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THE ILL OF THE AGE

THE transfer of one's sense of the troubles and pain of the world to oneself is the goal sought by serious writers, and in order to accomplish it through their discourses, they alternate between formidable statistics and intimate stories of the sufferings of a few individuals, the suggestion being that these personal reports are representative of what has happened to large numbers of people. Photographs often do duty for the personal stories, since the picture of a hungry child excites compassion in a way that figures can never achieve. So food is sent to Ethiopia and other African countries where hunger prevails, and then, perhaps, we learn that for a variety of reasons the food is not delivered to the hungry because of transportation difficulties such as lack of trucks or bad or no roads. Political disputes or local wars may cause further delays and the agencies involved secure trucks and send representatives to the outlying areas where the need is greatest. They set up camps and in time starvation is reduced or eliminated, while photos of children being fed show the effectiveness of the methods that have finally been adopted.

Then other writers address the problem at another level, pointing out that while emergency feeding is absolutely necessary, the people will continue to be dependent upon outside help unless they are assisted to become self-reliant and instructed in modes of agriculture that will be productive under the conditions in which they must live. Then it is discovered and reported that agribusiness, even in countries where people are starving, has acquired large tracts of land on which hired farmers raise crops producing luxury foods to sell to the wealthy of France and England and the United States.

Thus the problem of hunger, all over the world, as Frances Moore Lappe and Joseph Collins reported in their book, *Food First* (1977), is created by the land monopolizers. It takes nearly 500 pages to tell how this works, and since that time the authors have been working through the Institute for Food and Development Policy, 2588 Mission Street, San Francisco 94110, devising remedies for world hunger. It becomes evident, in reading this important book, that individual attitudes of mind on the part of people, not governments, are the key to the changes that need to be made.

There are other levels where individual attitudes need examination. In the British *New Statesman* for last August 29, Christopher Lasch shows what has become of the Left and the Right in the United States, making it plain that both are living in the past. He says:

> The left has lost the common touch. Failing to create a popular consensus in favor if its policies, the left has relied on the courts, the federal bureaucracy, and the media to achieve its goals of racial integration, affirmative action, and economic equality. . . . The left sees nothing but bigotry and superstition in the popular defense of the family or in popular attitudes regarding abortion, crime, busing, and the school curriculum.
>
> The left no longer stands for common sense, as it did in the days of Thomas Paine. It has come to regard common sense—the traditional wisdom and folkways of the community—as an obstacle to progress and enlightenment. Because it equates tradition with prejudice, it finds itself increasingly unable to converse with ordinary people in their common language. Increasingly it speaks its own jargon, the therapeutic jargon of social science and the service professions that seems to serve mostly to deny what everybody knows.

It seems clear that both the left and the conservatives ignore the fact that the real enemy of modern society is consumerism—the preoccupation with *things.* Lasch says:

> It is the logic of consumerism that undermines the values of loyalty and permanence and promotes a different set of values that is destructive of family life. . . . these values are being discarded precisely because they no longer serve the needs of a system of production based on advanced technology, unskilled labor, and mass consumption.

He quotes Daniel Moynihan on the rising importance of professionals:

> Moynihan points out that by emphasizing impulse rather than calculation as the determinants of human conduct, and by holding society responsible-for the problems confronting individuals, a "government-oriented" professional class has attempted to create a demand for its own services.
>
> Professionals, he observes, have a vested interest in discontent, because discontented people turn to professional devices for relief. But the same principle underlies modern capitalism in general which continually tries to create new demands and new discontents that can be assuaged only by the consumption of commodities. The same historical development that turned the citizen into a client transformed the worker from a producer into a consumer. . . .
>
> "Make it new" is the message not just of modern art but of modern consumerism, of which art, indeed—even when it claims to side with the social revolution—is largely a mirror image.
>
> Even the reporting of news has to be understood not as propaganda for any particular ideology, liberal or conservative, but as propaganda for commodities—for the replacement of things by commodities, use values by exchange values, and events by images. The very concept of news celebrates newness. The value of news, like that of any other commodity, consists primarily of its novelty, only secondarily of its informational value. As Waldo Frank pointed out many years ago, the news appeals to the same jaded appetite that makes a child tire of a toy as soon as it becomes familiar and demand a new one. . . .
>
> The effect of the mass media is not to elicit belief but to maintain the apparatus of addiction. Drugs are merely the most obvious form of addiction in our society. It is true that drug addiction is one of the things that undermine "traditional values," but the need for drugs—that is, for commodities that alleviate boredom and satisfy the socially stimulated desire for novelty and excitement—grows out of the very nature of a consumerist society.
>
> The intellectual debility of contemporary conservatism is indicated by its silence on these important matters.

Conservatives still think of the capitalist economy as it was in the days of Adam Smith, ignoring the vast changes which have taken place. They condemn the bureaucratization of government, ignoring the bureaucratization of big business, and they maintain that deregulation will bring about the revival of the "work ethic" and traditional values, claiming that "growth" will be the result.

> The poverty of contemporary conservatism reveals itself most fully in this championship of economic growth—the underlying premise of the consumer culture the by-products of which conservatives deplore. A vital conservatism would see in the environmental movement the quintessential conservative cause, since environmentalism opposes reckless innovation and makes conservation the central order of business.

What are the conservatives *for?*

> Not only do conservatives have no understanding of modern capitalism, but they have a distorted understanding of the "traditional values" they claim to defend. The virtues they want to revive are the pioneer virtues: rugged individualism, boosterism, rapacity, a sentimental deference to women, and a willingness to resort to force. These values are "traditional" only in the sense that they are celebrated in the traditional myth of the Wild West and embodied in the Western hero, the prototypical American lurking in the background, often in the very foreground, of conservative ideology. . . . Conservatism appeals to a pervasive and legitimate desire in contemporary society for order, continuity, responsibility, and discipline; but it contains nothing with which to satisfy these desires. It pays lip service to "traditional values," but the policies with which it is associated promise more change, more innovation, more growth, more technology, more weapons, more addictive drugs.
>
> Instead of confronting the forces in modern life that make for disorder, it proposes merely to make Americans feel good about themselves.

A final point in Mr. Lasch's criticism of conservatism is concerned with its extreme self-righteousness.

> The most offensive and dangerous form of this self-righteousness is the attempt to invoke divine sanction for the national self-agrandizement of the United States in its global struggle against "godless communism," as if American imperialism were any less godless than Soviet imperialism.

Meanwhile the left looks about for sources of renewal, and some leftists have begun to wonder if conservationists may not have a point or two. Now comes the good sense of Mr. Lasch's concluding paragraph:

> But even this last response is inadequate if it issues simply in a call for the left to appropriate conservative issues and then to give them a liberal twist. The hope of a new politics does not lie in formulating a left-wing reply to the right. It lies in rejecting conventional political categories and redefining the terms of political debate. The idea of a "left" has outlived its historical time and needs to be decently buried, along with false conservatism that merely clothes an older liberal tradition in conservative rhetoric. The old labels have no meaning any more. They can only confuse debate instead of clarifying it. They are products of an earlier era, the age of steam and steel, and are wholly inadequate to the age of electronics, totalitarianism, and mass culture. Let us say goodbye to these old friends, fondly but firmly, and look elsewhere for guidance and moral support.

One must thank Christopher Lasch for saying what very much needed saying, and urging us to return to the language of common sense. Where does common sense now have its most evident embodiments? The question is not hard to answer. Common sense is the vehicle of what the ecologists have to say, and it is also plainly present in the "organic" farmers in this country and the biological agriculturalists abroad. It is the natural endowment of the decentralists and the bioregionalists. These are all essentially non-political, if only for the reason that they do not seek power but prosper only by the removal of the influence of power and the gradual emergence of self-determination and self-reliance. All around the world there are groups, large and small, seeking to move in this direction. Some of them may take on a political guise by reason of the opposition of a central government. But their real problem is to get rid of politics, not to become like the power-mongers who are now their enemies. Freedom, today, means freedom from the manipulations of government in behalf of the short-term personal goals of politicians who in "democratic" countries have become virtually unable to think about national objectives that wall take longer to realize than two or four or six years. The goals of dictators are even more an obstruction, dependent as they obviously are on death squads and ruthless military rule.

The abolition of politics is the goal required for the success of projects like that of Frances Moore Lappe and the related objectives of E. F. Schumacher. Politics does not achieve the freedom that human beings want, but only subordination to one or another order of restrictions. And unhappily, it must be added, it often seems that people no longer really want the freedom they need, but rather the kind of dependency that will enable them to go on being voracious consumers. It is here, in our consumerism, that our troubles really lie.

How does one recover from consumerism? There is only one path to freedom of this sort. It is to acquire a feeling of purpose in one's life that does not depend upon consumerism. This indeed is one answer to the question asked at the beginning of our discussion: It is how one transfers one's sense of the trouble and sufferings spread throughout the world to oneself, bringing to the individual to do what he or she can to help matters. Commodities and personal wants are cut down to natural size ky such resolutions. Or, as Schumacher suggested, one learns what is *enough.* These, we soon learn from observation, are always personal decisions. That we are parts of one another is a conviction we all have in the bottom of our hearts, but it seldom comes to the surface save through painful experience. It is the source of both sympathy and compassion.

Preaching has little influence, or it may act in reverse. The capital we have for lives beyond merely personal satisfaction is there in each one of

us, but putting it to use in this way results from some mysterious discovery that can hardly be explained. Yet it happens, and in times of great confusion and disaster, such as the present, that way of life becomes attractive to more and more. It is in this sense perhaps that Jesus spoke of returning one day to earth—the same sense that we are meant to understand in the cyclic reappearance of avatars, as taught in Eastern religions. For as Krishna, an avatar of Vishnu, declared in the *Bhagavad-Gita,* he is the higher self in each one.

Yet we do influence one another. The Krishna or Christos is not the only element in our being which affects our decisions. We can hardly explain our tendency to imitate others except from a feeling of personal inadequacy and needing an exemplar to copy. So that every human community develops cultural ideals, not always good ones. Actors and actresses are always on display in their performances and in the newspapers and magazines. The very rich also get attention, and politicians seek it in order to gain office. Advertising shapes human longing by the luxurious scenes used to exhibit an endless array of products—the message being, if you have money you can enjoy all these things. Money is indeed the lifeblood of the consumerist acquisitive society and only those who develop a natural indifference to the common zest for unnecessary possessions are free from the hungers of consumerism. It becomes, therefore, an obligation of both business and government to feed, support, sustain and justify the appetite for more things, which was, indeed, the main point of the article by Christopher Lasch.

Preaching a life of self-denial and asceticism will accomplish nothing. These are disciplines of choice, not of necessity, and when precociously chosen lead to psychological disasters and sometimes to community aberrations, as we know from history.

Yet we live in a time when we are or ought to be outgrowing consumerism. The good minds of our epoch are all noting this, a realization that was hardly possible, say, two centuries ago. As long ago as 1942, Arthur M. Schlesinger, the historian, said in his President's Address, speaking of the early days of this country:

> In contrast to Europe, America had practically no misers, and the consequence of the winning of Independence was the abolition of primogeniture and entail. Harriet Martineau was among those who concluded that "the eager pursuit of wealth does not necessarily indicate a love of wealth for its own sake." The fact is, for a people who recalled how hungry and ill-clad their ancestors had been through the centuries in the Old World, the chance to make money was like the sunlight at the end of the tunnel. It was the means of living a life of human dignity. In other words, for the great majority of Americans it was a symbol of idealism rather than materialism. Hence "this new man" had an instinctive sympathy for the underdog, and even persons of moderate wealth gratefully shared it with the less fortunate, helping to endow charities, schools, hospitals and art galleries and providing the wherewithal to nourish movements for humanitarian reform which might otherwise have died a-borning.

Life on the frontier shaped the American character in the early nineteenth century and what were in effect virtues in those days, when continued in a time of growing affluence, became attachments and attitudes which have helped to create a society addicted to consumerism. And while we have not lost all the generosity Schlesinger describes, we have hardly learned to penetrate beyond external troubles to recognizing the part we play, along with the other industrialized nations, in causing the agonies of the peoples of the Third World. Our preoccupation with things gets in the way.

The assignment of E. F. Schumacher to Oriental countries to help with the development of their economies led him to contrast the economic theory of the Western world, founded on materialistic assumptions, with the very different economic ideas of Eastern religion, notably of Buddhism. In a chapter in *Small Is Beautiful* devoted to—this subject he wrote:

> While the materialist is mainly interested in goods, the Buddhist is mainly interested in liberation. But Buddhism is "The Middle Way" and therefore in no way antagonistic to physical well-being. It is not wealth that stands in the way of liberation but the attachment to wealth; not the enjoyment of pleasurable things but the craving for them. The keynote of Buddhist economics, therefore, is simplicity and non-violence. From an economist's point of view, the marvel of the Buddhist way of life is the utter rationality of its pattern—amazingly small means leading to extraordinarily satisfactory results.
>
> For the modern economist this is very difficult to understand. He is used to measuring the "standard of living" by the amount of annual consumption, assuming all the time that a man who consumes more is "better off" than a man who consumes less. A Buddhist economist would consider this approach excessively irrational: since consumption is merely a means to human well-being, the aim should be to obtain the maximum of well-being with the minimum of consumption. Thus, if the purpose of clothing is a certain amount of temperature comfort and an attractive appearance the task is to attain this purpose with the smallest possible effort, that is, with the smallest annual destruction of cloth and with the help of designs that involve the smallest input of toil. The less toil there is, the more time and strength is left for artistic creativity. . . . The ownership and the consumption of goods is a means to an end, and Buddhist economics is the systematic study of how to attain given ends with the minimum means.

It is by such means that the Buddhists endeavor to free themselves of the hunger for things—an aim in which the entire culture collaborates. For people who think about such things, the practice of the Buddhists makes an ideal example.

REVIEW
ARAB STORIES

WE have had, for some time, a book that came in for review—*Arab Folk Tales,* translated and edited by Inea Bushnaq—reading a story at a time, and wondering what could be said about a book whose contents originated hundreds of years ago, some perhaps thousands, long before the coming of Islam. (The publisher is Pantheon, adding this volume to its Fairy Tale and Folklore Library, at $19.95.) The editor was born in Jerusalem, educated there and at Cambridge University in England. She heard Arab folktales as a child in Jerusalem, then became a scholar in the classics, collected the some hundred and thirty stories in her book over a period of years, providing fresh translations of them all. They have the tang of everyday life and the spice of oral Arabic, which is quite different from its written classical form. For readers brought up in European countries and in America, they recall the fascination of Grimm, having the same sort of magic and morality, and at the same time characteristic differences.

What, one wonders, is the role of such stories in human life? Do the Djinns, good and bad, and the Afreets, stand for aspects of human nature, generalized and concentrated in more and less than natural beings? What is communicated from generation to generation by such tales, and what do their happenings sustain in human communities? It is of interest that the Arab folktales represent a living tradition that only now is dying out. In her introduction the editor says:

> . . . modernity and the twentieth century, arriving full-blown in a largely preindustrial world, have threatened with extinction a way of life valid only one generation ago, thus elevating into "tradition" recent usage and popular customs. A mother who as a child cradled a rag tied round two sticks buys her daughter a Barbie Doll in pink plastic with yellow nylon hair. What are now looked upon as "folk arts and "old-fashioned ways" were, a mere thirty years ago, regular everyday objects and the normal ways of doing things. Women did not pause to admire the colored basket as they looked for the freshest bunch of Thyme to buy, any more than they ate bread that was not kneaded at home. The same generation which welcomed the comforts of modern living introduced during colonial times has also found itself grasping for a remembrance of the fast-eroding "ethic" and "national" culture of its childhood.

Of the stories, she says:

> . . . I translated some stories entire as they stood and spliced others together from several variants. Throughout, my aim has been to present the English reader with a story as colorful and comprehensible as possible that is at the same time true to the spirit of the teller.
>
> It is many years since I heard some of these stories myself as a child. The evenings seem shorter now, and the pace has changed. There is less room for either embroidery or telling stories. But Arabic remains a magic language and the power of its words continues strong. For the poor especially, there is sometimes little else that has as golden a shine.

The stories begin with a collection of Bedouin tales. The true Arab, we learn, is the desert nomad.

> His is the purest form of the language. Around the thornbush fires of his encampments was spoken some of the most inspired of Arabic poetry as long ago as the Jahiliyya—the Time of Ignorance, before the prophet Mohammed became the messenger of God. Later when Islam had spread as far as Spain, the sons of the rich were sent back from the outposts of the empire to the Island of the Arabs, which is now Saudi Arabia, to learn their native tongue at the wellspring of their culture. . . . For a Beduin tale to end on a satisfying note, the storyteller has to be able to conclude with a sentence like "So it is when men are noble!"

Many of the stories in this book are quite short. One of these about the wiles of women, related in Palestine, tells of the competition between the devil and a clever old woman. To be settled was which one was better at sowing discord. The devil began, stirring up an argument between a butcher and a customer, which finally enraged the butcher so that he killed the customer with his cleaver. The devil said to the old woman: "Observe my power: in one instant I have

destroyed one soul and dispatched another to prison."

Then the old woman went to a cloth merchant. She told him her sinful son had a mistress to whom he wanted to give a present. "If I don't get him cloth for a lovely dress, he will drive me out of the house." So the merchant gave her a fine piece of Aleppo cloth, for which she paid and carried off. She took it straight to the cloth merchant's house, under her shawl. When the merchant's wife admitted her, she said that it was time for prayer and her home was far away: could she pray in the merchant's home? The wife gave the old woman the bedroom to pray in, and returned to the kitchen. Left alone, the old woman placed the Aleppo cloth in a clothes basket. After praying she thanked the wife and left.

After a while the cloth merchant came home, discovering in the bedroom the Aleppo cloth.

> Stunned, he ran to his wife and began to beat her and accuse her of adultery. The poor woman screamed and wept and swore on her faith that she was innocent, but he continued to beat her. Finally he sent her back to her parents, still sobbing over her miserable fate.
>
> "Am I your equal?" the old woman asked of the devil. "You have succeeded in coming between man and wife," he acknowledged. "Now watch the superiority of my powers, said the old woman.
>
> Next day she returned to the cloth merchant's store. "On my way home yesterday, I mislaid the piece of cloth I bought off you," she said. "I didn't want to miss the afternoon prayer and knocked at a door in the city. A kind young woman let me pray in her room, and I left my package there. Now I cannot find the house again, being a stranger in this place." The merchant stumbled into the back of his shop and returned with the length of cloth. The old woman snatched it from him, asking, "How did you find it?" "It was my home you prayed in yesterday," said the merchant, closing up his store so that he could go and bring his innocent wife back from her parents.
>
> The old woman turned to the devil. "Whereas you cannot repair the damage you have done, I have brought peace between these two again," she pointed out. "Now what do you say?"
>
> "I concede. You old women are wilier than the devil himself!"

* * *

For serious gardeners, *Growing to Seed*, a concise pamphlet of 80 pages has been issued by Ecology Action, 5798 Ridgewood Road, Willits, Calif 95490, for $3.50. The author is Peter Donelan, who says in his introduction:

> The purpose of this booklet is to demonstrate that you can grow your seed in a small area for many levels of benefit. It attempts to enable you to answer the questions, "How much seed and how many plants do I need?" and "How much area will I need to devote to become seed self-reliant?" Knowing these things is the first step actually integrating seed saving into your normal garden process on a continuous, self-sustaining basis.

Ecology Action, for which Donelan writes, was founded some fourteen years ago in Palo Alto by John Jeavons. He and his associates have developed its experimental garden to demonstrate the productive value of Biodynamic/French Intensive Gardening, and educational pamphlets issued by Ecology Action as well as books are circulated throughout the world. They now have twenty acres in Willits, of which Donelan speaks:

> Many of the plants we grow and consider indispensable are only available to us because we grow our own seed. The mother tree collard, the Cavagnaro onion, binje potato, a local heirloom tomato, and fotete amaranth greens are some of the crops we grow which have no commercial source. Many of the lettuce varieties we grow for market are strains we have developed ourselves over several years of simple selection. . . .
>
> A block of crowded onion stalks wave in the breeze, their white crowns bumping against one another. Down in Bed A beneath the circle along with the pear trees and some drying fava beans is a towering, graceful cluster of parsnips going to seed. They are six feet and more, terminating in a broad umbrella of yellow dot-like flowers.

The first page of the text asks:

> If you are not growing your own seeds, who *is* growing them? Recent years have seen the wholesale takeover of the seed trade by large transnational conglomerates (most in the petrochemical or

> pharmaceutical businesses). In England recently, for example, one conglomerate brought out 85 seed companies in a single week.
>
> Our gardens and the over-all health of our food system are not being well served by corporate economics. Genetic erosion of our most important food crops worldwide, reduced availability of garden varieties, increased centralization of the seed supply process, and an almost complete loss of seed saving skills among growers of every scale have placed us in a position of great vulnerability.

We can't say much more about this valuable guide, since you need to carry out its instructions to understand them well. The core of the booklet is a chart which on 26 pages lists 76 vegetables along with a table of their needs for saving the seeds. Those who read Donelan's *Growing to Seed* are likely to become infected with his enthusiasm and be impelled to do what he says. For the record, his booklet is Ecology Action's *Self-Teaching Mini-Series No.* 13.

COMMENTARY
SOIL AND PEOPLE

CLEARING UP the piles of paper in our work area recently, we came across an old interview with Wendell Berry and Wes Jackson, conducted by *East-West Journal,* and reprinted in the Spring 1986 *Land Stewardship Letter.* This gave an opportunity for extracting more good material on sustainable agriculture before filing the interview away. In reply to the question, How can we teach people to be farmers? Berry said:

> I've heard farmers say that it took five years to learn to farm. That's a rule of thumb. But they speak of learning a farm the way a musician would speak of learning a piece of music. The significant thing is not numbers here, but that it takes a long time to learn. Learning to farm is learning to farm a *farm.* Not learning a bunch of universally applicable rules. The fact that this learning has an economic value both to the farmer who does the learning and to the whole nation is something that the present economy has no way to acknowledge. And people don't want to talk about this because it isn't entirely quantifiable.
>
> The priority now ought to be on helping the farm people who want to farm to stay in farming. And to help the children from farm families to remain in farming. Because they know a little. Some of them don't know as much as their parents and grandparents knew a generation ago when farming was more diversified. But they know some. And they're worth saving because of that. . . .
>
> My preference is to see some kind of a tendency established again, to make it *possible* for ordinary people to aspire to own land. That would make it possible for the people who are most inclined to farm to do it.

Yet there are great obstacles. As Berry puts it:

> The capitalists are just as willing to subordinate people to a system as the communists are. Just as willing to sacrifice people to a system. When the only thing you can say about people who are suffering failure is that they deserve to fail and that everybody else is better off because these people have failed, you're not remarkably distinguishing yourself from your enemies.

To this Wes Jackson added:

> There's no disposition, in other words, to correct the system in favor of the human. The official policy is to sacrifice the humans in order to preserve the system. . . . I think it has to do with our willingness to regard both land and people as resources. As long as we regard land as a resource, or people as resources, then we leave the door wide open for cruelty to both. . . . I know a grown man, an ag-economist at Iowa State, who is willing to assign a dollar value of anywhere from one to forty dollars per acre as the true value of the soil. To assign a dollar value to topsoil is a kind of nuttiness.

And Berry, commenting, remarked: "As if the dollar were the standard. The soil's the standard."

Berry also says:

> The assumption is that in order to survive farmers need to be as good money managers as bankers. Apparently it has never occurred to anybody that somebody who is really doing a good job as a farmer may not have time to become a student of banking.

Of those who think this way, Wes Jackson remarks:

> They're social Darwinists. If you were to use that kind of language about almost any other situation, you'd be regarded as hopelessly inhuman. And yet we just sit around and take it. I haven't seen much of a rebuttal in the press about those statements that have come out of the White House. I haven't seen anybody in a prominent position say that there is anything wrong with that point of view.

Again Berry says:

> The soil is a renewable resource as long as we have it. When we don't have it, it's a nonrenewable resource. That's exactly the same for the farming people. They're renewable as long as we have them. Once we've lost them, they're nonrenewable, just like petroleum or coal. What the industrial economy does is work to reduce the organic to the inorganic. It sees life as something to be mined. And what this economy does is to take the organic world and the inorganic world and treat them as the same. It reduces life to an inert, marketable quality. Inert, expendable, and exhaustible.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
A PLACE FOR GETTING BETTER

WE get from Elyria, Ohio, four times a year, an eight page tabloid-size paper about teen-age children who have or are in trouble with the law. The paper is called *Betterway*, published by an organization of the same name which maintains homes for these young people of all races The presiding genius of this well-established activity is Tom Peters. The issue we have now is for the Summer of 1986—Vol. 10, No. 1. On the second page it gives an answer to the question "What is Betterway?"

> Betterway is a nonprofit private social service organization providing group homes, foster homes, and semi-independent apartment living for boys and girls.
>
> Homeless or troubled young people come to Betterway from any of the 88 counties in Ohio through the courts, child welfare departments, the Ohio Department of Youth Services, or from other states. Boys and girls come, ages 12 and up. All programs are licensed.
>
> Staff who like to work with teenagers are employed at Betterway, and full-time volunteers also live and work in the program. Room and board are given in exchange for volunteer work. College interns may also work at Betterway, receiving room and board.
>
> Betterway operates a delicatessen restaurant in downtown Elyria and a gift shop, The Search. They also have a 150-acre wooded property with a large house, lake, and ropes course, all of which may be used by outside groups.
>
> A daily fee is charged for placing young people at Betterway, varying with the program they are in.
>
> The Betterway newspaper is printed quarterly and mailed to all prisons and juvenile institutions in the United States and to many other people. Twenty-one thousand copies are printed and they are available in bundles at special rates.
>
> Call or write for information on placements or staff work: Betterway, 612 Middle Avenue, Elyria, Ohio 44035. Telephone (216) 323-2431

Tom Peters, now 56, founded Betterway more than 20 years ago and is doubtless responsible for the quality that seems to pervade all its activities. In writing about what goes on in Betterway he hides none of the problems that merge, hoping for the best, but wholly without condemnation of even the worst, although there is behavior that Betterway cannot put up with. *All* the children who come or are sent to Betterway are problem children, where they are given as much chance as possible to straighten out their lives. For example, there is this report about the girls' home which occupies part of the store called The Search:

> We had an unusual situation develop for a few hectic months. Seven of the eleven girls in our home came from families that physically and verbally fought with one another. All seven were used to swearing, yelling, and even hitting one another back with their families.
>
> Coming together in the group home gave them the feeling of being back with their families and they were constantly arguing and yelling at one another. The staff even had to break up two fist fights, which is rare in our home. They broke up numerous other shouting matches.
>
> We were not able to stop this until two of the most problemed girls left, one to another program and the other home to continue fighting. Unless such girls get control of these traits they will advance into adulthood and have the same kind of fighting families that they came from.

During 1986, Betterway opened two new homes, one for boys called the Bridge, one for girls called the Cove. The Bridge is a fine old building erected in 1911. It was renovated and has a sprinkler system on each floor, making it possible to accept more boys. The Cove is still older, built in 1869, Victorian style. It has three floors and will give a home to eleven girls.

A black lad with sickle cell anemia (inherited by blacks) arrived at one of the boys' homes last year. He would collapse every few hours. His name is Eddie. He was in his mid-teens but looked about nine. One day he collapsed on the street and was hit by a pick-up truck. People said

he just walked in front of the vehicle. After a week in the hospital, depressed and silent, he ate little and got no better, although the accident had resulted in only a few cuts. Told he could not return to the home unless he ate and got better, he finally began eating and got both cheerful and better. A doctor called in by Betterway prescribed some medicine and he began taking it. His energy increased and he stopped getting tired. He began to joke and "show his sly sense of humor." Before long, he was a favorite in the home, where everyone loves him.

There are both successes and failures at Betterway. One boy, Eric, left the Beacon House for boys after about a year.

> He had a bad temper, but learned to control it and his grandfather gave him a home. He had never stayed in any program before, always running, but he took hold here. Just before leaving, he bought himself a BMX bicycle with money he had saved. It was his pride and joy.

Betterway opened the two new homes last year because all their houses were full and a number of applicants were waiting in detention homes to be admitted. How do these young people who come to Betterway homes get along there? Figures on a year's experience in the Search home for girls give something of an idea:

> Thirty girls lived at The Search during the year. The average length of stay was 130 days, and the average age was 15 years 9 months. Twenty-one (70 per cent) of the girls were successful in the program, and nine ran away or had other problems (30 per cent). When a girl runs away we consider this a failure, although in some cases the person does not get in trouble again.
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> Only three of the 30 girls went back to their own homes. Five went to relatives, five to foster homes, one to another group home, six ran away, three went to private institutions. The latter three were waiting at the Search for openings in these places.
>
> Four Search girls had babies this past year, and all babies were healthy, as were the new mothers.

The impressive thing about Betterway is the spirit with which Tom Peters carries on the work of administration, which is duplicated in the members of the staff.

FRONTIERS

Worldwide Hunger

IN the *Washington Spectator* for last Sept. 15, the editor, Tristram Coffin, put together some quotations from *Ending Hnnger* (Praeger) to show the extent of hunger throughout the world. For example:

> Every year 13 to 18 million people die as a result of hunger and starvation. Every 24 hours, 35,000 human beings die as a result of hunger and starvation. . . . A full 50% of the world's hungry people live in just five countries—India, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Pakistan and Indonesia. If hunger were eliminated in India alone, as much as one-third of the world's hunger would be ended.

This seems an appropriate introduction to some notes on a massive book that came out last year, *World Resources 1986,* produced by the World Resources Institute and the International Institute for Environment and Development, published in paperback at $16.95 by Basic Books. The editors say in the preface that the volume (which has 353 large pages) is intended "to meet the critical need for accessible, accurate information on some of the most pressing issues of our time." Directly or indirectly, hunger is the primary factor in energizing the collection of this information. One value of the book is what seems the complete seriousness of the authors, who try to bring home to the reader the realities of pain and suffering of an enormous number of people in the world, and to avoid the verbal generalizations which dull the edge of statistical reports. Readers are encouraged to think about the meanings of the terms and definitions used. In the section on policy formation the writers say:

> While the term "sustainable development" has slipped into common parlance, its meaning remains elusive. In an international meeting it is used by those on the left and the right of the political divide. Natural and social scientists refer to it. It is applied to macroeconomic and microeconomic problems alike. It is all things to all people: a comfortable but ill-defined concept. Various authors have described what is not meant: excess pesticide use leading to pesticide resistance; poor agricultural practices to soil erosion and dams that silt up; excess pollution leading to environmental hazards and decay; planned obsolescence leading to a waste of resources and so on. Others have pointed to management decisions that fail to consider social equity, cultural sensitivity, the involvement of people, ecological concepts such as biological stability and resilience, and environmental ideas on minimizing waste by recycling and renewal.
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> Attempts to arrive at positive definitions usually produce a result too general to be useful. . . . "For development to be sustainable it must take account of social and ecological factors, as well as economic ones; of the living and nonliving resource base; and of the long-term as well as the short-term advantages and disadvantages of alternative actions." . . .
>
> The emerging recognition that environmental protection and economic growth can be complementary goals is the result of many pressures working on governments. Most are domestic in orientation but some are organized internationally. Change at the international level takes time. What may be accepted in the corridors of New York, Geneva, or Nairobi is only rhetoric until carried back for national debate and agreement. As a result similar statements are repeated again and again before they are translated into concrete action.

A hard-headed analysis of the best-known plans for the future brought a number of conclusions, one of which was:

> "Many plans, programs, and agreements, particularly complex international ones, are based upon assumptions about the world that are either mutually inconsistent or inconsistent with physical reality. Much time and effort is spent designing and debating policies that are, in fact, simply impossible."

A fundamental consideration seldom given attention is that basic alteration of attitudes on the part of people at large would have a transforming effect in relation to numerous particular problems, and that without such a change little of significance can be accomplished. Other conclusions about the findings of predictive studies were:

> "There is no known physical or technical reason why basic needs cannot be supplied for all the world's people into the foreseeable future. These needs are not being met now because of social and political

structures, values, norms and world views, not because of absolute physical scarcities.

"Population and physical (material) capital cannot grow forever on a finite planet. There is no reliable, complete information about the degree to which the earth's physical environment can absorb and meet the needs of further growth in population and capital. There is a great deal of particular information, which optimists read optimistically and pessimists read pessimistically.

"Continuing business-as-usual policies through the next few decades will not lead to a desirable future—or even to meeting basic needs; it will result in an increasing gap between the rich and the poor, problems with resource availability and environmental destruction, and worsening conditions for most people."

Something that caught our attention in the section on population growth was the fact that Kenya, with over twenty million people today, is the fastest multiplying country in the world. At the present rate, Kenya's numbers will double in seventeen years. In that country, the typical woman has eight children. A projection by the UN estimates that by 2025 Kenya's population will be 83 million. Today more than half of the Kenyans are under the age of 15. Why do Kenyan mothers have so many children? Questioned in an informal survey by health workers, one woman said: "Amongst many children there are likely to be not only rogues and robbers but also professionals such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc." Another woman said that a wife continues to bear children to prevent the husband from marrying another wife. In general, women have little status in Kenyan society unless they have children, preferably many. Family planning programs have not been successful in Kenya.

Another section that proved interesting is on erosion. The writers say:

Many factors cause erosion, but the two most important are degree of slope and the amount of bare soil exposed to the elements. Research in Nigeria, for instance, revealed that land with a 1 per cent slope, planted in cassava, suffered erosion of a modest three metric tons per hectare per year. On a 5 per cent slope, however, erosion jumped to 87 tons, and on a 15 per cent slope soil eroded at a disastrous 221 tons per hectare per year. At that rate, all the topsoil from the test plot would disappear in a decade.

One gets a feeling of fundamental reliability from the way this book is written and edited.