

SOME SUCCESSFUL PROPHETS

IN these days when so many books and articles on the "future" are appearing, it would seem sensible to give some attention to the writers of the past who were able to make accurate forecasts about the present. These men were not of course "scientific" investigators. They did not use the "systems" approach. Their preparation for predictive activity seems to have been mainly that they reflected intensively about human nature and behavior. We are thinking of men like Heine, Carlyle, Tolstoy, and one other nineteenth-century figure in particular—Henri-Frédéric Amiel.

These writers did not, of course, do Jules Verne-type predictions. They brooded on the prevailing moral and intellectual tendencies of their time, deducing what seemed to them the inevitable consequences. It was not necessary, for example, for Thoreau to make a "study" to decide that "men have become the tools of their tools." The "studies" would be made a century later by such scholars as Jacques Elull and others. Is the distinguished American solitary any the less of a prophet for leaving out pages of documentation?

In Germany, at the close of the eighteenth century, Schiller watched the onset of the industrial revolution and predicted in a work on education that industrialized man would end by "being nothing more than the living impress of the craft to which he devotes himself, of the science he cultivates." Carlyle believed that the mechanistic principle of the machine would become the philosophy of the age, and gradually diminish the role of individuality and the creative spirit. The machine was for him a symbol of the loss of inner freedom; "we are shackled," he declared, "in heart and soul with far straiter than feudal chains."

These are questions of where moral and social causation lies, and how men actually shape

their future, regardless of the conveniences and gadgetry of the times. Emerson also constituted himself a prophet when he wrote in *Nature* (1836), chapter IV:

A man's power to connect his thought with its proper symbol, and so to utter it, depends upon the simplicity of his character, that is, upon his love of truth, and his desire to communicate it without loss. The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language. When simplicity of character and the sovereignty of ideas is broken up by the prevalence of secondary desires, the desire for riches, of pleasure, of power, and of praise,—and duplicity and falsehood take the place of simplicity and truth, the power over nature as an interpreter of the will, is in a degree lost; new imagery ceases to be created, and old words are perverted to stand for things which are not; a paper currency is employed, when there is no bullion in the vaults. In due time, the fraud is manifest, and words lose all power to stimulate the understanding or the affections. Hundreds of writers may be found in every long-civilized nation, who for a short time believe, and make others believe, that they see and utter truths, who do not of themselves clothe one thought in its natural garment, but who feed unconsciously on the language created by the primary writers of the country, those, namely, who hold primarily on nature.

The very ground of such discourse is gone from modern thought, making Emerson sound like an antique moralist. There is also a question of "practicality," but what will all the practicality in the world avail if what we call "the practical" is, as Thoreau said, "but improved means to an unimproved end"? The ground of Emerson's observations lies in his conception of the nature of man; it is the same ground that supported Schiller and Carlyle in their opinions, and some others who wrote about the psychological confinements they believed mankind would experience, and which became plainly evident a century or more later. The question of whether these men were old-fashioned and unscientific seems rather

unimportant compared to the question of whether or not they have been proved right.

We have put together a number of quotations from Amiel (1821-81), a shy and obscure Swiss professor of philosophy who left no mark upon history, save for his philosophical diary, which was translated and published a year after his death in Geneva, and later in English as *Amiel's Journal*, translated by Mrs. Humphrey Ward. Our extracts have to do with the moral fabric of society. They are taken from entries written at various times. Some are comments on France, some on the United States, and others are more general.

"Each function to the most worthy": this maxim governs all constitutions, and serves to test them. Democracy is not forbidden to apply it, but democracy rarely does apply it, because she holds, for example, that the most worthy man is the man who pleases her, whereas he who pleases her is not always the most worthy, and because she supposes that reason guides the masses, whereas in reality they are most commonly led by passion. And in the end every falsehood has to be expiated, for truth always takes its revenge. . . .

All that can be expected from the most perfect institutions is that they should make it possible for individual excellence to develop itself, not that they should produce the excellent individual. Virtue and genius, grace and beauty, will always constitute a *noblesse* such as no form of government can manufacture. It is of no use, therefore, to excite one's self for or against revolutions which have only an importance of the second order—an importance which I do not wish either to diminish or ignore, but an importance which, after all, is mostly negative. The political life is but the means of the true life. . . .

The theory of radicalism is a piece of juggling, for it supposes premises of which it knows the falsity; it manufactures the oracle whose revelations it pretends to adore; it proclaims that the multitude creates a brain for itself, while all the time it is the clever man who is the brain of the multitude, and suggests to it what it is supposed to invent. To reign by flattery has been the common practice of the courtiers of all despotisms, the favorites of all tyrants; it is an old and trite method, but none the less odious for that. . . .

A crowd is a material force, and the support of numbers gives a proposition the force of law; but that

wise and ripened temper of mind which takes everything into account, and therefore tends to truth, is never engendered by the impetuosity of the masses. The masses are the material of democracy, but its form—that is to say, the laws which express the general reason, justice, and utility—can only be rightly shaped by wisdom, which is by no means a universal property. The fundamental error of radical theory is to confound the right to do good with good itself, and universal suffrage with universal wisdom. It rests upon a legal fiction, which assumes a real equality of enlightenment and merit among those whom it declares electors. It is quite possible, however, that these electors may not desire the public good, and that even if they do, they may be deceived as to the manner of realizing it. Universal suffrage is not a dogma—it is an instrument, and according to the population in whose hands it is placed, the instrument is serviceable or deadly to the proprietor. . . . Universal suffrage, with a bad religion and a bad popular education, means a perpetual wavering between anarchy and dictatorship, between Danton and Loyola.

Is Amiel a politician of aristocracy? Far from it. He was a mere "thinker," a man who read every important book of his time, tortured himself with self-deprecation, and confided his thought only to his diary and a few close friends. He had much in common with the great mystics of history, speaking in one place of a balanced serenity in which there is no longer either desire or striving. Then, suddenly, he turns to Western civilization and America in particular. The passage has a meditative beginning:

It is difficult to find words in which to express this moral situation, for our languages can only render the particular and localized vibrations of life; they are incapable of expressing this motionless concentration, this divine quietude, this state of resting ocean, which reflects the sky, and is master of its own profundities. Things are then reabsorbed into their principles; memories are swallowed up in memory; the soul is only soul, and is no longer conscious of its individuality and separateness. It is something which feels the universal life, a sensible atom of the divine, of God. It no longer appropriates anything to itself, it is conscious of no void. Only the Yogis and Soufis perhaps have known in its profundity this humble yet voluptuous state, which combines the joys of being and of non-being, which is neither reflection nor will, which is above both the

moral existence and the intellectual existence, which is the return to unity, to the *pleroma*, the vision of Plotinus and of Proclus—Nirvana in its most attractive form.

It is clear that the western nations in general, and especially the Americans, know very little of this state of feeling. For them life is devouring and incessant activity. They are eager for gold, for power, for dominion; their aim is to crush men and enslave nature. They show an obstinate interest in means, and have not a thought for the end. They confound being with individual being, and the expansion of the self with happiness—that is to say, they do not live by the soul; they ignore the unchangeable and the eternal; they live at the periphery of their being, because they are unable to penetrate to its axis. They are excited, ardent, positive, because they are superficial. Why so much effort, noise, struggle, and greed?—it is all a mere stunning and deafening of the self. When death comes they recognize that it is so—why not then admit it sooner? Activity is only beautiful when it is holy—that is to say, when it is spent in the service of that which passeth not away. . .

Extreme individualism dissipates the moral substance of the individual. It leads him to subordinate everything to himself, to think the world, society, the state, made for him. I am chilled by its lack of gratitude, of the spirit of deference of the instinct of solidarity. It is an ideal without beauty and without grandeur.

. . . when there is nothing left but a multitude of equal individualities, neither young nor old, neither men nor women neither benefited nor benefactors—all social difference will turn upon money. The whole hierarchy will rest upon the dollar, and the most brutal, the most hideous, the most inhuman of inequalities will be the fruit of the passion for equality. What a result! Plutolatry—the worship of wealth, the madness of gold—to it will be confided the task of chastising a false principle and its followers. And plutocracy will in turn be executed by equality. It would be a strange end for it, if Anglo-Saxon individualism were ultimately swallowed up in Latin socialism.

It is my prayer that the discovery of an equilibrium between the two principles may be made in time, before the social war, with all its terror and ruin, overtakes us. But it is scarcely likely. The masses are always ignorant and limited and only advance by a succession of contrary errors. They reach good only by the exhaustion of evil. They

discover the way out, only after having run their heads against all other possible issues.

Well, what did Amiel *do* about all this? He did nothing—absolutely nothing—except record his thoughts in his journal. Even so, it was something to see as clearly as he did. The language of modern social critics is not the same as Amiel's; it is probably not as good a language for saying briefly and strongly what ought to be said. For while Amiel made entries in his diary, those who echo his conclusions write large books and learned papers. And no more than he do they propose remedies. For the very reasons given by Amiel, remedies are difficult even to think of. Criticism today is almost entirely in terms of the widespread violation of rights. But as Amiel says, "The revolutionary school always forgets that right apart from duty is a compass with one leg." And how many are ready to declare, as he did:

Society rests upon conscience, not upon science. Civilization is first and foremost a moral thing. Without honesty, without respect for law, without the worship of duty without the love of one's neighbor—in a word, without virtue—the whole is menaced and falls into decay, and neither letters nor art, neither luxury nor industry, nor rhetoric, nor the policeman, nor the custom-house officer, can maintain erect and whole an edifice of which the foundations are unsound.

A state founded upon interest alone and cemented by fear is an ignoble and unsafe construction. The ultimate ground upon which every civilization rests is the average morality of the masses, and a sufficient amount of practical righteousness. Duty is what upholds all. So that those who humbly and unobtrusively fill it, and set a good example thereby, are the salvation of this brilliant world, which knows nothing about them. . . . Our cynics and railers are mere egotists, who stand aloof from the common duty, and in their indolent remoteness are of no service to society against any ill which may attack it. Their cultivation consists in having got rid of feeling. And thus they fall farther and farther away from true humanity, and approach nearer to the demoniacal nature. What was it that Mephistopheles lacked? Not intelligence certainly, but goodness.

Slowly, views similar to these conclusions by Amiel are coming to the surface in the works of the innovating thinkers of our time. That civilization has a *moral* basis, for example, is the considered view of Michael Polanyi, in *Personal Knowledge*, where he shows that it is the conscience of the scientist and discoverer which ultimately determines the quality and influence of his work. (See also Polanyi's *Science, Faith and Society*.) There is also a moral foundation for Ruth Benedict's conception of a synergistic society, which is gaining increasing discussion after some twenty years of neglect. It is as though a new moral language must now be invented and given currency before these new ideas gain wide penetration. When that time comes, a handful of men of the twentieth century will stand out as pioneers of restorative and regenerating change.

Gandhi, of course, will be among them, perhaps most important of all. A distinguishing quality of these thinkers is that they do not easily or naturally refer to "the masses" in abstract terms. Gandhi never did. Another man who will almost certainly gain recognition is Arthur E. Morgan, who began years ago to work for the kind of reeducation of the American people that may some day be acknowledged to be the key to a better common life. The problem, he saw early in life, was only superficially political. He wrote in 1936:

It has become offensively trite to refer to our vast natural wealth, to our favorable climate, our great manufacturing plants, our transportation and communication systems, our banking facilities, and our millions of men and women eager to work. We have all of these resources, yet are in confusion and poverty, with a denial of the reasonable expectations of life to many millions of our people. There must be a critical deficiency of some essential social vitamins. What we face is a real malnutrition—a scurvy of the social order, a political pellagra, a beriberi of business. Abundance of many things does not prevent a deficiency of others. Although in respect to some essentials we do have a great surplus, yet our deficiency is a real one. If we can discover what the missing elements are, we may find the way to supply

them to give tone, health, and vigor to the whole social order.

In this book, *The Long Road*, Dr. Morgan looks at every aspect of American society. As both an engineer and a businessman, and in addition a distinguished educator, he had had firsthand experience of many levels of affairs. He worked with labor gangs as a youth, consorted with industrialists and statesmen in maturity. Everywhere, he found the same defects—they were defects of *character*, failures of integrity. But he singled out no particular scapegoats, nor did he propose any formula as a remedy. Early in *The Long Road* he asks:

But where shall we turn for higher standards? When as a young man I went into engineering I felt considerably like a radical; I was determined to protect the common man against the encroachments of big business. Yet as I worked along through the years, over and over again I found that in practical affairs the ethics of big businessmen were better than the ethics of small businessmen. In general I found that I could have more straightforward and businesslike dealing with men of large experience than with men of small affairs. The difficulty, then, is not that big business has a lower level of ethics than small business; but that defects of character which in a simple society may be endurable as common weaknesses of human nature, may threaten to wreck the structure of our society when they are magnified to the dimensions of nationwide industries or of continent-wide governments with tremendous coercive power that size may bring.

Business, government, and labor are but different expressions of the single organism of our common life. Business recognizes the shortcomings in government and in labor; government recognizes them in business and labor leadership; labor recognizes them in government and in business. The defects of each do not originate in its own particular activities. Rather, they are the symptoms of a general lack of social health, appearing in ways characteristic of the particular activities. It is then no longer enough for the pot of business and the kettle of government to call each other black. We must look below the surface phenomena to the common sources of our difficulty.

The book continues in this sane and humane spirit, finally proposing that those who share in an

understanding of what is wrong must go to work, each one in his own field, endeavoring to raise the standards of enterprise as well as they can. Health will come for the whole, Dr. Morgan declares, when there is health in the seed-bed communities of the country, and in the multifarious relationships which men enter into while pursuing their chosen tasks. Toward the end he writes:

Keeping in mind all the dangers and difficulties involved, for many reasons it would be desirable for persons who are committed to actually achieving what I have called the universal expedients of a good social order, to begin to build their own economic and social world. If such men are to escape the constant dilution of their purposes by society at large, it is desirable that there be *islands of brotherhood* where men of like purposes can strengthen each other and can create a milieu in accordance with the expedients of a good life.

This will be, as his title suggests, "a long road." What needs now to be recognized is that there is no other.

REVIEW

ON "RACE"—AND MUCH MORE

TWO years ago MANAS (Nov. 13 and 20, 1968) printed a two-part lead article by Wendell Berry, "Loss of the Future," which delighted and impressed many readers. This material later appeared in Mr. Berry's book, *The Long-Legged House*, which was reviewed here and often quoted thereafter. We now have two more books by Mr. Berry. One, *The Hidden Wound* (Houghton Mifflin, \$4.95), is a profound reflection on the relations between the white and black races in the United States, the other a volume of poems—*Farming: A Hand Book* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, \$4.95). The two books go well together, and while this Department does not give attention to poetry, from both rule and preference, Mr. Berry's verse tends to abolish the need for such restrictions.

We have read *The Hidden Wound* and dipped into the poetry. Dozens of things to say about these books pop up, but one question seems more important than anything else. Why does this writer gain such close and devoted attention from a reader? There can be nothing casual about reading Mr. Berry. He has skill, to be sure, and he is intelligent. But these qualities, while necessary to a writer, are not really rare. He makes intelligence pursue what it is after until the very kernel of its object is somehow rendered intelligible in terms of its own—generated right there out of original materials. Wendell Berry is a writer who cannot be content with any existing labels, so whatever he writes comes out fresh, new, and his own. For example, we said that *The Hidden Wound* was about race relations in the United States. It is, but the book is no familiar tract for the times. Berry tells about the role of two black people in his boyhood in the South, what he learned from them, and what he is now learning by thinking about their part in shaping his life and character. "Race" becomes practically incidental—as, you could say, it ought to be.

It is just here, we think, that the true quality of this book, of this man's work, appears. For the reader begins to realize that the writer never says anything because he feels he is *expected* to say it. He knows about the conventions, he has mused about all the various levels of moral "ought" and social pressure, but he has looked at these things in order to understand them, not to submit to them. He has his own references, not entirely explicit, but definitely there, concerning what he ought to do. And what he writes boils out of him because it must.

In one place he tells about a birthday party given for him at his home. He invited Nick Watson, an aging black man who worked on the place. He loved Nick. It wouldn't be a party without Nick. But Nick, who was without either bitterness or anger, knew that in Kentucky a black man couldn't really attend a little white boy's party. The boy didn't realize what he had done, and Nick, not wanting to hurt him, came and sat on a wall behind the house! The boy's grandmother, realizing what was happening, let the boy follow his feeling, and he sat on the wall with Nick the whole time of the party:

It was obviously the only decent thing I could have done; if I had thought of it in moral terms I would have had to see it as my duty. But I didn't. I didn't think of it in moral terms at all. I did simply what I *preferred* to do. If Nick had no place at my party, then I would have no place there either; my place would be where he was. The cellar wall became the place of a definitive enactment of our friendship, in which by the grace of a child's honesty and a man's simple-hearted generosity, we transcended our appointed roles. I like the thought of the two of us sitting out there in the sunny afternoon, eating ice cream and cake, with all my family and my presents in there in the house without me. I was full of a sense of loyalty and love that clarified me to myself as nothing ever had before. It was a time I would like to live again.

This is a book about roots, about formative processes. The intent is to show that how men think of themselves and other men, how they think of the land and their relation to it, inexorably shapes their feelings about who they are, what

they want, and their ideas of right and wrong. And there are terrible blanks in their ideas of right and wrong if they are in any important way out of touch with the realities of their lives. Men who let other men do their work, relate to the natural world for them, mutilate themselves. They become incomplete. And they camouflage their self-inflicted wounds with elaborate pretenses. An entire panoply of cultural fraud and self-deception is the result. What they think of as their graces, their unique distinctions, become symptoms of their ill. And so the wound is hidden from them, and remains so, until terrible days of reckoning.

One of the central criticisms of the present is the extent to which modern man lives by abstraction, losing actual contact with the living earth and its vital processes. As William Barrett put it in *Irrational Man*:

Every step forward in mechanical technique is a step in the - direction of abstraction. This capacity for living easily and familiarly at an extraordinary level of abstraction is the source of modern man's power. With it he has transformed the planet, annihilated space, and trebled the world's population. But it is also a power which has, like everything human, its negative side, in the desolating sense of rootlessness, vacuity, and the lack of the concrete feeling that assails modern man in his moments of real anxiety.

Wendell Berry adds dimensions to this insight by showing the weaknesses which result from such "mastery" over nature:

It is not by the abstract ministrations of priests and teachers from outside the immediate life of a place that the ceremonies of atonement with the creation arise, but out of the thousand small acts, repeated year after year and generation after generation, by which men relate to their soil. Going out to plant and to cultivate and to harvest again and again, as one's father went out and his father before him, the sense of familiarity finally crests in ritual—exactly as work rhythms build into work *songs*—which tends not only to protect the individual's sense of himself in relation to the place, but to protect the place as well.

What our politics and science have never mastered is the fact that people need more than to

understand their obligation to one another and to the earth; they need also the *feeling* of such obligation, and the feeling can come only within the patterns of familiarity. A nation of urban nomads, such as we have become, may simply be unable to be enough disturbed by its destruction of the ecological health of the land because the people's dependence upon the land, though it has been *expounded* to them over and over again in general terms, is not immediate to their feelings. I believe that it is psychologically necessary that people develop, in addition to the forms by which to enact the duties prescribed by their relationships to each other and to the earth, the forms by which to enact their *consciousness* of these relationships. It seems to me that among a genuinely native and settled people the forms of daily and seasonal tasks would culminate finally in the forms of art and religion, and that the concourses between the lowliest and the most exalted forms would be familiar and open and direct. In such a situation a person would not consider himself to be involved in a series of abstract relationships, as one of a number, but a conscious responsible participant in the life both of the land he lived from and of the universe, dependent on the greater life but also its protector. From what I have read I gather that the American Indian did not conceive of himself as a mechanically producing and consuming agent of a political compact, but as the spiritual heir of the life of creation. He was the agent and legator of this life, but also a part of it, and his religion was the enactment of his unity with it.

The last chapter of *The Hidden Wound* is a remarkable summation of the significances that can be found in the world of literature—where Mr. Berry seems very much at home. Having shown the parallels between his own experiences as a boy on a Kentucky farm and the riches of Homer, Tolstoy, and Mark Twain, he illuminates the meaning of what he has quoted:

Such meetings as that of Huck and Jim or that of Pierre and Platon Karataev have a tremendous power to change men's lives and, as a consequence, their relations with other men. Without such change as this, institutional changes become merely the occasions of hypocrisy. These are in the best sense *instructive* texts, and their aim is revolution of a sort. But they are not political texts. They are not interested in the superficial revolutions by which men change their politics; they are interested in the profound metamorphoses that occur when men "rectify their hearts." No matter what laws or

governments say, men can only know and come to care for one another by meeting face to face, arduously, and by the willing loss of comfort.

I believe that the experience of all honest men stands, like these books, against the political myth that deep human problems can be satisfactorily solved by legislation. On the contrary, it seems likely that the best and least oppressive laws come as the result of the reflection of honest solutions that men have already made in their own lives. The widespread assumption that men can be set free or dignified or improved by *monkeying* with some mere aspect of manifestation of their lives—politics or economics or technology—promises no solution, but only an unlimited growth of the public apparatus. The American people may solve their problems themselves, and so save the world a catastrophe, but not by insisting that the government do their work for them. No man will ever be whole and dignified and free except in the knowledge that the men around him are whole and dignified and free, and that the world itself is free of contempt and misuse.

Mr. Berry reaches these conclusions as a by-product of a more fundamental search for his own roots. His book is a work of discovery of the human role and function. The author found he could do nothing else but pursue this never-completed task.

COMMENTARY

"A NEW MAN"

THE problem of moral judgment is probably the most puzzling mystery in human life. We think, for example, that justice and progress require the fixing of blame, yet no great research is needed to show that those who do the most for the alleviation of the pain seem least interested in who is most at fault. They may say a lot about the *traits* which bring the pain, but little about the people who embody the traits. They see no gain in doing this. The traits are everywhere and there would be no end to locating blame. Placing blame, they find, polarizes good and evil in human beings. It does not increase the one or diminish the other. Being pure and good is a fine objective, but thinking how much better you are than those who are not pure and good makes barriers between men which have neither pure nor good effects.

Historical and collective wrongs are peculiarly susceptible to multiplication by this means. People who think about how good they are, in comparison to others, usually pervert the good they have in themselves by claiming it as a distinction. Really good men never make capital out of their goodness.

Is it, then, impossible to organize a righteous cause? It is certainly very difficult. If you get people together on the basis of saying, "*We* don't do what *they* do," how can you avoid generating a self-righteous party spirit?

It is not difficult to see where these considerations are pointing. They are aimed at the idea that the best basis for a constructive human association is action in behalf of good things rather than punishing bad men for doing bad things. It must be admitted that this is not very popular. Bad things are specific, objective, and painful. People are hurt by them and they know it. They will unite against them. Good things may be in some sense the opposite of bad things, but for most of us mere "opposites" are abstract,

hardly ever known in either form or substance. Usually men are content to define the good as what will remain after the elimination of the bad.

So it is easier to organize a flight from and a fight against the bad than a construction of the good. It follows that the common ideas of righteousness are expressed as ways of avoiding guilt. Popular "righteous" men publish catalogs of sins. The implication is that their and our goodness is native and general, needing only to be kept purified of all the bad things we are against.

Yet we know that great reforms have never come about by careful location of a new set of sinners. They may be sinners, all right, but today's sins, as anyone who reads can learn, were often yesterday's virtues. If, as Emerson said, dirt is matter out of place, then likewise vice is virtue out of place.

After a long period of the misapplication of what once were prime popular virtues—say, the acquisitive drives of "hard work" and the ingenious harnessing of the "forces of nature"—we begin to get the feedback from the outside world, from other men, and from certain sensitive areas in ourselves. We get the symptoms of a massive ill. It is a sickness, as Arthur Morgan put it, "of the single organism of our common life." There is no *one* guilty party. The guilt is everywhere. Health is what we need to locate and to increase.

In India, Gandhi went to the villages and looked at them. He said:

Today the villages are dung heaps. . . . We must be patient with the people. We are ourselves novices in village work. We have to deal with a chronic disease. Patience and perseverance, if we have them, overcome mountains of difficulties. We are like nurses who may not leave their patients because they are reported to have an incurable disease.

Some people heard what he said and have been working as "nurses" ever since. Now and then, in some little publication most people never heard of, a progress report appears. It tells about the restoration of health.

Eventually, some people in the United States will get similar ideas about what to do here. They will no doubt be very diverse ideas, because the symptoms, here, are diverse in origin. The ill is everywhere. One of Wendell Berry's poems (see Review) speaks to this condition in the language of a lover of the earth. The poem is called "The Wages of History," and toward the end he says:

Doomed, bound and doomed
to the repair of history or to death,
we must cover over the stones
with soil for tomorrow's bread
while the present eludes us.

For generations to come we will not
know the decency and the poised ease
of living any day for that day's sake,
or be graceful here like the wild
flowers blooming in the fields,
but must live drawn out and nearly
broken between past and future
because of our history's wages,
bad work left behind us
demanding to be done again.

The listing of bad men and catalogs of their sins will *never* tell us what must be done, what we must come to, at last. Yet it is not always a gloomy lot:

Already
a new garden has fallen from my hands
into the ground. Having trusted seed
to the world, how should I not be a new man?

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves HOUSEHOLD ECONOMICS

WE have written a little, here, about the need for new textbooks for the new schools, and for the better schools of tomorrow. There is also, however, a need to recognize that some old books would make very good texts for new schools. Take the subject of economics. Two "old" books would provide excellent practical instruction in the laws of housekeeping, which is what economics is really about. One is Ralph Borsodi's *Flight from the City* (1933), first reviewed in MANAS for April 7, 1948. The other is *Living the Good Life* by Helen and Scott Nearing, first published in 1954. These books deal with the economics of *people*. They are aimed at practical well-being.

How can we say that books on housekeeping deserve the grandiloquent title of *Economics*? This is easily justified by quoting from the eminent economist, E. F. Schumacher. In his article in MANAS for Aug. 13, 1969, "Buddhist Economics," he compared the ideas of the Buddhists with conventional economic thinking, saying in one place that, from the Buddhist point of view, "considering goods as more important than people and consumption as more important than creative activity" is "standing the truth on its head." He continues:

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 nonviolence. 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 possible input of toil. The less toil there is, the more time and strength are left for artistic creativity. It would be highly uneconomic, for instance, to go in for complicated tailoring, like the modern West, when a much more beautiful effect can be achieved by the skillful draping of uncut material. It would be the height of folly to make material so that it would wear out quickly and the height of barbarity to make anything ugly, shabby or mean. What has just been said about clothing applies equally to all other human requirements. 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.

This seems a sensible way to begin the instruction in economics—a statement of what the science is supposed to achieve—regardless of what you call it. Education is supposed to bring to the young instruction that they are able to learn, apply, and remember—remember because they prove its truth in their lives and know it for themselves. What is the use of any other sort of education? So the laws of independent housekeeping developed by Ralph Borsodi and by the Nearings could easily be used for foundation studies in economics.

Living the Good Life, now available in a new edition by Schocken Books (\$4.95), with a valuable introduction by Paul Goodman, is the story of the migration of the Nearings from New York to a Vermont hillside in 1932. It tells how they developed an old, wornout farm and lived on its fruits for the next twenty years. (This book was reviewed in MANAS for March 23, 1955, and everything said about its usefulness then applies even more today.) Helen and Scott Nearing say in their Preface:

After twenty years of experience, some of it satisfactory and some of it quite the reverse, we are able to report that:

1. A piece of eroded, depleted mountain land was restored to fertility, and produced fine crops of high quality vegetables, fruits and flowers.

2. A farm economy was conducted successfully without the use of animals or animal products or chemical fertilizers.

3. A subsistence homestead was established, paying its own way and yielding a modest but adequate surplus. About three-quarters of the goods and services we consumed were the direct result of our own efforts. Thus we made ourselves independent of the labor market and largely independent of the commodity markets. In short, we had an economic unit which depression could affect but little and which could survive the gradual dissolution of United States economy.

4. A successful small-scale business enterprise was organized and operated, from which wagery was virtually eliminated.

5. Health was maintained at a level upon which we neither saw nor needed a doctor for the two decades.

6. The complexities of city life were replaced by a fairly simple life pattern.

7. We were able to organize our time so that six months of bread labor each year gave us six months of leisure, for research, travelling, writing, speaking and teaching.

8. In addition, we kept open house, fed, lodged, and visited with hundreds of people, who stayed with us for days or weeks, or much longer.

We have not solved the problem of living. Far from it. But our experience convinces us that no family group possessing a normal share of vigor, energy, purpose, imagination and determination need continue to wear the yoke of a competitive, acquisitive, predatory culture. Unless vigilante mobs or the police interfere, the family can live with nature, make themselves a living that will enhance their efficiency, and give them leisure in which they can do their bit to make the world a better place. . . . It is our hope that a novice, with the background of experience recorded in this book, can establish and maintain a health-yielding, harmless, self-contained economy.

The main point of Paul Goodman's introduction to this edition of *Living the Good Life* is his stress on its increasing relevance.

Today many young people are attempting to return to the land, practice subsistence farming and consume natural foods, and "for nearly the same reasons as the Nearings told themselves forty years ago." Goodman adds:

What the young can get from this book is know-how. They are, understandably, inept farmers; the Nearings are, famously, superb farmers. Certainly our communal hippies will be appalled by the Puritan rectitude of the Nearings, their extraordinary prudence in gathering stones for a ten-year building plan, their almost cash-accounting of labor time, and their rigorously hygienic pleasures. It might rub off on the young, however, that thought and responsibility are useful things even in subsistence farming.

One other paragraph seems especially pertinent:

By 1970 it is clear that we have to take seriously the Thirties' ideas of the Nearings, Borsodi, Frank Lloyd Wright, and the Southern Regionalists—and the economic ideas of Gandhi before them and, of course, the kibbutzim. Their experiments and analyses used to seem cranky, if not crackpot and they were certainly not in the mainstream of the technical and political issues that were discussed. But suddenly we have reached a tipping point. Ecologically, we are facing disaster, both environmentally because of pollution and physiologically because of poisoning. Abuses of technology have gone so far so fast, that the chief present purpose of technology must be to try to remedy the effects of past technology. Everywhere in the world the galloping urbanization is proving to be ecologically and fiscally unviable; worse, it is impossible to bring up citizens in urban and suburban areas that are no longer cities. The processing and social engineering that go with these conditions have called forth waves of populist protest, articulate and inarticulate, by those who are pushed around and find themselves without power. And finally, the expanding Gross National Product, the even higher Standard of Living, which was the justification for all this, has begun to yield sharply diminishing returns, trivial goods, incompetent services, base culture, and spiralling inflation.

The old "economics," in short, is no science and it does not work.

FRONTIERS

The Integrity of Student "Confusion"

IT'S disappointing to read through a long and apparently important book and not be able to remember much of anything with clarity—little, that is, but that the events described, which tend to run together, seemed both inevitable and largely futile. This book, for those who may be able to generate another reaction, is *The Harvard Strike* (Houghton Mifflin, 1970), written by four young men who were students and staff members of the (independently owned) student radio station WHRB, which gave the student revolt thorough coverage. A paragraph of the preface makes a capsule summary:

For several years, Harvard University, the nation's oldest and most prestigious university, had no major confrontation. Harvard had a large and active chapter of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS); it also had its share of demonstrations and sit-ins. But until 1969 all conflicts were resolved with a minimum of violence. Then, in April, 1969, the myth that "it couldn't happen here" was shattered when radicals seized University Hall; at dawn the next day, club-wielding police cleared the demonstrators from the building.

The chief issues were that the students wanted to drive ROTC from the campus and to stop the Harvard Corporation from expanding the university's building program into areas which would dispossess some poor people of their homes.

One gets the impression that while these issues—especially the feeling against ROTC—were real enough, even quite specific solutions would have only a temporary effect. The problems are *cultural*; they appear specific in big institutions which objectify the anti-human tendencies of an entire civilization, and these become morally intolerable to students when their university exhibits the direct connections it establishes between "educational" activity and the management and prosecution of the war in Vietnam.

Yet a big institution like Harvard, or any other large university, can change its character and policies only by gradual reconstruction of itself from within. Perhaps the most valuable part of this book is in its report of the struggle of the faculty to honor the moral feelings of the students and at the same time to preserve the dignities of a place of learning and intellectual inquiry. It now seems obvious that the places where disorder appears are not the places where its causes originate. The causes are not "local," and there can be no local remedies.

There is major irony in the polarization of the student movement in a Marxist direction, since socialism and communism are quite as "materialistic" as the value-system of the so-called "capitalistic" countries. Many of the students realize this. Richard Sennett's comment in *The Uses of Disorder* is to the point:

. . . the young people whom the press labels as student leaders are actually deviants from the real body of student unrest. These newspaper-created "student rebels" are ideologues, whose political ideas are a throwback to the primitive formulas of the 1930's. A great body of the young are disaffected, but their alienation is much more courageous, precisely because they have, in my experience, the integrity to be confused about what they want for themselves.

Harold Taylor's book, *Students Without Teachers* (McGraw-Hill, 1969), probably does more to eliminate the confusion about what is wrong with the universities than any other recent volume. He points out that the familiar claim that universities cannot "take a position" on public questions, in order to preserve their independence and intellectual integrity, needs further examination. He says:

The fact is that the university does have corporate views on public questions, and, as has been the case ever since the university began to assume its position of social and political power at the beginning of this century, it expresses its corporate views by the actions it takes as well as by the views it proclaims. . . . When it affects the lives of the poor in its own community, by its corporate actions, it is expressing a corporate view on a public question and must make

public statements in defense or explanation of the views it holds. When it takes corporate action to make policy on whether or not Communists should be allowed to teach, it makes public statements indicating why it holds the views that it does. . . . Something very close to a national corporate view of the function of a university was expressed by Clark Kerr in the Godkin lectures at Harvard while he was president of the University of California at Berkeley. Although the regents and the faculty had nothing to do with writing the lectures, it was clear from the lectures that the policy of the University of California as a whole was reflected in the views of its president. In fact, that is what aroused many of the politically minded students when they analyzed the meaning of the policy as far as the education of students is concerned.

Now comes the passage which has clarifying candor:

The university is not neutral, it is only in appearance disinterested—nor should it be. That is the whole point. We do not expect an American university in 1968 to proclaim that it has met in corporate session and now announces that it is against this American war. But we do have a right to expect that in its policies it will reflect a fundamental corporate decision, that by their nature *all* universities are against *all* wars as a means of solving human problems.

Further:

If a revolution were to come, intellectual or otherwise, it would come from a constellation of forces, of which the scholar with an interest in such matters is a component, and not from a decision by the university to act as a center of the revolution. To those who wish to use it that way, the answer must be that the university respects both the concern and the integrity of the free intellect seeking a means of acting upon the society: the university as an institution does not act either as a tool of the status quo or as a political instrument for use by ideologists.

This, surely, is the perspective that will have to be equally shared by administrators, teachers, and students, before higher education in the United States can be said to have a future.