

THE PRIMARY LONGINGS

SO much of what men talk about with great seriousness and show of learning seems a distraction from the primary longings of human beings. The heavy political arguments and urgent appeals from social and economic fact represent, more than anything else, a kind of thinking which comes about only after a "giving up" on hope of fulfilling the hungers of the heart. They concern the systems of settlement variously agreed upon by people who let themselves be persuaded that there is really no use to listen to the archetypal wonderings which fill so much of the inner lives of children, and which go on to animate the strivings of later years in only the very few.

It is not that matters of food and clothing, of places to live and means of transport and communication have not their due importance. These practical problems need to be solved, but the tendency to regard their solution as the main business of life may in time be recognized as the chief executioner of the human spirit. Perhaps we ought to ask ourselves about the consequences of turning away from this recognition, of insisting that meeting the needs of subsistence and of the growing requirements of a sense of material well-being—of forming parties, devising arguments, establishing orthodoxies with full-blown ethical theories behind them, in behalf of these needs—represent the normal activities of human beings who have accepted adult responsibilities and know what they are about. If all these respected and exceedingly serious and hard-working people should be wrong in their assumptions, what then might be expected as a result of this enormous mistake?

We should find, for one thing, that the scatter of individuals who do not submit to these claims becomes a breed apart—a race of men and women who reserve large space in their lives for the expression of childlike wonder, who have some

kind of touch with an inner presence which makes them *different*—as though, some say, they had never really become "responsible." Poets, artists, dreamers of every sort, and a few of those who come to be known as philosophers, are of this band of recalcitrants who march, as Thoreau put it, to another drum. And then, while the great majority is instructed not to take these people seriously, a kind of only-on-Sundays admiration of them comes into being, and a great deal of posturing and imitation of them follows, until, at last, it becomes difficult to distinguish between the kind of art that can be bought for money—constituting, the purchasers suppose, little pieces of the "freedom" and other fine things these lonely ones have somehow achieved—and the intangible realities that are felt to exist by the true wonderers, the artists, poets, and mystics.

It is after such developments have gone on for a measurable period that the hunger for truth turns back upon itself, and chews up and spits out both the spurious symbols of human fulfillment and the fragile, tentative hopes of people not yet victimized by the vulgar deceptions of the times. By these means is born an age in which clichés become attached to insights as soon as they appear, and men of authentic sensibility have all they can do to keep from being mutilated simply because they are alive. The common language is debased, honorifics become epithets, and ideas of revolutionary morality learn to hide in secret hipster codes, lest they be perverted, while the clanging monotony of traditional conceptions of the good touches only the external reflexes of the great mass of people, and this largely because they have learned the small advantages of doing what is expected of them.

In such an age, there are those who may as a final act of desperation begin to listen to the monitions of the inner life. The more courageous

ones sometimes practice a deliberate kind of deafness to the world outside. A posture of disdain for "practical affairs" becomes the hallmark of enlightened youth. Unlettered spontaneity is preferred to any kind of planning or prudential concern. The children tell their parents that they have no intention of "growing up." What for? they ask, with a great deal of common sense, although with secret expectation of being "taken care of," somehow. It is something like the Negro movement, or a large portion of it, which looks toward a future conceived only in terms of the self-reliance and integrity of black men, as though the white community, as a lost world of moral lethargy and injustice, did not even exist. They have discovered a real truth, these people, and for the time it is carrying them along. Privately, they may suspect it is not the whole truth, but they know it is far better than no truth at all.

What if this world, so filled with commonplace insanities and false motions, should be no more than the institutional mirror-image of the multiplied frustrations and self-denials of individual man? Why should it be anything else?

The psychological biography of each one of us is very much the same. We start out as children, and while we are going through the grid of regulated initiation into the ambivalence and compromise of the adult world managed by our parents, we have random hours of free-ranging imagination. We dream of ourselves as doing great things. We have some time for visioning before the pressure to fit ourselves into the system of ulterior motives begins. We *know* what we are, inside. A little girl sees her father make a bookshelf. Accordingly, the next day she finds the hammer, a few bent nails, and begins to make one of her own. Nothing can stop her. Nothing except the fact that she can't drive the nails, that the wood is not square, and the whole affair ends in fiasco. But often the little girl does not even know that the project failed. The imperfections of her achievement do not matter; the play was the thing; and she has gone on to other engagements.

Or perhaps she came crying to her father with the unmanageable parts, and he made them work, after a fashion. The question is, what is the true reality for the child? The high purpose and confident attempt, or the failure from the adult's point of view? In their own minds, and initially, the children are all undimensioned gods who move from one gleeful act of creation to another.

This dreaming never stops in human beings. What stops is its open celebration. What stops is the act of daring, which retreats into the fantasies of daydreaming and, for those who are disabled in adjusting to what the authorities call "reality," into the obscurely manifested symptoms of schizophrenia. The acts of daring stop, and the acquisition of various merit badges begins. Substitute climaxes, representing the completion of courses in "adjustment," palely reflect the lost moments of wonder. There are graduation exercises, confirmation ceremonies, baccalaureate addresses, and other impressive devices invented by the adult community. Gradually, the children turn into adults who harbor the usual suspicion of rebels who manage to survive the conventional rejections of what they feel inside. For most, it is a matter of no longer being able to distinguish between what they feel themselves and what they have been told they *ought* to feel. It is a matter of fearing any circumstances which might compel them to make this distinction. On this basis, a grown-up is hardly much more than a child who has settled for systematic disappointment and is now interested only in suitable techniques of compromise.

This is too simple, of course. Children have other qualities. They are often cruel to one another. They do indeed go off on parabolic curves in all directions. But this is not really the point. We have to learn how to deal with these things, but fumbling and lack of dexterity are not well met by putting peoples' hands in plaster casts. Vision and the energy of spontaneous quest are really all we have to work with in human beings. The question is: What do we do with these

qualities, that they survive only in a handful of extraordinary people called "geniuses," who are so determined, so tough, who are willing to pay such an enormous price for being what they are, that we need some kind of supernatural theology of the arts in order to explain them?

Consider the possibility that the schools we set up for teaching people how to become artists, and to participate in our civilization under this label, are really places which fit the young with various sizes and lengths of leashes upon their creativity. In the eyes of a great many people, for example, a commercial artist is a man who hires himself out to the people who study how to beguile money away from other people, in exchange for articles of trade. The commercial artist is supposed to help make the transaction comfortable, even desirable. And the practitioner of the fine arts? He is a man who makes objects which eventually get sold to people who are successful in business and are able to become "art patrons" or "collectors." Much more than this is involved in the arts, of course, but what we said was that artists are so regarded by a great many people. And, in some measure at least, artists have to conform to this popular image. Only the very great can escape the need to conform. Or only if they are willing to be very poor.

The trouble with these popular images is that they categorize people and make respectable the idea of subdividing the qualities of human beings according to various "specialties." We professionalize (commercialize) the human spirit and turn its highest capacities into a species of entertainment, decoration, or embellishment of lives which were impoverished, in the first place, by the emphasis on theories of specialization and "practical" objectives. There is a widespread and constantly encouraged belief that culture, spirituality, freedom, and truth can always be bought by those fortunate enough to have the money. You buy culture by hiring cultured people to talk to you. You buy spirituality by building or supporting churches. You buy freedom by

fighting an expensive war in Vietnam. You buy truth by paying scholars and scientists to do research, and then you listen to what they say. If you don't like what they say, you can always turn them off. You're paying them, aren't you?

But this is only the external shell of our civilization. Underneath, in peoples' inner lives, there is a continuous guerilla resistance to all these arrangements. Unfortunately, the resistance isn't strong enough; it doesn't seem to change anything; yet it is there, and it keeps on working, throwing up little disturbances.

The question we are asking, here—the only important question, it seems to us—is whether it might not be possible to arrange the external civilization according to some other plan. Why should we make it so *tough* on ourselves? Why do we provide no middle ground for all those people who don't want to be heroes yet hate to be hypocrites?

For the past several centuries we have attacked our problems and dissatisfactions by defining the enemy found to be the cause of the difficulties, and opposing him. This has led to the habitual assumption that life is made up of straight-line problem-solving: You deal with your enemies, or your circumstantial problems, one after the other, hoping, eventually, to get to the end of the line, where, hypothetically, Utopia awaits. The question of how to separate what we can or must do for ourselves, without having to change anybody else, from what requires legislative or other manipulation of human behavior is almost never seriously asked. This preoccupation with the political means has had wide but unnoticed consequences. It has led, for an example, to neglect of the importance of independent thought and opinion—independent, that is, of the political process. And this, in turn, has led to the fetishism of "feasibility"—an unwillingness to give attention to ideas which have no obvious application through the use of political power. The areas of action which do not involve politics are regarded as "unreal," and

therefore not worth a serious man's attention. The resulting personal and institutional dichotomies are before us on every hand. Only politics (and, in other relationships, technology) is a significant activity. Inner attitudes, cultural understanding, the arts and literature, are matters of leisure-time fun and games which a civilization is able to "afford" only after it has taken care of the basic problems by well-established "practical" means. It is worth noting that the question of the subjective states and attitudes of individuals receives practically no attention except at the level of gross pathological phenomena. A man's psyche has to be pretty sick before we are ready to talk about the importance of psychological health. In other words, the qualitative side of life has to be converted into the quantitative problem of more mental hospitals, outbreaks of juvenile delinquency, social control of alcoholism and addictions of various sorts, before it is taken seriously as an "issue." And then we are inclined to define it in terms of "salvage" rather than ideas of normal life.

One way to set this general problem would be to ask: Should our "practical" undertakings be accommodated to the needs of the inner life, to some over-arching conception of human purpose and genuine human culture, or should we continue, as we are doing now, to wait until the practical problems are properly dealt with before giving attention to these "higher" things?

The question answers itself. The practical problems cannot be solved in their own terms, because these terms do not include the basic causes, which remain untouched by our tools of practical diagnosis. Practical, mechanistic solutions for what are really ills of the mind and the spirit are the real superstitions of our time. In many cases they are totally ineffectual—as ineffectual as "faith" cures and the spells of witch-doctors will prove in the case of a man who needs his appendix removed, or a tooth pulled.

A little earlier, we spoke of the "needs" of the inner life. This is a revealing usage. There is

probably something wrong with our entire approach to the human situation according to a listing and analysis of "needs." Our endless discussion of human beings in terms of all the things that they "need" is doubtless a direct hangover from scientific objectification of the human being. There he sits, the man with his needs, and to make him happy, or "fulfilled," we decide what must be done to service him properly. Something is revoltingly wrong, tiresomely paternalistic, in this idea. The best of men don't have "needs"—they have projects, ventures, and all-engrossing visions. They are servicing the universe, it is not the other way around. Distinguished human beings don't have "needs," and they would be embarrassed by pretentious talk about such matters. Josiah Royce came very close to the truth when he said that what this universe needs is a moral agent to make it better.

After Gene Debs took off his coat and gave it to a shivering workman who had no job in a cold northern winter, he needed a coat. Of course. But getting another coat for himself, as an expression of the "philosophy" of filling needs, would have bored him silly. What did Debs need? The only thing Debs really wanted was the development of integrity and compassion in other beings, because out of these qualities would come justice, and there was no way under heaven to buy it for him. That was his project, his mission, his purpose in life, and you couldn't help him at all by talking about his "needs." And if you say Debs was a rare man, a self-sacrificing individual, the answer to that is: How right you are! But what are we talking about except the question of the good life for human beings? Do we want a master-slave morality—one value-scale for leaders, another for followers? Do we have a special code for heroes, but turn to the Grand Inquisitor's menu to take care of the rest of us?

What do we need (there's that word again) most of all, in view of this long-term syndrome of psycho-social defects? The civilization of the United States needs the development, within the

mechanical, political matrix, of a vital autonomous culture which is animated by the energies of autonomous individuals who are devoted to the values and concerned with the processes of a life which is fundamentally independent of merely political potentials. While it is a fact that only from such a platform of independent thinking and opinion may individual citizens speak effectively *to* government, and to government officials, with authentic moral authority—as, for example, Lewis Mumford and one or two others have been speaking for some time—this is not really an important reason for developing autonomous culture. The only important reason for developing this culture is that it is the only proper environment for intelligent human beings and the only matrix in which genuine education of the young can take place. Culture is the practice of ends. A society which gives no attention to ends can *never* develop means which will take the people where they want to go. Why? Because people unpracticed in the life of ends *do not know* where they want to go. The controlling principle of politics then becomes ignorance instead of understanding. Its fruit is an ever-misunderstood self-defeat.

REVIEW

THE ANXIOUS AUDIENCE

NOTICE in these pages of such books as Harold Rosenberg's *The Anxious Object—Art Today and its Audience* (Horizon, 1965, \$7.50) presents certain problems. First of all, the matter and meaning of modern art are not questions which interest a large number of readers. And the determination by an individual of whether he *ought* to be interested in these things, if seriously pursued, is a considerable undertaking. (Mr. Rosenberg, incidentally, is not particularly consoling on this point.) Then there is the difficulty of discussing artists in terms of their names, in order to fit them into some conception of historical development, and even if the reviewer could do this competently, the procedure too easily becomes a kind of involuntary name-dropping for readers unfamiliar with their work. Finally, there is the problem of relating the book to a scheme of affirmative values, based upon, say, the Tolstoyan view of art, or the Kantian conception that art or "beauty" is something that gives delight without need or thought of possession. Mr. Rosenberg offers the reader only occasional clues as to how he feels about such matters. Yet his book is too important to be ignored. We might say that it is excellent, even brilliant, criticism on the basis of unexpressed norms which must be intuited or felt out from the style of the writer.

For the MANAS reader, it would, we think, greatly increase the value of this book to prepare himself by looking at two chapters in Lyman Bryson's *The Next America* (Harper, 1952), "Art and Democracy," and "Art and the Machine." Mr. Rosenberg's strictures as well as his insights take on larger meaning in the context of Mr. Bryson's ideals.

The Anxious Object gets down to serious business in the first chapter. Mr. Rosenberg lets the reader feel his contempt for the phyness in "official" attention to Art during recent years by

starting out with an account of the Sao Paulo Biennial of 1963—an exhibition which gathers works from many nations. The part paid by governments in arranging the entries excites Mr. Rosenberg's skepticism:

Did not all this official enterprise and spending and getting together imply that some new relation now prevailed between art and public life? These busy and important personages were each hoping for one of "his" artists to break the tape, if not actually maneuvering to that end behind the scenes. Yet were they really putting forth their esthetic preferences or those of the social groups they represented? A fair guess would be that at least eighty per cent of the art at the Bienal belonged to some species of abstraction, and more than half to its latest modes—was this the kind of painting and sculpture that now appealed to government? We knew where Truman and Eisenhower stood, also Khrushchev. Did Kennedy, Nasser, Ben Gurion and De Gaulle love Abstract Expressionism? Had vanguardism become the esthetic idiom of a new cultural UN? Does the diplomatic world today constitute an elite of taste?

I had hoped that observing at the Opening the functionaries who had contributed to the Bienal, together with their women and their friends, listening to the speeches, overhearing remarks, might uncover an answer or two to these questions. How much did these people care for the art they were furthering? And, if the answer was, Not at all, how had these selections been forced on them? Were they merely yielding to modernist art as a fact of contemporary life, as they and their colleagues accepted as inescapable the armaments race or the population explosion? It was notable that the new international sponsors of art had less to say about what that art should be than had any category of art patrons in the past. Current governments had arrived on the art scene too late, when modern styles had already been developing their character for more than a century. It was thus not impossible that this cosmopolitan caste was at bottom indifferent to what it was causing to be exhibited and even quietly hostile to it.

Toward the end of the book Mr. Rosenberg answers the question which has occurred to us all, and cries out raucously in his first chapter: How do we know that these things are indeed "art"? Who says they are? How are they able to say so? A measured response comes from one of the professionals in the field, Thomas M. Messer,

director of the Guggenheim Museum in New York, who mournfully observes in a foreword to a recent catalogue:

The relationship between the *good* and the *new* in contemporary art is intriguing and baffling. The realization that art and invention are akin is balanced by the suspicion of eccentricity. Out of this conflict arises the question: *Is it art?* And the answer: Yes and no. *Yes, it could be*, since the expansion of artistic boundaries is inherent in the creative process. *No, it need not be*, for no mode in itself assures us of artistic validity.

This is a way of saying that there is no longer any legitimate Academic opinion about what is art and what is not, or what is good art and what is bad. Museum director, patron, collector, student, man-in-the-street—we are all in the same boat, on our own in relation to such questions. Meanwhile the trade journals of art, the dealers, the various experts and critics, are very busy generating a kind of double-talk enthusiasm for novelty to fill the vacuum left by the breakdown of honest academicism. *Aha!* we say resentfully, we are being had by these people! And the answer is that we are being had by them no more than by the fillers of other vacuums, such as the designers of current foreign policies, and miscellaneous promoters of products for the market. The fact is that the world of art is afflicted by the disappearance of believable authority, along with all the other "worlds" that have been governed largely, through the centuries, by respectable academics or bureaucrats. This is the nature of our times—at once vastly liberating and vastly confusing. And since very few people are ready for this enormous individual responsibility, we feel the uncharted disaster of the confusion more than we rejoice in the liberation. Naturally enough, the pitchmen and hucksters quickly move in. The inside dopester makes a rich market out of such confusion.

But the freedom is real, too, and it is in his honoring of the serious artists of the time, as he finds them, that the positive quality of Mr. Rosenberg's book is felt. Of course, you can't

take *his* judgment. Not really. But you can believe that it is seriously arrived at. Reading him, you are able to recognize some of the qualities of mind and feeling which are useful or necessary in understanding the great, swooping, perpetual avalanche of change in content, form, color and conception that descends upon the senses in the name of modern art. The following is a helpful generalization:

The most pervasive term in modern art is "New Realities." It has been used as the title of vanguard magazines, of art movements (both abstract and ultra-representational), and of group exhibitions. . . . Since it signifies something different for everyone who uses it, the label is meaningless. Its popularity does testify, however, to the belief, all but universal among twentieth-century artists, that a work of art ought to be a thing added to the world of things rather than a reflection of things that already exist. In short, while the work of art today is not illusory in the sense of being a representation, it is of a nature to give rise to new forms of mystification through drawing the spectator into an invented realm not unlike that of his everyday life.

Also this:

To detach paintings from fixed social, esthetic, or metaphysical objectives is basically to redefine the profession of painting. The function of art is no longer to satisfy wants, but to serve as a stimulus to further creation. . . . Said Brancusi: "It is not difficult to make things; what is difficult is to put ourselves in the proper condition to make them." The work of art belongs to this moment of potency. Today, art and the artist are suspended upon one another, with no net of social values or religious beliefs underneath.

For the serious artist, a condition of this sort calls upon all the heroism at his command. Mr. Rosenberg helps his reader to recognize the fact.

COMMENTARY

ARTHUR MORGAN'S VISION

THERE is ample justification for recalling the work of Arthur Morgan in the Frontiers discussion of Crenshaw Neighbors. No one has set down more clearly the first principles of social change. In *The Long Road*, he says:

First of all there is needed a burning desire within individuals—desire so strong that they will give all they have for the achievement of a better social order. That, it seems to me, is the first requisite. If it is lacking, if we do not care enough for a different order to pay a great price, then we can scarcely have great hope. One of the fruits of that desire must be a clarifying of aims and purposes, because zeal, without insight which is disciplined by critical inquiry, may be no asset. . . .

Next, clear and moving statements of clearly conceived principles of personal and social life are powerful influences. . . . With repetition of the theme of the dominant importance of motives and character in society, the time will come when the current of thought will run to that conclusion, and there will be created a general awareness of, and interest in, that truth. When that awareness occurs, the truth of the principle may seem to be self-evident, the general conviction and action may turn in that direction, and the resulting changes may be very rapid and very great.

In his latest book, *The Community of the Future*, Dr. Morgan shows why faith in the corrective measures of government is not sufficient:

Each group, each community, having some desirable part of a pattern which others lack, tends to be closed and isolated from the other values it needs. So great is our insecurity and our fear of losing hold of the little corner of truth we have grasped, and so great is the social pressure upon us from the world about us toward conformity and mediocrity, that we have lacked the poise and confidence to build a society of societies in which the strength and accomplishments of each supplement and complement those of others that are different. It is not through putting all together in the melting pot that this isolation can best be overcome, but through association and interrelations among different culture groups and communities. Such interrelations

between communities and cultures will lay the basis for social order within nations, and for international relations. That mutual understanding cannot be achieved chiefly through top-level actions by governments. It will be surest and most lasting when it grows out of the actions of individuals and communities that have come to recognize, respect and value each other's qualities.

It should not be difficult to see how faithfully the effort of the Crenshaw Neighbors fulfills the conditions described by Dr. Morgan.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

THE DIGNITY OF CHILDREN

[Since the discussion here of John Holt's *Why Children Fail*, in the Sept. 1 issue, we have been fortunate enough to obtain from the author two papers which are to be read as sequels to the concluding chapter of his book. One of these follows.]

THE conventional wisdom of our time has it that a child's character and personality are formed largely out of the conflict between his animal wants and the repressions of those wants by society. Maybe so. But I have seen much that makes me doubt that this is more than a small part of the story.

One summer day, with four or five other people, I sat on the porch at the house of a friend. As we talked, and drank lemonade, the two-year-old boy of the house came up to us. Rather formally, his mother introduced us. But this was not enough; he knew that when grown-ups meet, they shake hands, and as I have often seen him do, he went round the table from guest to guest, solemnly offering to each his hand to be shaken. After one trip around, he started another; but this time, as he passed a corner of the table, he knocked over a full glass that was standing there. No damage was done; the glass didn't break, and there was nothing for the spilled lemonade to stain. All the grown-ups, sincerely concerned to save the child embarrassment and distress, told him that there was nothing to worry about. Still, he was troubled, and backing away nervously from this glass he managed to knock over another. This was too much for him. In spite of our efforts to reassure him, he began to cry.

I have known this little boy well since he was born, and have heard him cry many times. Before, I had always heard in his crying a strong note of outraged indignation, of "How dare you do this to me?" Before, too, even when he had had a bad fall and was really frightened and hurt, it never took more than a few seconds of hugging and comforting to bring his crying to a stop. But now his crying did not sound hurt or angry or indignant; it sounded ashamed and heart-broken, and in spite of all our

comforting, and many hugs and kisses and reassurances from his mother, it went on and on, until exhaustion finally crowded the incident out of his mind.

Never before have I felt so strongly what I think anyone seeing this must have felt, that a child's most precious possession, and his most fragile, is his sense of his own dignity and worth. This tiny boy was not crying because he feared punishment, or the displeasure of his elders. He is not by nature timid; in fact, he tends to be teasingly disobedient, and it often takes a very loud and sharp "No!", a real bellow, to make him so much as hesitate when he is doing something he is not supposed to. Even outright punishment does not affect him much or for long. In any case it was clear in this situation that nobody was angry with him, that we only wanted to spare his feelings. This time at least—this is not always so—the grown-ups could not have been more tactful. No, it was not their opinion of him that concerned him, but his own. He had wanted so much to do the right, the appropriate, the grown-up thing, and it had only ended in another childish, not to say babyish disaster, in further proof of his clumsiness and incompetence, or the enormous gap between him and everyone else he knew.

If it is true, and I think it is several thousand years too soon to be sure of it, that man differs from all other animals in that he is aware of himself, then it must follow, it cannot but follow, that man has a fundamental want and need that is not animal, that arises, not from the animalness, but from the non-animalness of his nature. This is the need to feel himself a being, a person of dignity, competence, and worth. For me, no theories about the development of human personality and character that do not take this fundamental want into primary account can be worth a tinker's dam. No one who does not understand, whether intellectually or intuitively, with the mind or with the heart, how long, how difficult, how painful, and how rarely successful is the struggle of every child to gain a sense of his own worth, can be of much use or have much success in his dealings with children.

This difficult and painful struggle for self-respect is made much more difficult for children by

the way we adults habitually deal with them. Over the years I have seen a great many older people, parents, teachers, and others, in company with children, in homes, schools, and public places. For all the talk we hear about children's need for love, or about ours being a child-centered and child-dominated society, it is rarely indeed that I hear adults treat children or speak to them with courtesy and respect. In fact, to many people, even those fond of children, the very notion of respecting children can seem only ridiculous and grotesque. They can not imagine why one should respect children, or if one felt that one should, how one would go about doing it. But children sense this, and whatever slight and hard-won sense of worth they may be able to gain is quickly destroyed by our ill-concealed, if concealed at all, feeling that they are worthless, at best potential adults, just raw material for their elders to work this way and that.

One of the brightest, most curious, most perceptive, most imaginative children I know is the now five-year-old daughter of a good friend. When she was barely four, on an evening when he and his wife were going out, she asked him who was going to be the baby sitter. He named someone who had come several times before. The little girl said nothing, but her face clouded over. He said, "What's the matter, don't you like her?" After a pause, the child said, "No." He asked why not. She thought a long time, and then said, "She treats me as if I wasn't a person." Not many children could put this feeling into such vivid words, but is there a child who hasn't felt it, who hasn't realized quite early in life that most grown-ups, often his own parents, talk to him as they wouldn't care or even dare to talk to anyone else?

There seems to be no limit to the rudeness that we adults are ready to show children. Often we do not do this in malice; in fact, we are often rudest to the children we like, as if our affection somehow did away with any normal need for tact and good manners. One morning I was in our neighborhood drugstore when a girl of about six came in to get a prescription filled for her mother. Three or four other people from the neighborhood were there. All of them would have thought of themselves as being polite and well bred. They all knew this child, at

least by sight, though none knew her well. Right away they all began to talk, not to her, but about her, exactly as if she had not been there at all. What they said was nice enough, but they went on and on. The druggist, a kindly man, joined in, instead of getting the child what she had come for. Not a word was spoken directly to her, she was given no chance to take part in this conversation, of which she was the sole subject. As she shifted and squirmed, I could tell—it was plain to see—that she was in an agony of confusion and embarrassment. Finally she got her prescription, and all but ran out of the store, the grown-ups beaming moistly after her, as if this had been a happy scene for everyone. Later, I said to my friend the druggist that this situation had been painful for the child and that we had no right to treat her this way. He laughed jovially and said, "Oh, they don't care." But they do care, very much. And they go on caring, unless someday we so completely destroy their good opinion of themselves that the good opinion of anyone else seems not worth having, at which point we find to our dismay that they would rather shock and terrify us than please us.

Our natural tactlessness and rudeness in dealing with children is supported by our learned ignorance. In such books and articles as I have read about the psychology of children, I have often met the words, "infantile omnipotence." I look always for a hint, if only a word, that the writer knows that this omnipotence is only a wish, a hope, a crib-sized Walter Mitty dream. So far I have not found so much as a hint. We are asked to believe, no, firmly told, that infants believe themselves omnipotent, that what makes them angry is the denial or frustration of powers that they feel rightfully theirs, that for them the long process of growing up is a painful descent from the status of gods to that of ordinary mortals. I think these experts are as obtuse as they are wrong. It is nonsense to say that little children think they can do what nobody else can do. They know, and are reminded a hundred times a day, that almost all of what everyone around them can do and does all the time, they are either not able or not allowed to do. This is the central fact of their lives—their own ignorance, weakness, helplessness, dependence, and subservience. They are both frightened and

humiliated by it. They pretend to be omnipotent, when they do, not because they really think they are, but because they know very well they are not, in their play they make a substitute world, in which they *can* do something and be somebody, in which their pride and dignity may have a chance to recover and even to grow. This is in large part what their play is for, and why it is so necessary to them.

It is a serious mistake, that psychologists seem to make all the time, to judge what children think from what they say. I know a little girl, youngest in a big family, who at the age of three used to say to people, as if stating a fact, that she could read and write. Did she really think she could? Nonsense! She knew she couldn't, but she didn't like, indeed couldn't bear to admit it. On several visits to her house, I brought some materials, Words in Color, that I had been using for the teaching of beginning reading. I thought she might be interested, and without saying anything about them, managed to leave them where she could see them. She was very interested, asked what they were, and when I told her, insisted that I use them with her. I did so, and always with the same result. Knowing how much the fear of being wrong inhibits children's thinking, I did not put her in a position where she could be wrong. Instead, I tried to work these materials into a learning game that we could play together, leaving her free to tell me whatever she thought she knew and to ask me whatever she did not. But each time, after a short while, she would stop playing the game by my rules, and begin to make her own arbitrary rules, that had little or nothing to do with the material. Soon after, she would ask to stop. Hardly ever would she ask to see those materials again, until I returned on a later visit. If I forgot them, she would scold me; if I brought them, we would go again through the same cycle. It became clear, after much thought, that however much I tried to make reading an exploring game, I could not in the nature of things conceal the fact that it was a game about which I knew everything and she nothing. This situation was too painful and humiliating for her to endure for long. Only when in nursery school she met other children who knew no more than she did was she able to make a serious, and very successful attempt

to learn to read, and even then, with as little outside instruction or interference as possible. When, at home, she asks us some word in a book she is reading, it is clear from her voice and manner that she does not like to have to ask, and wants only the information specifically asked for. Her whole attitude says, "I'm doing this by myself, and you please keep out of it." And since we respect her pride and independence, we do.

But most children are less fortunate than this one. Behind most of what we do with them and to them at home, and all we do at school, lies an unspoken assumption—that they will never learn anything unless we tell them, never notice a mistake unless we point it out, and never correct it unless we make them. Thus, in the name of education, we continually offer a great insult to their pride and dignity. The revolution in education, for all its high-flown talk, is not changing this. More now than ever before, we treat children as if they were nothing but raw material, to be molded under heavy pressure and at the cost of much tension, anxiety, and suffering, into whatever specialists our corporations, space agencies, universities, laboratories, etc. think they need. But the child is father, not just of the man, but of society, and the end-product of a process that has so little respect for children is the society that we can see, and hear, and smell around us—disappointed, envious, fearful, violent, unstable, and self-destructive. If we want something better, and our civilization will not last much longer unless it gets better, the place to begin is with children, by recognizing, respecting, and nurturing from the very beginning their so fragile and so vital sense of their own dignity and worth.

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FRONTIERS "The Long Road"

A FEW weeks ago, at an institute conducted for personnel of the Adult Division of the Los Angeles City school system, some 1200 teachers and principals were favored with heartening information. They learned that during one of the worst "race riots" in the history of the United States, which spread from the Watts area in Los Angeles to outlying districts, the combined damage to all public schools of the beleaguered territory amounted to only \$1600—less than that accounted for on a normal weekend by youthful mischief. Like islands rising high above the chaotic waters of a storm at sea, the elementary schools and junior and senior high schools were invariably passed by. Why? Was it respect for the intent and good work of educators? (Incidentally, investigation revealed that four-fifths of even this slight destruction was attributable to the hasty, if belated, occupation of the schools by national guard units.) The point of calling the assembled teachers' attention to this surprising report was not, surely, self-gratulation, but to suggest the recognition by the dispossessed that education is their only truly open door to a better life.

This restraint by the desperate segment of the Negro community in Los Angeles underlines the importance of equalizing all opportunity—for housing, especially, which may be second in importance only to education and jobs. We have at hand an example of how this responsibility is being met unpretentiously by residents in a nearby Southern California community—by Caucasians who are presently endeavoring to alleviate, locally, conditions which pose a national problem. An article by Jean Gregg in *Human Relations Magazine* (Vol. I, No. 5 of a small quarterly published in Burbank, Calif.), titled "The Crenshaw Story: Working for an Integrated Community," gives the highlights of a neighborhood effort:

Most of us are by now familiar with the increasing ghettoization of Negroes in America, and

the tragic events that accompany the growth of the big city ghettos. We have heard of the panic that hits a community in the central city when a Negro family moves in. We know about the hasty community meetings, the insults to new neighbors, the resistance from real estate brokers. We hear also about the activities of the block busters, the exodus of white residents, the rumors and tensions, and the ultimate resegregation of the area. But not many of us realize that across the country during the past ten years, an increasing number of communities have refused to be helpless victims of ghettoization and have organized—not in a futile attempt to stay all-Caucasian—but in bi-racial or multi-racial efforts to become a stable, integrated area. There are several such communities organizing in Los Angeles, Long Beach, Altadena, Inglewood, and in some seven other areas of the County. All of them are new, experimental, and as yet unproved. The oldest, and it is not very old, is the Crenshaw community in the wealthy and beautiful Baldwin Hills section of Los Angeles, its organization, Crenshaw Neighbors, Inc.

The Crenshaw area lies just north of the city of Inglewood, between La Cienega and Crenshaw Boulevards. When the first Negro families began to buy homes in the high-priced hill areas some nine years ago, few residents panicked. The number of Negro families increased gradually; but gradually the percentage of non-whites increased and fears about the effects of substantial numbers of Negro children in the schools led to rumors, and to more fears, and to more Caucasians quietly moving out, and then to more rumors about falling property values, empty houses, until rather suddenly, about two years ago, the fear that the area was slated to become all-minority—a fear aided and abetted by many real estate brokers—triggered an explosion of "For Sale" signs and serious difficulties began. . . .

The immediate reaction of the community organizations was to do something about the high school situation, and by the time this furor was calmed, people began to realize that many homes were for sale and that most of the prospective buyers seemed to be non-white. A human relations group in the area, United Neighbors, decided that the time had come for an action group. Within a relatively short time, a hundred charter members had paid ten dollars each to set up the new organization, and in July of 1964 Crenshaw Neighbors was incorporated.

The Board of Crenshaw Neighbors decided to take the somewhat radical course of opening their own licensed real estate agency, hiring a broker, and

proceeding to sell houses, charge commissions, give special service to every potential Caucasian buyer, and spend their earnings on advertising and publicity that might be uneconomic for a conventional real estate business but a sound investment for property owners with their community at stake.

Crenshaw Neighbors now has about four hundred members, a corporate real estate license (issued in February of this year), and an impressive number of committees working on such things as schools, research, membership, publicity, fund-raising, and publications. It is much too soon to tell how effective their efforts will be. There are some indications that the real estate panic has slowed down. But there are also indications that the effect it had on prices of homes has been significant. Members agree that this may be all to the good—that a prospective buyer would have to travel long distances to find comparable values in housing.

Here, we might say, is an embodiment of the philosophy of community interrelationship which Arthur Morgan formulated in the 1930's in *The Long Road*, and implemented later by founding Community Service, Inc.

Crenshaw Neighbors issues periodical progress reports. One of these, for July, observes:

We have become convinced that interracial neighborhoods can exist and prosper—and then the fears will be gone. The way to stop ghettos is not to try desperately to confine all Negroes within their present borders. The way is to nurture the interracial neighborhoods so that ghettos will no longer be considered inevitable.

We are very highly motivated, and by far more than abstract principle. Our homes, our communities, and our children's faith in us and in their world are at stake. But we are very aware that we need help. As we have grown in numbers and size and understanding of the complexity of our task, we realize how much more we must be able to do—and quickly.

After the riots in the Watts area, the directors of Crenshaw Neighbors prepared a letter (dated Aug. 17) to the Los Angeles *Times* which read in part:

Now that the crisis is over, and we have survived with virtually no incidents or damage here,

we have some things we would like to say to the citizens and officials of this city and this state.

Those of us living in racially mixed, but still predominantly white, communities just outside the periphery of the Negro ghetto have learned through many startling and painful personal experiences of the fears and hatred that racial separation has produced in both Caucasians and Negroes. We have also learned of the tremendous feeling of relief and accomplishment that can come from personal confrontation and growth of understanding and communication. The more we have learned, the more we have come to recognize and fear the build-up of tensions in both the all-white and all-Negro areas. Isolation is a perfect breeding ground for demagogues, for rumors and misrepresentations, and ultimately for violence.

It is our fervent hope that we will get the support and encouragement and help of this entire city in our continuing effort to stop the spread of the ghetto, so vividly dramatized to us all as the "unsafe zone" of Los Angeles, and to substitute instead more and more communities like Crenshaw where people of all races can live safely and peacefully together.

Mrs. Gregg's article in *Human Relations* concludes:

What is most significant is not so much the degree of initial success, but rather the fact that there is a local group attempting to give positive direction and leadership in a changing neighborhood. In the past, no community would have dared hope that white buyers would keep moving into a racially mixed area.