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SOME ANCIENT PROPHECIES

WHAT sort of an age do we live in? An Easterner would have more resources for considering this question than a modern Western man. In Eastern thought one finds cyclical conceptions of history, which are linked with ancient teachings of cosmology, but the religions of the West afford little more than the distinction between B.C. and A.D., with the promise of the Millennium for hope of relief from the oppressions of life. The Western secular outlook begins to take history seriously only after the great revolutions of the eighteenth century; that is, the peoples who lived before the dawn of the modern political conceptions of freedom, equality, and self-rule are regarded as not quite "real," since they had no instruction in the principles of a truly human civilization. We read about those earlier times mainly to find anticipations of our own virtues, and novelists find it natural to plant modest evidence of "democratic" inclinations in the heroes of historical romances of pre-revolutionary epochs. Our own period, we have been convinced until quite recently, is an age of unending progress. Modern man, appropriate to Francis Bacon's recommendation, investigated nature in order to obtain power, and gaining it increasingly, would eventually put an end to all troubles. This was the general belief, a fine replacement for the unfulfilled expectation of the Millennium, since the practical benefits of man's mastery of the forces of nature were already everywhere in evidence, and it was plain that the literary "prophecies" of writers like Jules Verne and Edward Bellamy, once thought fantasies wholly beyond realization, had not only been equalled through the collaboration of science and technology, but dwarfed by actual achievement.

It is for this reason that the mounting disasters of the present can find no theoretical explanation in Western thought. None of the things that are happening were *supposed* to happen. Men were going to enrich the earth for all, not despoil and poison it. There would be plenty for everyone, and no cause for anger and revolution. Wars would cease because peace would be established by just men who made open covenants openly arrived at. The benefits of self-rule would gradually spread around the world as people became literate and saw its advantages.

The failure of the present is therefore a vast anomaly, productive of deep anxiety and in some quarters of desperation. Ordinary hardship men can understand and deal with, but unexplained disaster which contradicts what has been the central faith of their lives—this brings paralysis or frenzy.

Not only the East Indians, but also the ancient Greeks, regarded the affairs of men as subject to cyclic vicissitudes. Both civilizations had the teaching of four great ages, the Golden, the Silver, the Bronze, and the Iron Age. The Golden Age was a time of innocence and purity. In Bulfinch's idyllic account of the Greek tradition:

> Truth and right prevailed, though not enforced by law, nor was there any magistrate to threaten or punish. The forest had not been robbed of its trees to furnish timber for vessels, nor had men built fortifications around their towns. There were no such things as swords, spears, or helmets. The earth brought forth all things necessary for man without his labor in ploughing or sowing. Perpetual spring reigned, flowers sprang up without seed, the rivers flowed with milk and wine, and yellow honey distilled from the oaks.

With the coming of the Silver Age, these paradisiacal conditions declined somewhat; the seasons appeared, men needed shelter from the cold, and they had to plant and cultivate the soil to obtain food. The Bronze Age found men more savage and readier to resort to arms, but they were not yet evil. Not until the Iron or Black Age

did every dark tendency come to the surface. For then, as Bulfinch says—

> Crime burst in like a flood, modesty, truth, and honor fled. In their places came fraud and cunning, violence, and the wicked love of gain. . . . The earth, which till now had been cultivated in common, began to be divided off into possessions. Men were not satisfied with what the surface produced, but must dig into its bowels and draw forth from thence the ores of metals. Mischievous iron and more mischievous gold were produced. War sprang up, using both as weapons: the guest was not safe in his friend's house; sons-in-law and fathers-in-law, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives could not trust one another. Sons wished their fathers dead, that they might come into the inheritance; family love lay prostrate. The earth was wet with slaughter, and the gods abandoned it, one by one. . . .

It becomes evident that the qualities of human beings are the determining factors in these definitions. The *Vishnu Purana* is even more psychologically explicit in its account of the Black Age:

> There will be contemporary monarchs, reigning over the earth—kings of churlish spirit, violent temper, and ever addicted to falsehood and wickedness. They will inflict death on women, children, and cows, they will seize upon the property of their subjects, and be intent upon the wives of others; they will be of unlimited power, their lives will be short, their desires insatiable. . . . Wealth and piety will decrease until the world will be wholly depraved. Property alone will confer rank; wealth will be the only source of devotion; passion will be the sole bond of union between the sexes; falsehood will be the only means of success in litigation; and women will be objects merely of sensual gratification. . . . External types will be the only distinction of the several orders of life. . . .

This may seem a rather doleful determinism, the work of writers who lived thousands of years ago, yet the fact remains that in many respects the picture of modern society provided by this Puranic description of the Iron or Black Age—*Kali Yuga*—is astonishingly accurate in certain respects. And one recalls the dark prophecies of such imaginative geniuses as Tolstoy, and the brooding expectations of the Belgian diarist, Amiel, as a means of showing that an informed Western intelligence might easily reach similar conclusions. Not long ago a European psychiatrist, after a discussion of the unnatural and self-indulgent lives of the people of the "advanced" nations, was moved to say:

> And if man cannot get his environment and his drug problem in order?
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> We have to keep in mind that at least in the recent history of man there have been civilizations that have completely disappeared. The Egyptian civilization, for example. The Inca civilization. The Greek civilization. If our civilization can't solve its problems, it could disappear. We don't like to think about it, but it wouldn't be the first time and maybe not the last.

This, among other things, amounts to a casual defense of the cyclical theory of history.

The question naturally arises: Well, suppose we do try to use some imagination in the interpretation of the mythic idea of the Four Ages, what then? How will that help us? How could we possibly go back to the simplicity of a Golden Age?

A blunt answer might be that there are a number of young people who are attempting to do it—very imperfectly, without knowing how—and who may teach the world something from their determination to try. But in the much older civilization of India, where the idea of the four ages is well known, a group of active reformers, the Gandhians, are using this conception in their appeal to their countrymen. Many Hindus of today are persuaded that since both their own country and all the world are in the grip of Kali Yuga, there is no use in attempting to bring about any change for the better. But Vinoba Bhave, aged leader of the Sarvodaya movement, proposes a very different view, which is summarized by Joan Bondurant in one of her papers ("Traditional Polity and the Dynamics of Change in India," *Human Organization*, Spring, 1963):

> Redefining, reinterpreting, this group asserts that a new age—*satya yuga*—is now upon us and that this age is egalitarian. Vinoba has described his ideal

> society as one in which the functions, qualities and positions are not hierarchical or divided between different categories of men. In a *Sarvodaya* society, he asserts, every individual will have to learn to combine in himself the qualities of a *brahmin,* a *ksatriya,* a *vaisya,* and a *shudra.*

Vinoba calls the constructive workers of the Sarvodaya movement the bringers of the Satya yuga, or Golden Age. Miss Bondurant comments: "We have here, then, a clear and strong non-deterministic philosophy."

We hear a great deal, today, about the need for "commitment," and the impossibility of a better life without it. This seems obvious enough, but what is to be the content of the commitment? The conception of being part of a movement to restore the Golden Age for mankind certainly has power in it, and as we look around today, and think of the men who win our respect, they seem always to be related to some aspect of this ideal. If you read Dolci, see what Chavez is about and what his ideal social conceptions are, or turn to the radical humanism of Ivan Illich, you find in the work and dreams of such leaders an uncompromising devotion to the humanization of the common lot of ordinary men, women, and children. They are concerned, as Gandhi was, as Vinoba is, with the betterment of the masses, and are led on by vision, not anger.

There is a sense, as Illich says, in which the task should be easier in the Third World—the so-called "undeveloped" world, which might better be called the *not yet spoiled* world—than it will be among the under-privileged of the prosperous nations. We have some samples of what we mean by "spoiled," taken from recent magazine articles. One is a passage from a review (in the October *Atlantic*), by George Kateb, of B. F. Skinner's latest book, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity.* Prof. Skinner, as most readers know, is a behaviorist psychologist, long at Harvard, best known for his "scientific" utopia, *Walden II.* Mr. Kateb says:

> What could lie beyond freedom and dignity? What is the shattering truth that awaits us? Skinner says that no person is responsible for anything he does, whether good or bad, great or mediocre, because he is the creation, as he is the creature, of his environment. Hence no person should be praised or blamed for anything he does. Praise and blame would make sense only if we could intelligibly speak of free human agency or "autonomy." But the notion of an inner man undetermined by his environment (and genetic inheritance) is mythological. Free choice is nonsense. All behavior is caused behavior. All causes (of interest to the scientists of human behavior) are external to the creature. Each of us is, and is only, what he has been made.
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> Of course, society must continue to administer rewards and punishments, pleasures and pains. The point is to drop the old understanding and justification of these measures. We go beyond freedom when we see that since none of us is free none should be said to *deserve* punishment in any of its forms. We go beyond dignity when we see that since none of us is free none should be said to *merit* reward, respect, or admiration in any of their forms.

Perhaps that is enough. That Prof. Skinner has these views is not especially surprising; they belong to a past generation of psychology which is far from being displaced from authority. But what is appalling is the fact that the psychologists who spread these opinions seem undismayed and not in the least humbled by the fact that nearly all Greek tragedy would be invalidated if what they say is true; or, more pertinently, that nothing a man says can have much importance, since he doesn't say it as an independent intelligence, guided by principles of reason, but only because he has been *conditioned* to think (is it "thinking"?) the way he does.

We turn now to an essay by John Aldridge on the decline of literature, in the *Saturday Review* for Sept. 18. Here he is speaking of the decline in the quality of the fiction in the "little magazines," which he finds now much poorer than was fifty years ago:

> Over and over again in the little magazines one encounters stories about the small housekeeping details of life, the sweaty anxieties of simple, average people, the sexual daydreams of bored housewives, political intrigues in university English departments, the suicidal impulses of adolescents who do not feel loved, the suicidal impulses of old folks who do not

> feel needed. The stories, in other words, are about the usual situations and distresses of the world we all inhabit. They are familiar. They may seem trivial. They may even be boring. But the problem is not the subject-matter, although surely one of the hazards of writing about contemporary American life is that its banality can perhaps be accurately rendered only at the level of soap opera. The problem is rather that in most cases the author's conception is as banal as his subject-matter—banal in the sense that he and it seem to be locked into the same system of values. And just as he has been unable to imagine an alternative to those values, so he has also been unable to imagine a way of endowing his subject-matter with a significance that would elevate it from the level of soap opera to the level of art.

Mr. Aldridge is talking about a culture in which vision has been extinguished, for that is what has happened when writers are simply unable to imagine any alternative to the "everyday values" of commonplace, conventional lives. He has no role, any more, and the writing of such stories might as well be delegated to a computer. He does not feel called upon to make a heroic effort—which, indeed, is Mr. A1dridge's complaint—but is content to accept in his own way the visionless version of reality which Mr. Skinner proclaims in his book abolishing any meaning for freedom and human dignity.

Our final quotation is from the October *Atlantic* again, a passage from a very short article by the psychiatrist, Robert Coles, on Simone Weil—or rather, on what she learned as a young woman who went to work in the industrial plants of France, among them the Renault factory, in order to find out what it was like to make a living on the production line. Anyone who revives interest in Simone Weil does a public service. She may, in the perspective of history, come to be regarded as one of the most profound of the European thinkers of the twentieth century. In her book, *The Need for Roots*, written as a program for the reconstruction of France after the liberation (Simone Weil died at thirty-three, in 1943), she wrote of the deadly monotony of the workmen's lives on the job, of how they were shut out from participation in the knowledge and meaning of their tasks. She called the factories "industrial prisons" and spoke of the senselessness of artificial stimulants to overcome their boredom or exhaustion. Dr. Coles comments:

> But she was not primarily a social critic; perhaps more than anything else she was a visionary, hence easily written off as impractical—but uncannily able to say things starkly and prophetically and with apparent naïveté, which more cautious and "realistic" men only in time could come to see as indeed significant. She noted how frightened and sullen her co-workers became, how drained they felt by the end of the day, how tempted they were to make minor mistakes, slow down, even at times cause considerable damage to the plant in which they worked or to the products they were turning out. Why is it so, she asked—why must men (in both America and Russia—that is, under capitalism and Communism alike) work in such huge, cold, impersonal places, and feel so fortunate (such is their vulnerability, their fear, their insecurity) for having even that kind of opportunity? The answer, no doubt, is that efficiency demands it; in a modern industrial nation mass production has to take place in large factories. Yet, in the France of the 1930'5, Miss Weil saw what we in America are now beginning to notice and worry about: the dangers which a cult of efficiency and productivity unqualified by ethical if not spiritual considerations, can present us with. She saw how much her worker friends needed one another's company, notwithstanding all the factory rules and regulations. She saw how tempted they were to stay off the job, to feign illness or offer some other excuse that enabled them to take at least this day off. She saw how greedy and thoughtless an industrial empire can become: land, water air, raw materials, the lives of people—everything is grist for those modern mills of ours, which in turn are defended as necessary for our "advanced civilization," while all the while we cough and hold our noses and our ears and see about us an increasingly bleak and contaminated land, and feel upset as well, at a loss, and more than a little angry. The words and phrases are familiar, indeed have become clichés: absenteeism ecological disaster, alienation, dehumanization, the loss of a sense of community.
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> Simone Weil sensed in her intuitive way that something was wrong, that a new order of attention must be given to the ordinary working man—whether he wears a blue collar or a white one—to his need for fellowship and dignity as well as money, to his struggle for meaning as well as possessions.

How do these various quotations go together? They go together, we think, because they are all of a piece. We have no difficulty in accepting that the elements and forces of the material world constitute a system in which everything affects everything else and is a part of everything else. The extraordinary revelations of the ecologists are now making this plain in respect to the delicate organic balances of the natural environment. What then of the moral environment? Will not its forces have hidden, subtle relationships, too?

One thing we have gained during our cycle of scientific discovery and invention is a measure of insight into the complexity of the correlations of natural forces, and only recently has it been impressed upon us that the intricate network of symbiotic relationships which form the web of life involve delicate fields of interdependence which may take many centuries for us to understand in their completeness. What if the moral relationships of human life, among individuals and groups, are still more complicated? The great myths of antique religion and tradition may be extraordinary cultural intuitions into the balances and harmonies involved, not to be adopted as "beliefs," but to be used as psychological guidelines in the endeavor to understand ourselves.

REVIEW
A MIXED BAG

WHAT kind of a literature do we need? The conductors of this Department read a lot of books and magazine articles, but they also develop an insistent hunger, seldom fed, for reading which raises the sights of the reader. These might be books devoted to some kind of questing or search. For what? The short answer would be the search for truth, yet this comes too easily. For most men, the truth has a particular guise. It may not, when it is reached, turn out to be the final truth, but only a stage along the way. And any quest, if it is a good one, has more than one level. Its bottom level hints at higher ones and there are moments when the seeker knows this well.

If the higher levels are forgotten or neglected the whole affair sours in time, and then the very language of vision which was once associated with the quest becomes offensive to honest men, who assume that candid vulgarity and bold self-seeking are superior to hypocritical moral pretensions. The people of the United States have been through this sort of cycle two or three times.

A sage passage in Arthur M. Schlesinger's essay, "What Then Is the American, This New Man?", has some application here:

> When President Coolidge made his famous remark, "The business of America is business," he quite properly added, "The chief ideal of the American people is idealism. I cannot repeat too often that America is a nation of idealists." This dualism puzzled foreign commentators, who found it difficult, for example, to reconcile worship of the Almighty Dollar with the equally universal tendency to spend freely and give money away. In contrast to Europe, America has practically no misers, and one consequence of the winning of Independence was the abolition of primogeniture and entail. Harriet Martineau was among those who concluded that "the eager pursuit of wealth does not necessarily indicate a love of wealth for its own sake." The fact is that, for a people who recalled how hungry and ill-clad their ancestors had been through the centuries in the Old World, the chance to make money was like the sunlight at the end of a tunnel. It was the means of living a life of human dignity. In other words, for the great majority of Americans it was a symbol of idealism rather than materialism. Hence "this new man" had an instinctive sympathy for the underdog, and even persons of moderate wealth gratefully shared it with the less fortunate helping to endow charities, schools, hospitals and art galleries and providing the wherewithal to nourish movements for humanitarian reform which might otherwise have died aborning.

Prof. Schlesinger said this in an address before the American Historical Association in 1942, and would not, were he alive, be so tender with us today. Yet his point is well made, since he is illustrating a reality of human nature—how aims and qualities of various sorts can all be embodied and have fulfillment in the same external activities. This seems to extend throughout human life. Charles Jung, in *The Integration of Personality*, related how he discovered from his historical and psychological studies that "true alchemy was never a business or a career, but a real *opus* that a man carried on in silent, self-sacrificing labor." Its end was the fulfillment Jung termed "individuation," of which the alchemical process was a material symbol, typifying the refining process that was necessary.

The life of the early Americans was filled with challenges and invitations to dangerous adventure. Naturally enough, psychologists use the decline of the frontier as an explanation for the proclivities of the young for law-breaking, which doubtless has truth in it so far as it goes. But it is a quality of strong human character to find new frontiers as old ones give way to control and humdrum management. These dual possibilities are illustrated by George Stewart in a novel of the settling of California, *East of the Giants* (Ballantine paperback). This is the story of a young New England girl who elopes with a handsome Spanish landowner in the 1830's and spends the rest of her life as a pioneer woman of California. Her husband is a splendid partner as long as the frontier life lays claims to his energies, but after he gains some wealth, both from the successful ranching operations managed by his

wife and by getting in early on the gold rush, he weakens into an habitual gambler and turns into a dissipated, useless man who is eventually killed in a card game. His wife marries again, sustains her dreams by reading, and converts the ancestral Spanish grant ranch into an ill-fated attempt at a utopian community. Much of what California will have to answer for is in this story, but it also captures the qualities which are lost from present-day life.

Another book about the settling of the West—not fiction—is Hal Borland's *High, Wide and Lonesome* (Popular Library). Borland, who was born with the twentieth century, is best known as a nature-lover who contributes delightful articles to the *Progressive.* This book begins with the year 1910, when Hal's father, a printer and newspaper editor, decided to have a go at ranching and homesteaded 320 acres in an unsettled area of eastern Colorado. The impulse lasted five years, until Will Borland decided that after all he was an editor, not a farmer, and took over a struggling paper in the town of Flagler, ninety miles southeast of the homestead. The book tells the story of that five years—very nearly the most important time of a boy's life—complete with blizzards, the passing of the open range, and the major and minor tragedies which can overtake a small family which lives far from any neighbor and twelve miles from the nearest telephone. They lost two horses and a cow to poisonous weeds. Hal's father took sick with typhoid, and after nearly dying went to work as an editor in the nearest town while his wife and young son did the work of the ranch, so that he could pay off his doctor's and hospital bills within a few months.

At the end of his foreword Borland says:

> Colonial New England is far away and long ago, and Dan Boone's Kentucky is a misty legend. But the Old West is just over the horizon, a frontier which in many ways summed up three centuries of American pioneering and growth toward maturity. Reaching for a remembrance of it, trying to understand this heritage of ours, we sometimes catch only false heroics and false melodrama, but now and then we do capture enough of its reality to recognize our enduring purposes. No matter where we came from or when, the pioneers were our rootstock, our source, our beginnings. They shaped the pattern for America.

(Here we'd like to recall Elizabeth Madox Roberts' *The Great Meadow,* which is very nearly the best book of all on early American life. For its reader, Dan Boone's Kentucky is no longer a "misty legend," but a living root of our past.)

These books, however, all look backward. They are valuable in showing how people behave under conditions requiring struggle, and when they have a vision to lead them on, but they cannot be models for any future enterprise or growth. There is a sense, of course, in which it is much too soon for "models." Models are something for people to copy, and we are still a long way from the copying stage, so far as the future is concerned. About all that we can expect, these days, is more and more open-minded looking around.

For a sample of how this might be done—or has been done by one man—Danilo Dolci's *A New World in the Making* (Monthly Review Press, 1965) would be good reading. This is a book concerned with planning, how to think about it, how to attempt it. Dolci starts with root ideas, and he clears away all the rubbish. He has no place in his plans for any kind of war, for one thing. He is a Gandhian. He says in the first chapter:

> One of the fundamental questions to which we must try to find an answer can, I believe, be expressed in these terms. Man has lost his belief in a ready-made system of moral truth yet how is he to be sure that his attempt to renew his being will lead him to other, more exact notions? What means has he of discovering his true, essential function, the fundamental lines of approach to his true purpose—to live a full and natural life? This is a common-sense question yet so vast in its implications that one is almost afraid to ask it. So vast indeed, that I do not believe a man could ask himself a vaster question.

That is how Dolci starts out. He is very serious, and should be seriously, not casually, read.

Other promising material on planning for the future is found in the literature of the New Alchemists, quoted in last week's Frontiers. If these people are as good as they sound, they, too, deserve serious reading. In one place they say:

> Viewed ecologically, modern cities and their suburbs lack the variability and self-sufficiency necessary for the prolonged maintenance of stable social systems. A similar dilemma on another plane pervades the lives of most men and women. Their world becomes more complex and increasingly beyond their reach, yet their role within the world grows ever more simplified as one by one they relinquish the various tasks of living to myriads of specialists. Unlike our ancestors we have little individual control over the creation of our power, food, clothing or habitat. This simplification and emasculation of the lives of most of us lies close to the roots of much of the chaos, violence and disintegration which threatens to collapse this society.

This group is devoting its efforts to alternative ways of life, and is planning its work "on the lowest functional level of society on the premise that society, like the planet itself, can be no healthier than the components of which it is constructed." A summary of the plan of a project for a tropical center concludes:

> The goal of all this activity would be to improve the nutritional and financial situation of the tropical smallholder and poor man rather than to improve national economies. The goal of maximizing total GNP, or total rice production, is not incompatible with the goal of helping the really needy and preserving the ecosystem. However, the two goals are incompatible if certain assumptions of modern economic developers and politicians in the tropics are accepted: Concentrating on plantation industrial crops; eliminating "primitive" and "backward" things like fruit crops; using amounts of pesticide and other such items far in excess of real need or of safe margins; monocropping over large areas; clear-cutting of the steepest forest land and putting it under soil-wasting crops such as maize; concentrating on starch-staple foods so that the rural diet grows poorer and poorer in essential nutrients while remaining high enough in calories to satisfy government "experts." These and many other strategies are considered the very essence of agricultural modernization by most developers with whom I have talked, and ecological and nutritional arguments are countered frequently with statements that short-term gains to the nation are more important than any caution. Research and development aimed at improving alternative systems, both traditional and totally new, should focus on assisting the average poor farmer.
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> Our task should be to help them save their environments and protect and extend local social systems, rather than make them totally dependent upon the needs and whims of the developed nations and their business enterprises.

One easily sees how all this fits with the educational reforms proposed by Ivan Illich, and with the intermediate technology urged by E. F. Schumacher. Little by little, the pattern of the new frontier may be emerging.

COMMENTARY
CHUANGTSE'S PRINCIPLE

A SIGH of nostalgic longing for the good old days of frontier simplicity, followed by a shrug declaring the impracticability of any such dream, may be a natural reaction to the "radical" prescription of Chuangtse (see Frontiers), but it is by no means the only possible response. Various individuals have been making heroic efforts to apply the root principle of Chuangtse's counsels, as the remedy for the extreme excesses of the twentieth century.

Consider Gandhi. Gandhi was not an emotional Luddite. He was not against technology in behalf of man, although he vigorously opposed the enslavement of man by technology. He wanted machinery that would set people free by helping them to fulfill their responsibilities. He had high praise for the sewing machine, for example, and he urged the development of an improved spinning wheel.

The movement for intermediate technology led by E. F. Schumacher is another application of the same principle. Men need better tools, not machines which take work out of their hands, which dehumanize them by making them into mere machine-tenders, a rootless proletariat denied any form of self-reliant and independent life. Machines which help men to become self-sufficient, and at a rate at which they can remain masters of the process of change and growth—this should be the goal of the technological genius of the present, instead of the manufacture of devices which place their users at the mercy of experts or oblige them to buy new equipment long before actual replacement should be necessary.

The ideal is a society in which people are equal to management of their own lives. As conditions and capacities change, the normative conception of such a society will change, also, so that practical intelligence is called for, not mechanistic objectives, on the one hand, or blind adherence to a past primitive situation, on the other. There should indeed be material progress, but never at the cost of human disorientation and the reduction of people to servants and victims of technological objectives. So we could say that every thinker who is concerned with the restoration of individual responsibility, with the growth of self-reliance, and who is able to show how these qualities may be fostered and given opportunity for development under existing conditions, is a follower of Chuangtse.

Progress which lacks direct relation to general human excellence—something different from the ambiguous human "good"—turns out to be a distortion of the common life. This is the substance of what Chuangtse taught.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
WHAT TEACHERS FIND OUT

WE could probably compile half a dozen "Children" articles out of Grace Rotzel's book, *The School in Rose Valley* (Johns Hopkins Press, $8.95), and may do just that, eventually. The School in Rose Valley has a great many symmetries—both inner and outer—which makes it a school which readers in perhaps quite different situations will find of interest. And the book is the work of a *teacher*.

At the end of this small but packed volume is a chapter, "A Summing Up." Reading it over suggests that intelligent people devoted to children and to teaching will almost certainly discover the same things, although they may write about them in very different terms. The point of careful and repeated reading of this chapter is to absorb the importance of these common discoveries, so that the words telling about them will matter less and less. Miss Rotzel lists here the books she and the other teachers have found most valuable in their work together. We should like to list this book, and especially this chapter, as more important than any of the other books, if it is used as a tool for shaping one's own basic stance in relation to teaching. There is this, for example, at the beginning:

> I learned not to expect to arrive at a given point, for we never did. To be sure, we had goals that seemed to assume an end, and we made headway toward them; but we came to realize that the accomplishments and the problems that were solved were not important; it was the *accomplishing* and the *solving* of the problems that showed us how to continue.

"Goals" are never as good as the abstract longings for what they stand for in the feelings of people. And too much longing can distort the whole of life. There is a part of human nature that needs goals and to reach them, but it is not the most important part, and somehow knowing this may be the source of most of the balance and serenity in human life.

From the beginning, the School avoided the mechanistic, additive idea of achievement. There were things for the teachers to teach, and for the children to learn, to be sure, but this wasn't the main thing, although if the main thing got done the learning would, too.

> From the first we realized that a school cannot meet all needs. Our school, based on Dewey's idea that education proceeds in a social environment where children came into contact with their natural surroundings, attracted people who trusted that process. Those who felt uncomfortable with Dewey's concept stayed away, and even deplored us. . . . We were trying to put into action what Dewey meant by the social function of a school. We never educate directly, he said, but indirectly by means of the environment. A child learns from the other children and from the materials he works with, and he finds ways of taking part in what is going on. By small steps he discovers what he can do, and then shares in the activity until he can feel that the group's success or failure is his. This meant children behaving like children and teachers not always teaching, but sometimes learning.

There is a sense in which the basis of Ivan Illich's demand for deschooling is put quite simply in this paragraph. If that basis were more widely understood, there would be less need for an anti-institutional revolution. This is not to say that Illich is wrong, but that the more people understand how learning takes place, the less need there would be for the abolition of the bad habits and delusions enshrined in institutions.

What about parents who want a lot of testing and to see specific signs of "progress"? There is only one real solution for this problem, and that is to help the parents themselves to obtain a better understanding of progress in education. Miss Rotzel writes at some length in relation to this point:

> Another thing I learned was that self-discipline was the backbone of the educational process. When that was strong, everything else fell into place. I learned to recognize the humming sound of children at work on their own initiative and I knew it for a sign that all was well. Parents wanted the *results* of self-discipline, but were often impatient with the slow process of getting it. We all shared these feelings, but, as a result of our work in child study, we were committed to the slow process, to self-initiated

experience, the confusion, failures, and the gradual growth of self-respect and self-confidence. We found it made a great difference in our thinking if we ourselves were going through the same sort of process we were offering the children. So we had classes for adults in clay, painting, or woodwork, and urged parents and teachers to explore something they knew nothing about—learning Russian, or how to manage a garden. Then they could see for themselves how learning disciplined and how it led on to confidence and joy in work. They could understand the stupidity of using gold stars, marks, blue ribbons, or punishments as incentives, and they could agree that offering such incentives was even immoral, because they were ulterior motives that denied the reward in work for work's sake.

One passage in "Summing Up" recalls David Hawkins' apt reference to the Water Rat's (in *Wind in the Willows*) championship of just "messing about," experimenting in free play, as distinguished from systematic learning. Miss Rotzel says:

> It is difficult to over-emphasize the need for time for self-directed activity—that period of "romance" Whitehead talks about. "My point is," he says, "that a block in the assimilation of ideas inevitably arises when a discipline of precision is imposed before a stage of romance has run its course in the growing mind." We took that to mean we couldn't always control a child's pace. Here we sometimes got into trouble. "Why are you letting my child stand around? He must be taught"; and he was removed from the school. We erred on the other side too. Teachers, being teachers, love to direct. I must say there was not as much self-direction as there could have been. But we talked about it, put it into our weekly curriculum reports, and at coffee-time told each other anecdotes about our children's independent activities and competence in solving their problems.
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> In the preschool the child works on learning patterns he will continue throughout his life—who he is, how he can cope with himself, other adults, materials, tools, the earth, animals. He must have periods to enjoy and use his environment. This takes time. We were always holding off parents who wanted us to teach more, "to cultivate the mind," as if the mind wasn't working unless it was being force fed. Our answer was, "Take the child on a bug-collecting tour and watch him use his mind. Watch him make a dump truck in shop. Don't minimize the learning going on. Give him time to BE."

It should be evident that the School in Rose Valley needed children with a certain sort of parent, so that its growth was slow. Begun in 1929, it took thirty-six years for the school to reach its maximum enrollment of 150 "This," Miss Rotzel explains, "was partly because we expected so much of parents—we looked for both faith and works—and partly because we worked hard to make clear our concept of the school in relationship with the child, and generally only those families whose aims were similar to ours were admitted, though there were exceptions."

The school was based on faith in the innate capacities of the young:

> We never believed that education was just a "preparation for life," but we were too busy living to indulge in bickering about definitions. When everybody was going full steam, the process was bound to be messy. Animals, a shop, raw materials, gardens, useful junk, collections from stream and woods meant clutter, and clutter was sure to worry somebody. I was bothered sometimes, myself, and said so; but then I was likely to bring in a new set of animals, or something that increased the clutter.
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> I could take the physical jumble easier than the mental confusions arising from conflicting ideas. For example, parents who had the preparation-for-life idea of education were concerned that their children were living too much in the present. Wandering by streams was not preparing them for the next grade. Would they be ready? I couldn't say. I remember having cold chills myself when we decided to postpone the teaching of reading until the seven-year-old year, but we went ahead anyway. It worked, because we were all enthusiastic; but years later when we decided to return to teaching reading in the first grade, that worked, too. That was the way it was. Policy decisions were always debated and made in the Education Committee (parents and teachers) so I never felt alone.

MANAS has enjoyed an exchange with the *Parents' Bulletin* of the School in Rose Valley for a number of years. It is an unpretentious sheet, but it always seems filled with bubbling energy, the right sort of confidence, a complete willingness to ask questions, and feeling of eager, friendly cooperation from everyone.

FRONTIERS

The Taoist Solution

AFTER time spent with the daily papers, it may be a good idea to go deliberately to Lao-tse or Chuangtse for contrast and relief. A sage character in Pearl Buck's novel, *The Three Daughters of Madame Liang,* said quietly of China's Communist revolution, "If it is not the Eternal Way, it will be only an interlude and pass." Meanwhile, she served as well as she could.

In *The Wisdom of China and India,* LinYutang says of Lao-tse's *Tao Te Ching:*

> It accounts in fact for any mellowness that may be seen in Chinese social and individual behavior. If one reads enough of this book, one automatically acquires the habits and ways of the Chinese. I would go further and say that if I were asked what antidote could be found in Oriental literature and philosophy to cure this contentious modern world of its inveterate belief in force and struggle for power, I would name this book of "5,000 words" written some 2,400 years ago. . . . The chaos of the modern world, I believe, is due to the total lack of a philosophy of the rhythm of life such as we find in Laotse and his brilliant disciple Chuangtse, or anything remotely resembling it. And furthermore, if there is one book advising against the multifarious activities and futile busyness of the modern man, I would again say it is Laotse's *Book of Tao.* It is one of the profoundest books in the world's philosophy.

We happened to pick up this large volume put together by Lin Yutang just after listening to a radio program devoted to exposing the unfair policies of a California television station. Its newscasts, it was shown, were biased, distorting the reporting of events such as anti-war protests in behalf of the opinions of the station's owners. The broadcast was thorough and long, the offense it described outrageous. So now there will be "equal time" demanded, and perhaps even obtained, and the struggle will go on and on.

It is no doubt good and necessary for this effort to be made. Yet one usually hears about such causes from a considerable distance, and if you take the trouble to list all the similar causes you hear about, and which seem to deserve support, you realize that there is literally no end to the things that one ought to help along. Yet to work for all these causes is impossible. Time and money run out, and every one of us has things of his own to do which need primary attention.

Is it then wrong to suggest that making a series of attacks on evils is not the only way to contribute to the betterment of society, and perhaps not even the best or most important way? Or that unless other things are made to happen, too, this "problem-solving" approach becomes a kind of profession which nourishes the situations it sets out to change and helps create others like them?

This, it seems clear, is what Lao-tse would say. And Chuangtse. Some years ago we reported in MANAS on a study made of the public facilities for mental health in a large New England city. The research showed that the various services available overlapped, and that often what was offered to the needy grew out of medical activities which took no account of depressed social conditions. It was shown that in some respects, people might be more harmed than helped by endless referrals and psychiatric professionalism. A critic pointed out that these sufferers needed the environment of a truly therapeutic community, where each one could accept personal responsibilities according to his ability and have opportunity to "mop up" his own problems while feeling himself to be among friends. This, of course, was simply beyond the capacity of the city agencies, regardless of reforms instituted. The whole city would have to change, to make anything like that possible. What then must be done?

Chuangtse was a master of Taoist irony:

> Banish wisdom, discard knowledge, and gangsters will stop. Fling away jade and destroy pearls, and petty thieves will cease. Burn tallies and break signets, and the people will revert to their uncouth integrity. Split measures and smash scales, and the people will not fight over quantities. Trample down all the institutions of the Sages, and the people

will begin to be fit for discussing (Tao). . . . Destroy arcs and lines, fling away squares and compasses, snap off the fingers of Ch'ui the Artisan, and each man will use his own natural skill. Wherefore the saying, "Great skill appears like clumsiness."

In the good old days, under wise rulers—

the people tied knots for reckoning. They enjoyed their food, beautified their clothing, were satisfied with their homes, and delighted in their customs. Neighboring settlements overlooked one another, so that they could hear the barking of dogs and the crowing of cocks of their neighbors, and the people till the end of their days had never been outside their own country. In those days, there was indeed perfect peace.

But nowadays any one can make people strain their necks and stand on tiptoes by saying, "In such and such a place there is a Sage." Immediately they put together a few provisions and hurry off, neglecting their parents at home and their masters' business abroad, going on foot through. the territory of the Princes, and riding to hundreds of miles away. Such is the evil of the rulers' desire for knowledge. When the rulers desire knowledge and neglect Tao, the empire is overwhelmed in confusion.

How can this be shown? When the knowledge of bows and cross-bows and hand-nets and tailed arrows increases then they carry confusion among the birds of the air. When the knowledge of hooks and bait and nets and traps increases, then they carry confusion among the fishes of the deep. When the knowledge of fences and nets and snares increases, then they carry confusion among the beasts of the field. When cunning and deceit and flippancy and the sophistries of the "hard" and "white" and identities and differences increase in number and variety, then they overwhelm the world with logic.

Therefore it is that there is often chaos in the world, and the love of knowledge is ever at the bottom of it. For all men strive to grasp what they do not know, while none strive to grasp what they already know; and all strive to discredit what they do not excel in, while none strive to discredit what they do excel in. That is why there is chaos. Thus, above, the splendor of the heavenly bodies is dimmed, below, the power of land and water is burned up, while in between the influence of the four seasons is upset. There is not one tiny worm that moves on earth or an insect that flies in the air but has lost its original nature. Such indeed is the world chaos caused by the desire for knowledge.

Ever since the time of the Three Dynasties downwards, it has been like this. The simple and the guileless have been set aside; the specious and the cunning have been exalted. Tranquil inaction has given place to disputation; and disputation alone is enough to bring chaos upon the world.

If we take what Chuangtse says as concerned with what ought to be the center of gravity in human life, and are able to render him into the sort of language we use, we may feel that this diagnosis touches our troubles at many points.