairs, are reduced to a few, most generalized terms. Undoubtedly, one comes closer to the truth when one sees history as the expression of the class struggle rather than a series of private quarrels among kings and nobles. But precisely because such an analysis of history comes closer to the truth, it is more dangerous. It gives the illusion of *full knowledge;* it supplies answers to all questions, answers which merely run around in a circle repeating a few formulas. . . .
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> The son of a worker, subjected to such an education, cannot think otherwise than as the school demands. Two times two equals four. The press, literature, painting, films, and theater all illustrate what he learns, just as the lives of saints and martyrs serve as illustrations of theology. It would be wrong to assert that a dual set of values no longer exists. The resistance against the new set of values is, however, emotional. It survives, but it is beaten whenever it has to explain itself in rational terms. A man's subconscious or not-quite-conscious life is richer than his vocabulary. His opposition to this new philosophy of life is much like a toothache. Not only can he not express the pain in words, but he cannot even tell you which tooth is aching.

Now the terrible thing about this framework of education and cultural indoctrination is not only that it forces *authentic understanding* to work obscurely through dark emotional channels, almost condemning it to manifest in what will seem, initially, as some form of excess, or to intrude, finally, upon the times as rebellious and anarchic explosions; this is bad enough, but in addition to dooming growth to anger and revolt, it throws out what may be called the classical humanist understanding already achieved by mankind, and preserved in literary forms. Take for example some passages of richly suggestive description in a novel (*Pilgrim's Inn*) by Elizabeth Goudge; these sentences, read by ideological canon, have hardly any meaning at all:

> . . . for a woman of Lucilla's vivid imagination and deep sympathies, her own personal sorrows and anxieties had not been the only ones that she had had to bear. She had borne also as much as she was able to of the sorrow of the world. . . .
>
> Hilary's kind brown eyes saw a very great deal more than most people realized. . . . And he had, too, a charm that was all his own, an indefinable air of aristocracy that was the outcome of his own secret spiritual victories. In Hilary that something in a man that is independent of inheritance, training, or tradition, though it has roots in them like a plant in the soil had grown to unusual height and strength.

> People did not take much notice of Hilary when they first met him, but they found that he grew upon them.

The ground of these characterizations is vague. It is the secret, inner, human host which has never been finally "defined" and doubtless never will be, yet is essential to all recognition and grasp of individuality. But if we can never explain it away—as mechanistic or "controlling" theories of history or progress attempt—we very possibly can know more about it than we do. It is a question of courting the inner "host," of finding out how it grows, or *if* it grows; what its relations are with the measurable world about us; and why, in addition, it seems always stifled and driven underground by final definition. (It, he,—it doesn't matter.)

So far as the mind-set of the modern age is concerned, finding out something about this host is hardly easier in the West than in the East, where such researches are ideologically forbidden. In the West a voluntary sort of confinement to the tangible, the plainly explicable, the profitable, prevails. As Milosz says, "For in the West also one experiences the pressure to conform—to conform, that is, with a system which is the opposite of the one I have escaped from. The difference is that in the West one may resist such pressure without being held guilty of mortal sin." Such pressures create massive cultural barriers to the spontaneous movements of understanding. Acts of understanding are closely related to acts of creation. One is the passive, the other the active, mode of the human host, you might say. But understanding is not really "passive," as we are using the term. It is the private conjunction of the knower with meaning. And let us note that what has been just said depends for its sense upon an intuitive agreement between writer and reader that some sense is there. Attempt at precise definition (impossible, anyway) would lose the point. Here, we must "court" meanings, not invade and survey an alien land. (Could there be a poetic transit?) If a man succeeds in bringing a radiant reflection of some flashing incommensurable he has felt, or somehow known, into our view, how will he tell us what he has done, or why? There is, as Paul Valéry says, a "coquetry of silence on the part of artists as to the origins of their work." Valéry continues:

> And though-few artists have the courage to say how they produced their work, I believe that there are not many more who take the risk of understanding it themselves. Such understanding commences with the very difficult abandonment of the notion of glory, of the laudatory epithet; it tolerates no idea of superiority, no delusion of greatness. It leads to the discovery of the relative beneath the apparent perfection. And this is necessary if we are not to believe that minds are profoundly different as their products make them appear. For example, certain works of science, and mathematical works in particular, show such clarity in their construction that one would say that they were not the work of any person at all. There is something *unhuman* about them. And this quality has had the effect of making people suppose so great a difference between certain studies, as, for instance, between the sciences and the arts, that, owing to it, opinion has also assumed a separation between the minds devoted to each, as complete as that which seems to exist between the results of their labors. These labors, however, only differ as variations from a common basis, differ in what of it they include and what of it they leave out in forming their languages and their symbols. One must, therefore, have some distrust of books and explanations which seem too clear. We are deceived by what is definite. . . .

This is an old, old problem, encountered by human beings in many ways. Here, as Valéry sets out the different uses of the mind, it becomes the question of scientific epistemology as now subjected to intense investigation by Polanyi and Bronowski. In a more ancient context, it is the central question of the kinds of knowing considered by Eastern philosophy. Last month, at a meeting with some Los Angeles religious leaders, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk and scholar, Thich Nhat Hanh, sang for his audience a chant which is repeated every morning by the monks upon arising, before their hour of meditation. In this chant is the injunction to learn to distinguish between absolute and relative truth (*paramarttasatya* and *samvrittisatya*)—between

the living truth of principles and the causal, make-something-with-it, truth about things.

It is natural enough that in the West, where the religious quest has been endlessly perverted by the manipulation of the religious instinct, and where the attempt to put absolute meanings into finite terms has been an intellectual disease, people prefer to investigate this distinction as a secular problem of aesthetics and "creativity." Fundamental intellectual distrust of "the religious" seems in Europe to have limited the meaning of the word "spiritual" to the higher reaches of the arts and in the United States to have led psychologists to approach the "mystical" in a more or less "naturalistic" spirit, finding so many parallels between mystical insight and artistic inspiration that the two often seem to merge. Meanwhile, of course, psychology has broadened its base, so that "naturalistic" may be understood as "generously humanistic," so far as methodological assumptions are concerned. For example, in illustration of the new temper of this science, there is this statement by Frank Barron in a discussion of the creative process: "Psychology, if it holds itself apart from dehumanizing generalization, can be a sacred discipline devoted to the celebration of the human spirit." A research psychologist at the University of California in Berkeley, Mr. Barron has formulated an approach to the study of creativity in terms of its relation to the peak experience, as framed by self-consciousness. In his contribution to *The Study of Lives,* a volume published in 1963 in honor of Henry A. Murray, he writes:

> Perhaps the most basic antinomy psychologically is the distinction between self and not-self. It is fundamental to common sense and may be thought of as the first achievement of the ego or the beginning of perceptual structure. All of logic and causal thinking begins with this distinction and its corollaries. Whether things are going on inside us or outside us is the first distinction we must make. With that established space and time can take on separate existence, distinct events at specific space-time coordinates can be described; and, above all, our self belongs to us alone, our mind is distinct and separate from other minds.

The question now is: How does "logical" thinking—thinking which requires the assumption of separateness, of finite limit—become informed with brooding awareness, the sense of the incommensurable? It seems as though either the essences which are beyond limiting definition are sometimes dwarfed or beheaded by the logical process, or that logic serves instead as the pliable tool of poetic or mystical inspiration. Again, the logical process (or "rational field") seems open to invasion or expansion at both ends. Mr. Barron's treatment of the idea that "genius is akin to madness" has a bearing here:

> Paranoia is the most vivid pathological manifestation of a breakdown in the ability to maintain the distinction between what is inside the self and what is outside it. But paranoia bears a puzzling relationship to certain intense experiences of a religious, transcendental, or mystical nature, whose existence we know best from the reports of outstandingly sane men. The common feature in such experiences is the feeling of unity with the entire universe, utter merging of self in the infinite, a relinquishing of the experience of boundedness and separateness of subject from object.

Again, which end of the logical continuum is entered by the "oceanic feeling"—the higher or the lower? Has egoity structure? And is there a superconscious as well as a subconscious? Mr. Barron deals with this by noting that in 1962, when a Gallup Poll reported that twenty per cent of all adult Americans have such experiences, psychiatrists of his acquaintance referred disconsolately to "the psychotic core" in everyone! Apparently, some "higher" influence did not even occur to them as a cause. Mr. Barron continues:

> A temporary abandonment of the distinction between subject and object can be a great and freeing delight, for though we make our antinomies for profit, we suffer a loss with them as well. . . . To enjoy the advantages of sanity and at the same time have access to the arcane pleasures popularly imputed to psychosis has been the goal of many men throughout the ages. Plato has unfortunately been vastly

> misunderstood in the passage so frequently quoted in which he links poetic inspiration to "madness." The Greeks were fully aware of the dreariness and stultification of human personality represented by psychosis; the "madness" they praised was always something added, a gift from the god, and not, as we know psychosis to be, something subtracted. It was an extension of clarity and coherence of perception; furor or frenzy were certainly not of its essence, although they might indeed play a part if Dionysus had a hand in the game. . . . To express this in the terms of our modern psychology, it appears that creative individuals have a remarkable affinity for what in most of us is unconscious or preconscious. . . . The concepts of discipline, responsibility and committed, enduring attention are all too often left out of account in descriptions of the creative process, simply because what so often first impresses us in the personality of the creative artist is unconventionality, self-assertiveness, independence of judgment, impulsiveness, a skipping wit, and a tendency to take lightly what we are wont to take seriously.

"A gift from the god"! Is that the best we can do? Well, we could do very much worse. We have at least caught up, or are back, with the ancient Greeks. Consider the importance of—. . . independence of judgment . . . a tendency to take lightly what we are wont to take seriously . . . along with discipline, responsibility, and "committed, enduring attention."

These, we may say, are the outward evidences of understanding, of grasp of far-reaching meaning. You can't put this understanding into the hopper to make a manageable or marketable item out of it. It is nothing less than the presence of a man.

REVIEW
A NATION'S RICHES

THE publisher's (Faucett) blurb for Laura Z. Hobson's *First Papers* quotes a reviewer who says it is "a big, rich book teeming with people and events," filled with "the loves, hates, triumphs and tragedies of one of the most unforgettable families in modern fiction." The book is all of that, but these handsome superlatives miss the most important point. *First Papers* is also about a very recent but almost forgotten epoch of American history—the closing years of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, until the end of the first world war—and has for its setting the milieu of radical and idealistic Jewish journalism in New York City. Mrs. Hobson's novel will be savored by everyone who has enjoyed the *Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens,* who has dipped into Irving Stone's *Clarence Darrow for the Defense* and his *Adversary in the House* (a life of Eugene Debs). It will interest, for a comparison of temper, those who have been sufficiently drawn by their anxieties regarding the omnipotent state to read Emma Goldman's *Living My Life* and to turn the saddening pages of Alexander Berkman's *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist.*

Essentially, *First Papers* is the story of Stefan Ivarin (born in 1861), distinguished Jewish journalist who came to the United States soon after his student days in Odessa where, because of his revolutionary activities, he learned the full meaning of the word "cossack" and, like so many Russian intellectuals and radicals, began to read and think seriously in the prisons of the Czar. As editor of the New York *Jewish News,* Ivarin was a revered leader of the Jewish intellectual community, and respected, when translated into English, by everyone who took a responsible interest in the struggles of labor and the social issues of the day. He bore his trials with stoic endurance, and they were great because of his principled views and his passionate devotion to the ideals of freedom and social justice. The uncompromising determination which still survives in the civil liberties movement in the United States owes much to men of Ivarin's stamp and stature. He raised his three children—a boy and two girls—in an odd house of his own design in a Long Island suburb, enjoying the loyalty and devotion of a wife who understood him, and bearing as well as he could the "Americanization" of his children who, except for the youngest, did not.

When, in 1911, a ten-story East Side factory burned down, killing 154 workers—teen-age girls, mostly, who had been packed so tightly into the dingy building with their sewing machines that access to the single fire escape was impossible—Ivarin and his wife draped the front of their suburban home with black bunting. One daughter asked:

> "But, Mama, is anybody *else* putting black all over their porch?':
>
> "I had the idea and we—"
>
> "The whole labor movement," her father interrupted, still sounding patient, like Miss King at School explaining parsing, "is staging public demonstrations. We want to do something too."
>
> "It was my idea," Alexandra began again, but she saw that the child was looking only at Stefan, and she let her voice trail away.
>
> "But, Papa," Fee said, moving closer to the ladder and looking up in entreaty, "everybody will make fun of me."
>
> "It's nothing, Firuschka, let them. When you're older you won't mind."

But the pitiless middle class community did not wait until she was older. After a day or two, Fee's teacher at school asked about the bunting. The child tried to explain, and then, as she told her mother, "Miss King said well, we must be anarchists, mustn't we, or socialists, and I told her we were socialists, and they all laughed all over again and then I knew I had to vomit so I ran out, and then she came out and said to go home—"

A high point of the book is Ivarin's interview with the principal of Fee's school, in the presence of the ignorant and properly embarrassed grade teacher. He patiently explained the meaning of freedom of opinion in the United States, and how it ought to apply to psychologically defenseless schoolchildren—with the obvious sympathy and support of the principal. True to his wife's last imploring words, he did not lose his temper. After

he spoke, the principal said "I'm sure Miss King agrees with you." Ivarin was not done.

> "In that case," he said, "she will understand why I now charge her with invading the inalienable rights of an American child."
>
> There was no reply from either of the two. Stefan leaned forward. For the first time, his color rose.
>
> "As to Miss King's rights," he continued, "I assure you Miss King, I defend your right to ridicule me, publicly, privately, in a lecture hall where I am speaking, or in letters to the newspapers—anywhere, any time, you choose."
>
> "Ridicule?" she said. "I really didn't mean to hurt Fira's feelings. As for my 'right'—"
>
> "Though I defended it," he went on, suddenly sharp, "I also despise the practice of such a right on a child."
>
> Miss King gasped. "Why, Mr. Iwarin."
>
> "Ee-*var*-in," he said, amiable again, "the accent is not recessive. By the way, Fira tells me that though she has been your pupil since last fall, you still stumble over her name, obviously too foreign a name to master, Ivarin." He dismissed the matter with a wave of his hand and rose.

Ivarin suffered his greatest personal blow when the publisher of the *Jewish News* slowly succumbed to commercializing temptations, using the vulgar gimmicks of the English language press to gain circulation. Finally, as the man who had built the paper's reputation through personal integrity and the challenge of his editorials, he resigned in protest against the yellow press techniques which were adding a thousand a day to his paper's readers. Although broken in health, he continued to make a living as a lecturer before labor and socialist groups; and then, was surprised but completely delighted when his wife, who had been teaching neighborhood groups of women how to care for their children, blossomed into a columnist who earned, finally, almost as much as he had himself in his best days. *First Papers* has so many facets that it is difficult to stop telling about them. A great charm of the book is the friendship which develops between Ivarin and a liberal New York lawyer, his neighbor in the suburban town. The two families at once recognized each other as civilized human beings devoted to the same values and dreams. Eventually, Evander Paige, the lawyer, persuades Ivarin to write in English for the cause of free speech and civil liberties. As time passes, and the United States is drawn into World War I, the ugly hysteria of the war fever (far worse than in 1942) claims its casualties, among them Paige's son, Garry, who is determined to be a conscientious objector. Young Paige is arrested and indicted on evidence supplied by malicious and distorting letters from four people who had heard him talking against war. His father, who acts as his attorney, is pilloried in the press as a civil liberties lawyer who went to San Diego to defend Ben Reitman, Ernma Goldman's manager—another *anarchist!* Although believing the war just and necessary, Ivarin is horrified, and comes to young Paige's defense. His belief in freedom, his hope for America, his respect for the manifest integrity of the son of his friend—all these now come into play and he writes an article which is printed as a guest editorial by his old paper, the *Jewish News,* under the heading, "An American Boy in Siberia." He ended the piece: ". . . this country is now partly enslaved to the Czar of Orthodoxy, the Emperor of Conformity. The Siberia I speak of awaits the man who says the unpopular thing."

Ivarin is true to his ideal of freedom to the very last. Moved beyond words by the news of the Russian revolution, and almost wanting to return to share in the rejoicing, he knows the temper of the revolutionary parties. The book ends with his reaction when he hears that Kerensky is in flight for his life after only six months, and that the Bolsheviks have taken over. "And now," he shouts, "we'll see a terrorism—now the whole world will see such a terrorism as the czars never dreamed of." His youngest daughter watched him cry for the first time in her life. "My poor Russia," he said. "My poor Russia."

We have reviewed *First Papers* as fully as we can, to get people to read the book. It concerns a quality of man the world cannot do without.

COMMENTARY
BOYCOTT FOR CAUSE

DURING the random sort of "research" sometimes undertaken in behalf of MANAS articles, we came across a passage in Arthur Koestler's *The Act of Creation* (Macmillan, 1964) which, for its deft exposure of the vanities of coterie fashions, is hard to beat. In a section titled "The Comforts of Sterility," Mr. Koestler writes:

> The art-snob's pleasures are derived not from the picture but from the catalogue; and the social snob's choice of company is not guided by human value, but by rank or celebrity value catalogued in the pages of *Who's Who*. . . . The creative mind perceives things in a new light, the snob in a borrowed light; his pursuits are sterile, and his satisfactions of a vicarious nature. He does not aim at power, he merely wants to rub shoulders with those who wield power, and bask in their reflected glory. He would rather be a tolerated hanger-on of an envied set than a popular member of one to which by nature he belongs. What he admires in public would bore him when alone, but he is unaware of it. When he reads Kierkegaard, he is not moved by what he reads, he is moved by himself reading Kierkegaard—but he is blissfully unaware of it. His emotions do not derive from the object, but from extraneous sources associated with it; his satisfactions are pseudo-satisfactions, his triumphs self-delusions. He has never travelled in the belly of the whale, he has opted for the comforts of sterility against the pangs of creativity.

These foibles of the wrong kind of "belonging" are amusing to read about, and rare is the person who will not recognize himself at all in any of the characterizations. But this criticism takes on wider importance when it is noticed that what Mr. Koestler calls the "comforts of sterility" are often the chief motor of modern merchandising. All products which are sold on a prestige basis encourage the kind of "belonging" which depends upon "pseudo-satisfactions" and promises "enjoyment of reflected glory."

Since such satisfactions soon pall, and the glory wanes or is outdone by the endless competition in conspicuous possessiveness, the market for status merchandise remains the most active of all (except in times of extreme depression). This means that its blandishments are the chief "educational" influence in a buying and selling society. So the people who feel a bit shamed by reading Mr. Koestler may be moved as part of their self-reform to undertake a campaign of personal resistance to commercial trading on imitative snobbery. Nobody should be permitted to make money out of catering to human weakness. How can it be stopped? By not buying the goods of people whose selling methods are an attack on character.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
DROPOUTS ANONYMOUS

THERE may be considerable significance, as a sign of the times, in the fact that the dramatic achievements in the field of human welfare are increasingly "salvage" operations. The chief trouble areas, in modern domestic life, are almost without question in education and mental health, and the public facilities in both these fields are so vast, so overburdened with problems of numbers and institutional lag that workable reforms most frequently occur outside the boundaries of conventional institutions. At the same time, men of originality and commitment seem drawn to activities which are primarily corrective in character, rather than positive, mainstream undertakings. To do what they think needs to be done, they find they must work against the grain of the times, often experiencing extreme opposition, or at least massive indifference, at the outset. There is the example of workers for peace, in this connection; of conservationists, of students of world food supply, of decentralists who see the casual devastations brought by ruthless, distant power, and of reformers who spend their entire time trying to pick up the pieces of broken lives.

Placid American optimism and ingenuous pride of achievement make it certain that public attention is given only to overt and easily identifiable failures. In education, therefore, one hears first of the problem of drop-outs. The number of children who fail to complete high school is said to range from 25 to 50 per cent of all those enrolled in the country. Why? And why is the drop-out rate increasing in our proudly "education-oriented" society?

Again, it is the *overt* or plainly evident reason that gets attention—in this case poor reading ability. A study compiled by the California Legislative Service in 1963 reported that in California the typical drop-out student is at least two years behind the other children in reading ability by the time he quits school. There have been countless studies and surveys of the drop-out problem, with many causes listed, but one factor which appears again and again in these reports is poor reading ability. It is natural, therefore, that special efforts by the schools seek to correct this defect.

Meanwhile, outside the schools, exciting remedial programs are being privately undertaken, with impressive results. One of these is the Northern Educational Service in Springfield, Mass. (31 Westminster St.). This venture provides tutorial services to needy students and offers a varied program of cultural enrichment and personal counseling. Students come voluntarily to the NES and are tutored and helped by college students who volunteer to teach.

Another undertaking to help drop-outs, which began even more informally, is Dropouts Anonymous, founded a few years ago by Mrs. Mary Stewart of Rosemead, California. Her own experience as a high school drop-out moved her in this direction after she had raised a family. (Publicity given to DOA has caused people in four other California communities to attempt the same thing.) Mrs. Stewart started out by advertising in her local newspaper for drop-outs interested in "learning and earning." As an article in *Parents Magazine* for May relates:

> In the three-and-one-half years of its existence, the eleven-foot-wide campus of Dropouts Anonymous has become the alma mater of more than a thousand students at least half of whom couldn't read at all when they first joined. The main activity of Dropouts Anonymous has been to help the students who have been discarded by the public schools. Since many schools lack adequate provisions for remedial reading, youngsters who have trouble reading gradually fall behind in all of their subjects. All of the DOA members—salvaged dropouts and youngsters still in school—have improved their reading to the point where they have been able to do class work with some assurance of continuing success.

The core of the program devised by Mrs. Stewart consists of two weeks of phonics followed by sight reading in primers, with average advancement (varying with age) of one grade per week until the senior high school level is reached—in about three months. Mrs. Stewart describes the first encounter with DOA's free nightly sessions:

> A beginner's first night at DOA is a cram session to shore up his damaged self-image. If we don't give them a sense of accomplishment at the first contact, they won't come back. So we race through as many of the exercises in the manual as they can absorb at once. If a student masters 400 three-letter words before he goes home, I can guarantee you'll see him back the next night.

As soon as the beginning student—whether nine years old or sixty-nine—has had his two weeks of phonics, he is put in charge of a new member of the class, helping him to learn what the "teacher" has himself just learned.

Mrs. Stewart's program is growing. According to Martha Dawson, head of Hampton Institute in Virginia, who observed this work, DOA's "total concept and achievement met a particular need better than any of 500 remedial reading programs from all over the country that the Institute has investigated." The record of DOA "graduates" who have been able to get jobs, stay in school, and go on to trade school or college is so good that the newcomer feels hopeful at the start. Mrs. Stewart's freewheeling way of solving problems helps a great deal:

> To demonstrate the feasibility of a mobile classroom to go wherever DOA sessions were needed, Mary finagled the use of a trailer. The portable school was set up at an El Monte trailer court, where thirty-seven of the thirty-eight families were on some kind of public assistance. The need for Dropouts Anonymous was so great that the trailer remained moored to the spot. Sessions were originally scheduled to start at eight in the morning. They were changed to afternoons at the request of the school board because kids were cutting school classes to go to those at the trailer.

It would be unjust to leave this subject without notice of the Higher Horizons program of the New York City school system, said to be perhaps the only program in behalf of the "culturally deprived" which is old enough and successful enough to have measurable results. Begun in 1956, this program endeavors to bring cultural enrichment and remedial reading opportunities to both children and their parents, with after-school study programs in low socio-economic neighborhoods. According to report, some 40 per cent more pupils are now finishing high school in New York, as a result of this effort, and similar projects have been started in seven other major cities in the country. (*Health, Education and Welfare Indicators,* April 1964.)

FRONTIERS

Constructive Work In India

IN the face of many increasing problems, some of which are plainly an inheritance from two hundred years of British rule, India is today carrying on a great deal of constructive program. India is a large country with a vast population. Only eighteen years ago she emerged as a "nation." So for many it seems imperative that she have things suited to a national government—such as a massive army for defense, palatial buildings in which to entertain foreign guests, and various pomps and ceremonies. In doing all these things, the Indian government is trying to construct a new India according to the Western image of a world power. But this is only one side of the total constructive program for India. There is also an "other side."

This "other side" of the constructive program began early in the 1930's when India was trying to be free under the leadership of Gandhi. For Gandhi, who was a "born democrat," government had only a small role to play. He was concerned with the people, not with the Government. Through his constructive program he wanted to change man and through man to change his circumstances. To Gandhi, government was no more than a coordinating organization formed by individuals. Recently, in his book, *A Plea for the Reconstruction of Human Polity* (*Lok Swaraj*), Sri Jayaprakash Narayan gave an account of this vision of Gandhi.

In the thirties it was necessary to awaken the Indian masses through political campaigns. But political campaigns meant nothing to a hungry people. So Gandhi "politicalized" the needs of his people. To save their pence spent on salt, he inspired them to make salt at the seashore, and in order to improve their economic condition he exhorted them to weave their own clothes with their own handspun thread. Spinning then became the key to the whole constructive program. Later on, Gandhi divided his constructive program into eighteen parts. Through these programs he brought a new outlook to the minds of the people, and a spirit was born which caused the downfall of the British raj in India. But after Indian liberation, when a national Government was formed, Gandhi's close associates and staunch followers took up power politics and the situation changed. All his constructive programs were adopted by the National Government. More basic schools were opened, more names were enrolled on the list of spinners, and "untouchability" became a crime in independent India. The national and provincial Governments carried on these programs and they were good.

In the thirties Gandhi had chalked out a specific plan for the development of rural India. In those days he demanded a group of 700,000 young people—one for each village—who would devote their time and energy to the uplift of the village people, keeping themselves aloof from power politics. Many young men came forward, but not enough. Gandhi, no doubt, had a great hope for the National Congress, but the Congress was a political front. Most of the leaders of the political parties which mushroomed in free India had been in the National Congress. These vocal people, who once had inspired the lethargic masses with the vision of freedom, now had different objects in view. Except for a few, they had been power-seekers who recognized in Gandhi the man to serve their purpose—in other words, to give them freedom; so they followed him. But when the goal was achieved, they deserted him in a very subtle way. Gandhi had anticipated this, and while disappointed, was not surprised. In the early thirties, when the constructive workers united to form the Gandhi Seva Sangha within the National Congress, some party leaders objected; the Sangha, they said, was distracting the minds of the people from the main objective of independence. The Sangha was concentrating on spinning, village sanitation, community prayer, basic education, eradication of untouchability, treatment of lepers and development of cattle, etc. At that time it was

impossible to convince those leaders that the constructive program was the program that would enable them to achieve their political goal in reality—since political freedom might turn out to be comparatively less important than overcoming the apathy of the people.

So, the Sangha was dissolved. But in his address to its last meeting, Gandhi instructed its members to remain active; he said that although the Sangha as a group was dissolved, each worker committed to its cause should stand erect and consider himself a Sangha. Gandhi exhorted them to stay out of power politics and they did so. They carried on their activities in their ashrams (shrines). The masses of India could not see the meaning of this occurrence, in those days. For the villagers, those who wore handspun and hand-woven clothes were workers in the "Congress party." But after Gandhi's death, the difference between the people in power and the people who lived in ashrams became obvious. It was realized that the National Congress, in spite of its historic background, no longer had revolutionary zeal and no longer represented the true voice of the nation. It had become "the organization of a power-loving group," *i.e.,* a party. Therefore in the first national election, these constructive workers, from under the thatched roofs of their ashrams, appealed to the people to cast their ballots for the individual candidates, not for the party they represented. To everybody's surprise, the constructive workers arrested the attention of the people and of the political groups in free India. However, the most important thing was yet to come.

For a certain period, the constructive workers in free India had no clear-cut idea of what to do next. What they were now doing also was being done by the Government, and the Government had power and money. So, although not always good, the Government had a greater effect. On the other hand, the work of ashramites was good, but limited in effect.

In 1951 voluntary gift of land occurred on a mass scale and Vinoba's Land Gift mission continued. Physically this mission provided land to the landless. But its impact on the minds of the people was impressive. At this time words such as love, truth, and nonviolence, which the Gandhians had taught to the people in the early days, were no longer in the air and political antagonism, personal jealousy, and an atmosphere of hate had replaced them. To root out these powerful enemies was much more important for India than to solve her economic problems. The Land Gift mission, however, helped to accomplish both; it helped the villagers to come out of their economic depression by sharing their land and property with one another; and it spread a fraternal love among the people. Slowly, the number of the workers in the Land Gift mission increased and it became a movement to establish the "kingdom of Love." Younger people from the new generation joined in the work. Students left their schools and colleges, some of the politicians left their parties, intellectuals and religious leaders gave active support to the movement (popularly known as the Bhoodan movement). Gradually, the Land Gift mission became a powerful informal organization in India. In its lifetime of fifteen years, Bhoodan has proved to be an all-pervading constructive program gaining cooperation from people of all shades of opinion.

Today, it is widely realized that constructive work has a vital role to play in the life of the country. So, the task before the Bhoodan workers is immense. Although these workers believe in "spiritual anarchy" and the "withering away of the state," at present they live under a national Government based on power and coercion. In the name of democracy it has the support of the majority, the qualification for exercising rule which is approved by the existing schools of political philosophy. Like other national governments, it claims to represent the people. So, if a massive army stands at the border of Assam and Ladak, and if an Ashoka hotel is built in Delhi, and if palatial buildings are provided

for Government offices, and if the formalities and ceremonies of the British time continue at the expense of the bread labor of the starving millions, it is because of the ignorance of the people as to true social values.

No government engaged in the politics of power, even if "elected by the people," can be a teacher. In a democracy such as that in India, the persons in power only manipulate the ignorance of the people. Meanwhile, the constructive workers in India play a teaching role. They explain the situation and teach the masses. They try to set dormant minds in motion. In order to "arm the people with ideas," they travel from village to village and obtain land for the landless. No longer are constructive workers considered to be ineffectual in national life. In certain areas the people are inspired by them to change the political as well as economic set-up of their respective areas and have accepted the principles of unanimous decision and Gramdan (village community based on a decentralized egalitarian economy). In this way the constructive workers have emerged as a third force different from both the people and the power-seekers—but there are difficulties and hazards ahead. The most important problem they face today is the lack of *sincere* opposition. Their words are respectfully accepted, but not practiced.

There is a great difference between the India of the thirties and the India of today, with corresponding changes in the role of a constructive program. A strong feeling of alignment in "groups" has gone deep into the minds of the people and their outlook has changed politically, economically and socially. The hopes of the people far exceed their achievement. Piled-up new problems sometimes confuse the vision of the constructive workers, making them excited and frustrated; many a time they feel helpless and this helplessness makes them too reliant on "leaders." Ideologically, there is a great gap between the constructive workers and the Government. While the village workers want the state to "wither away," government people rely on expanding state power. But physically, so far as the day-to-day life of common folk is concerned, the two groups work side by side in certain respects. The government does have power and it is accomplishing much in the spread of literacy, eradication of disease, provision of employment, etc. Therefore, in spite of their aloofness from power politics, the constructive workers try to direct the governmental power for their cause. The development works of the Government in the Gramdan villages are examples of this. Each group tries to utilize the other's power for its own purposes. For example, devoted constructive workers join in the Government's planning in order to emphasize the necessities of rural India; and the Government of India seeks the help of the constructive workers to pacify "trouble spots" so that it can avoid the use of the military forces. This mutual cooperation sometimes confuses observers, who speak of it as "dependence." However, it is not dependence. It is a "cold war" of decentralization versus centralization; love versus coercion; spiritual anarchy versus national Government; the withering away of the state versus nation-state; and Sarvodaya (welfare of all) versus the Welfare State. The war is there in terms of manipulation on both sides, but the explosion is yet to come.

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