VOLUME XXI, NO. 39
SEPTEMBER 25, 1968

A HISTORICAL PROCESS

A DISILLUSIONED man is like a deserted lover. It is practically impossible to engage him in an inquiry into the means of his disillusionment. Obsessed by humiliation, he regards the deceit he has suffered as far more important a reality than the susceptibilities which began the romance. He wants to arm himself against all such seduction—it may have been only naïve miscalculation, but now it is *seduction*—and he will hear nothing about the good that may have once animated his lost faith.

He finds it an empty comfort to be told that his commitment was a fine and beneficial thing—that the fault lay in its object. So, to guard against future entanglements, he sets out to devise rules which will guarantee him immunity. The one mistake that will doom his defensive projects from the beginning, and which he almost always makes, is to evolve his rules from a principle which denies love. For love has as many guises as life, and is inseparable from human existence. It keeps on coming back. It may even return as hate, which surely, the man may then argue to himself, is the best possible defense against seduction. Yet a day arrives when, still being a man, he awakes to find that he has submitted to the worst possible seduction: In that hour when he longs above all to love, he sees that he has abolished within himself the open-heartedness that love requires.

We know these things about ourselves, but we know them cautiously or only symbolically. We know them in the imagery of Prometheus and Sisyphus; we preserve such truths remotely in myth and religion. We know we need them, but we want them to keep their distance. Applying them practically to our lives would require a relentless honesty that inflicts exquisite pain. So, a certain sagacity limits the investigation of "truth" to a level of abstraction which preserves its symmetry but removes its immediacy. And then we do exercises with it "out there," enjoying for a time an era of good feeling. This approach to meaning, when pursued self-consciously, may be called the theory of Objective Truth—a calculated defense against seduction. You look for the truth, but you make sure you find it in places where it can't get *at* you. You say that it is ridiculous to try to use it personally until it is *complete.* And you hide for as long as you can, even from yourself, the fact that it will never be complete.

Where is the seductive power in this theory? It is in those wonderful *symmetries* of external knowledge, which have a magical correspondence to the unreached and perhaps unreachable finality men long to know. And if anyone doubts that we are really on the way to truth through objectivity, you run off a show of some selected symmetries. *Wow!* he says. I didn't realize you knew all that!

But a time comes when this man's life grows seriously uncomfortable, even tortured, and he asks the custodians of the "truth out there" for some practical help in human terms. They can't give it to him. When this is attempted, they explain, their truth is at once perverted by human longing. It isn't "objective" any more. And sometimes there is high conflict among the custodians themselves, many of whom insist that their truth wasn't meant to be applied for "partisan" purposes. Any application, they say, will be twisted to partisan purposes until the truth is self-corrective by being *complete.* So the symmetries of objective truth disappear in practical application and people become disgusted with the whole idea of "truth out there." They realize it has nothing to say about what people ought to do to help themselves, and what good is truth like that? A distinguished thinker of our time—he may be great—has set out a fairly complete philosophy of moral obligation without once mentioning any of the "truths out there." There is no argument from science in the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre.

Sartre, you could say, is a man profoundly on guard against seduction by the "truth out there." He is not without other susceptibilities, and conducts some flirtation with a political system of thought, but

he remains so insistent a revisionist concerning scientific socialism that he might as well have left it alone. He uses pure moral ideas, intuitively given, and because they are pure, they hardly seem "moral," yet they have awakened response in the longings of a great many men. They are giving power to a widespread revolutionary determination that gets its energy and sanction from within.

Let us look for a time at the vast seduction which Sartre has ignored. This is the claim of science to objective knowledge about the world. Why was it so overwhelmingly attractive?

The first thing to be noted is that longing is imperial. It characteristically displaces other considerations. When a longing gets hold of a truth to justify itself, it can hardly recognize the importance, or even the existence, of any other truth. The other truths grow pallid. They don't really matter in the presence of a dominant longing and its intellectual vindication; you don't even argue about them any more. You just show your disdain or your contempt. You make your longing into the flaming reality of a new system of hope, and you convert its truth into a new theory of knowledge which shuts out everything else. If anyone objects, you wither him with claims and denunciations. You say that we can't afford to have people like that around. Their ideas are misleading when not absolutely mistaken. They confuse the ones who don't have secure understanding. They diminish the importance of truth by indulging in feckless speculation.

This is the general pattern of human affairs under the rule of undisciplined moral longing. It is repeated over and over again. The longings change, but not the pattern.

It was a crucial moment in history when some of the most intelligent men in Europe decided that the time had come to separate longing from truth—*once and for all.* We must be tough, they said; no more seduction. This was the birth of the moral theory of scientific objectivity. Don't tell me what you want, tell me *the way it is!* became the cry of the objective scientist. He wanted a world of true ideas unseduced by any sort of longing. He wanted to outlaw longing. The fact is, he *longed* to outlaw longing. That was the rule of celibacy adopted by the scientific clergy. They would not *long.*

A great purity of scientific thought was the result. It grew in abstract splendor, and in untouchable remoteness from deep human concerns. As it turned out, it proved immeasurably useful in applying for practical purposes the symmetries of every kind of truth except the truth about man. Science, one might say, is a social incarnation of Faust. Giving up longing—denying it meaning—is a sort of pact which, like some other self-denials, brings emoluments. And as long as the scientific clergy remained pure, they enjoyed respect. Most people respect commitment. They respect production even more. And while common folk don't understand scientific celibacy and don't really believe in it, they easily learn to speak admiringly of its "discipline" and sometimes hope that their children will be smart enough to join the order.

This general conversion of the world to the scientific religion enabled a new caste of professionals in science to arise—often people who do not practice much science, and certainly not its kind of celibacy, but they know the language. These are the trainees of a new generation of grand inquisitors, and they learn how to tell people what they have simply *got* to do, not to get to heaven, but merely to survive. They set up offices all around and become consultants to all the foci of power in the land, mainly—indeed sometimes mostly—the Government.

We know all this now, or we are beginning to know it. And the first and doubtless "natural" reaction is to say that we have been made victims of another great seduction. So we denounce objectivity, declare the uselessness of science in relation to human problems, and herald a new epoch of spontaneous longing. Those scientists, we say, are a bunch of mechanics. They don't know about truth and don't care about truth: they'll even tell you so, some of them. What truth they've got is all in technology, and if that isn't Mammon, can you think of a better way to describe it?

So we are off on another Crusade. And this time we're not making any "pacts" at all. Pacts are

for Puritans. The time has come to trust in our longings. We have *good* longings. We reject the seductions of our betrayers, so of course our longings are good. Compared to the longings the priests of technology try to arouse in us, we are *saints!*

Well, the claim is at least half true. So was the more austere claim of the early scientists, back in seventeenth century. "Methinks," wrote Galileo, "that in the discussion of natural problems, we ought not to begin at the authority of places of scripture, but at sensible experiments." Further:

> Philosophy is written in that great book which ever lies before our eyes—I mean the universe—but we cannot understand it if we do not first learn the language and grasp the symbols, in which it is written. This book is written in the mathematical language, and the symbols are triangles, circles, and other geometrical figures, without whose help it is impossible to comprehend a single word of it, without which one wanders in vain through a dark labyrinth.

From this we go to a lesson learned from another sort of objectivity, which developed after some three hundred years. As summarized by A. E. Burtt:

> Obviously, man was not a subject suited to mathematical study. His performances could not be treated by the quantitative method, except in the most meagre fashion. His was a life of colors and sounds, of pleasures, of griefs, of passionate loves, of ambitions and strivings. Hence the real world must be the world outside of man; the world of astronomy and the world of resting and moving terrestrial objects. The only thing in common between man and this real world was his ability to discover it, a fact which, being necessarily presupposed, was easily neglected, and did not in any case suffice to exalt him to a parity of reality and casual efficiency with that which he was able to know. Quite naturally enough, along with this exaltation of the external world as more primary and more real, went an attribution to it of greater dignity and value. . . . Man begins to appear for the first time in the history of thought as an irrelevant spectator and insignificant effect of the great mathematical system which is the substance of reality.

Part of the excitement which attended the birth of science grew out of the fact that here was a way of looking at the external world which had been almost completely neglected—a way which supplied independent verification for what was found out, which meant release from oppressive and arbitrary religious authority. In a letter to Kepler, Galileo wrote:

> Oh, my dear Kepler, how I wish we could have one hearty laugh together! Here at Padua is the principal professor of philosophy, whom I have repeatedly and urgently requested to look at the moon and planets through my glass, which he pertinaciously refuses to do. Why are you not here? What shouts of laughter we should have at this glorious folly! And to hear the professor of philosophy at Pisa labouring before the Grand Duke with logical arguments, as if with magical incantations, to charm new planets out of the sky.

If you read enough about this period, and "interiorize" what science meant to men like Copernicus and Galileo and Newton, you begin to feel something of the commitment involved in the practice of science when it was called "natural philosophy." And if you read about the opposition the first scientists encountered, you begin to understand the high morale of the science of those days, since persecution typically generates a responding ardor. Persecution may not give new doctrines final truth, but it undoubtedly contributes some moral luminosity. Science, you could say, became a *social* movement when Cardinal Bellarmine declared that the Copernican theory was "false and altogether opposed to Holy Scripture."

What was the true danger and offense of the Copernican doctrine at the dawn of the seventeenth century? It challenged by implication—hardly directly—the medieval conception of the nature of man, and therefore the power of the medieval Church. The doctors of the Church were not searchers for the truth like Galileo; they *had* the truth, or claimed to have it, and they were stage-managers of the drama of Christian salvation. The importance of their theatrical enterprise was in the control it gave them over human longing, and Galileo was dismantling the scenery. As Arthur O. Lovejoy says in *The Great Chain of Being:* "the geocentric cosmography served rather for man's humiliation than for his exaltation. . . . Copernicanism was

opposed partly on the ground that it assigned too dignified and lofty a position to his dwelling-place." He also says:

> The chief affront of Copernicanism to theological orthodoxy lay, not in any fundamental discrepancy between it and the more philosophical parts of the traditional scheme of the universe, but in its apparent irreconcilability with certain details of that body of purely historical propositions which Christianity had, to an extent matched in no other religion. The story of the Ascension, for example, was obviously difficult to fit into the topography of a Copernican world; and it was easy for the ecclesiastical adversaries of the new hypothesis to point to numerous passages of Scripture which made it evident that supposedly inspired and infallible writers had, as a matter of course, assumed the motion of the sun about the earth and other postulates of the astronomy of naive common sense.

It just shook things up too much. There were of course all sorts of philosophical and moral points to be made in harmony with Copernican theory, and they were made by many independent thinkers—Bruno, for one. The difficulty was that these points did not relate to or amplify the *system* that had been built up on the assumption of Ptolemaic doctrine and Aristotelian interpretation. The stage-managers of Christian belief could not use the new cosmic scenery and they opposed it to a man until they all died off. (It wasn't until 1835 that the Copernican doctrine was finally omitted from the *Index*.)

Superficially, the conflict which goes on in a period of change is between old truths which have turned false—have been elaborated or inverted into falsity—and new truths developed by men who see more clearly. More basically, the conflict is between men who defend doctrines they believe are essential to their managerial activities, and men devoted to what they have found out by independent discovery, pressed on by spontaneous longing.

We are obliged by our knowledge of the reversals of history to admit that no truths which become the foundation of an age are finally true: they operate morally as truth because of the quality of the commitment which goes into them. As the commitment dies away, it is gradually replaced by a system of management. The truths may seem the same, externally, but the proprietorship is different, and the certainties have a different origin. They are now the props of management, not the credos of discoverers.

Here, indeed, was the special vulnerability of the scientific vision. The very idea of "objective truth" about the world made it easy to dispense with the spirit of discovery. And truth that can survive loss of commitment is just as much possessed by ignorant and immoral men as by its original discoverers. So in the end it was a terrible disaster—this separation of truth from human longing. "Objective truth" by a change of hands could become no more than a bag of sorcerer's tricks. Its very independence of longing—which is a human dignity—led into the market places of commerce and politics, where, notoriously, there is practically no control of the worst sort of longings.

So, disillusionment is upon us again, and we are in an epoch of new beginnings. What *about* the factor of human longing? Very bad things were done with religious longing, before the days of the scientific revolution; and today, some might say, even worse things are being done without it—without taking account of it, that is, in the prevailing theory of truth. Our theory of knowledge, which has nothing serious to say about motivation, has proved a dehumanizing affair.

But what, let us ask, is the extraordinary virtue recognized in "objectivity," which made our love affair with it last so long? Well, first, objectivity was intended to assure impartiality. All subjective prejudices are supposed to be removed from the account of a scientific fact. Sentimentality has no way of getting into the world of scientific objectivity. The method of science was designed to keep out even unconscious bias, hidden proclivities, snaring self-deception. And it must be admitted that so long as the scientific commitment lasts, it lends splendor to the ideal of objectivity. A man who is determined to fool no one about the nature of things—least of all himself—is a kind of hero. He has a discipline, and his contemplated end is human good (no more betrayals of man through longing). He leads an ascetic life, absorbed in his commitment, and this is at least the practice of a man with moral intentions,

even if the substance of these intentions is derived from distant symmetries.

From an essentially human point of view, what the scientist has done is to *externalize* in the rules of his discipline the philosopher's principle of self-control, of *sifting* his longings. To make control absolute, the scientist turned it into a prohibition. Human beings have many kinds of longings, and the philosopher is the only man who is willing, out of a paramount and transcendent longing to know the truth, to regulate and screen impartially all his lesser inclinations. And when, as in the case of the very greatest men, the objective of knowing becomes indistinguishable from love of one's fellows, then the idea of truth becomes ethical through and through, and the rigors of searching for it unify the intellectual and moral dimensions.

Because of the extreme fallibility of ordinary moral longing, Science declared a great *tour de force*—the definition of truth without any moral dimension. Its predecessor, Religion, known to us mainly through its corruptions, had made a similar attempt: it gave intellectual activity only a few play yards within the barriers established by theological assumption. This sufficed as a mode of control until, after several hundred years, the prisoner broke loose and renounced not only his shackles but also the principle of which they were a bad imitation—the philosopher's rule of self-control in both thought and feeling. With a lot of evidence to support his judgment, the lately escaped prisoner declared that you just can't *trust* those people who use subjective inspiration. We won't know anything about "reality," he said, until we get subjectivity entirely out of the world! And while he couldn't outlaw subjectivity itself, he succeeded in establishing its unimportance. It isn't anything of itself, he said; it can't tell us anything that isn't just poetry or speculation. So subjectivity was declared unreal.

And now this new prisoner—the man who knows he has an inner life—is making good his escape from the dungeons of Objectivity. And again the stage managers—a different group of people, but with the same basic interests—are upset. Awakening subjectivity has many high inspirations, but they don't fit at all well with the existing system of control.

So it is time to ask, what basic principle shall we be tempted to externalize, this time, as protection against all future betrayals? And what reality are we preparing to deny?

There are two ways to experience disillusionment. You can awake from a betrayal and react in shock and disgust. But you can also outgrow the pain of a long-standing seduction. In the one case you have your betrayers to punish and new illusions to embrace. In the other, you look down on the situation. You have no enemies, since a man who undeceives himself finds no one to blame. He can even see the limited virtue in his past illusions. He maintains friendly relations with people who haven't given them up. But, he will never, never again delegate to others either the management of his longing or the obligation of control.

REVIEW
GANDHI'S VISION

THE writings of M. K. Gandhi have all a common, identifying quality. They bear no trace of ideological bias and are addressed directly to urgent human problems with an enlightened common sense. Gandhi, it is true, and as Ronald Samson has recently reminded us, was a profoundly religious man. This gave his work strong roots of conviction. He was also a man of learning, even though, most of the time, the "learning" is hidden by its fruit. One might say that while learning brought Gandhi a wide audience among the literate, his indifference to the distinctions of learning gave him a far greater constituency among the illiterate and half-taught of the world.

We have for review a recent edition of a book by Gandhi, *The India of My Dreams,* a compilation edited by R. K. Prabhu, first published in 1947 when Gandhi was still alive. (The publisher is Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad 14. The list price is 2.5 rupees, and in the United States this book can probably be obtained from Greenleaf Books, Canterbury, N.H.) The editor says in his Preface:

> In this work an attempt has been made, by assembling together passages from the writings and speeches of Mahatma Gandhi, to give the reader an idea of the part he expects a completely free and independent India of his conception to play in her own domestic affairs as well as in her relations with the rest of the world.

It may be useful to make a brief comparison of this book with Plato's *Republic.* Conceivably, Gandhi undertook what Plato hoped his "utopia" might lead to—a heroic attempt to apply high ideals in an imperfect environment. Neither Plato nor Gandhi would compromise in stating social and moral objectives. Both pursued exhaustive examinations of the means of reaching them. Neither indulged in uncritical optimism. Plato said that his social dream could not be realized unless kings became philosophers, or philosophers kings; and Gandhi set down these expectations (in *Harijan* for June 21, 1942]:

> What policy the National Government will adopt I cannot say. I may even not survive it, much as I would love to. If I do, I would advise the adoption of nonviolence to the utmost extent possible and that will be India's great contribution to the peace of the world and the establishment of a new world order. I expect that with the existence of so many martial races in India, all of whom will have a voice in the government of the day, the national policy will incline towards militarism of a modified character. I shall certainly hope that all the efforts to show the efficacy of nonviolence as a political force will not have gone in vain and a strong party representing true nonviolence will exist in the country.

Well, the party exists, although its strength is sometimes doubted; and Gandhi left behind him a historic demonstration of his principles that made a deep impression on all the world. To this extent, at least, he has vindicated the Platonic design. Non-violence is obviously an idea whose time has come, even though its assimilation to the point of swinging the balance of human behavior in national affairs may take much longer than its champions have hoped. Meanwhile, it is plain that Gandhi had no false hopes; and it is just as plain that he reduced his efforts not one whit because he saw that the general adoption of non-violence might be a very distant goal indeed.

Wholly as important as non-violence for Gandhi were his ideas of domestic economy, decentralization, individual labor for self-support, and education through the practical activities in the region where one lives. Actually, he made no separation of non-violence from these activities. The book is filled with statements of guiding principle in all these areas, along with quite practical and programmatic proposals. *The India of My Dreams* may be read as a work of vision, as Plato's *Republic* is read; or it may be read as history—the history of a morally transforming movement in the years of its genesis.

But it may be also read, in the West, as a work in need of translation into the social and economic idiom of the "advanced" societies.

Gandhi's social objectives are hardly different from many of the objectives of enlightened Western thinkers. The abolition of war, the elimination or reduction of centralized authority, the restoration of significance to work, the psychological importance of self-sufficiency, the awakening of commitment to basic ideals—who worth listening to does not talk about these things? Indeed, we have more than enough talk, and very little practice. The compulsive grip of other patterns seems to make actual practice unimaginable.

Yet the sustained use of the imagination for devising application of Gandhian principles in advanced industrial societies is something that has hardly been tried. There is one dramatic instance of this use of the imagination before us now—the work of the Intermediate Technology Development Group, started in London by the economist, E. F. Schumacher. The literature of this group (which may be addressed at 9 King Street, Covent Garden, London, W.C. 2, England) shows the deep consistency of this helping enterprise with what Gandhi said about machinery:

> Machinery has its place; it has come to stay. But it must not be allowed to displace necessary human labour. I would welcome every improvement in the cottage machine, but I know that it is criminal to displace hand labour by the introduction of power-driven spindles unless one is at the same time ready to give millions of farmers some other occupation in their houses. . . .
>
> I refuse to be dazzled by the seeming triumph of machinery. I am uncompromisingly against all destructive machinery. But simple tools and instruments and such machinery as saves individual labour and lightens the burden of the millions of cottages, I should welcome.
>
> Dead machinery must not be pitted against the millions of living machines represented by the villagers scattered in the seven hundred thousand villages of India. Machinery to be well used has to help and ease human effort. The present use of machinery tends more and more to concentrate wealth in the hands of a few in total disregard of millions of men and women whose bread is snatched by it out of their mouths.

If you want to prove this true and then get angry, read Marx. If you want to prove it true and do something to help, read Schumacher. If you want to know how this relates to the human condition in the West, talk to a dozen or so people under twenty-five. With or without the cooperation of the older generation, many of the young are going in this direction, and are determined not to go in any other. Manifestly, they are right; manifestly, they need help.

The fundamental idea of *Swadeshi* leads such thinking into over-all conceptions of education, character formation, and communitarian good. The effect of reading Gandhi on Swadeshi is to realize the utter stupidity of letting technologists manage the applications of technology. Only educators and social philosophers should qualify for planning the use of technology, out of consideration for the human values involved. Yet they must know their business as technologists, and this means gaining firsthand knowledge of the appropriate techniques. Surely it is evident that the techniques of a humanistic technology have yet to be evolved.

What is Swadeshi? It is a word which unites the meaning of decentralism—a pallid Western term concerned with the foci of power—with profound spiritual conceptions of human life and ramifying ideas of how to make the best possible use of one's own environment, while rejecting the presumptions of critical decision about the obligations of other people, living under other environments, where problems are different.

Nobody can claim Gandhi in support of a partisan social doctrine. In one place he says:

> Real socialism has been handed down to us by our ancestors who taught: "All land belongs to Gopal; where then is the boundary line? Man is the maker of that line and he can, therefore, unmake it." Gopal literally means shepherd; it also means God. In modern language it means the State, i.e., the people. That the land today does not belong to the people is true. But the fault is not in the teaching. It is in us who have not lived up to it. . . . Land and all property

> is his who will work for it. Unfortunately the workers are or have been kept ignorant of this simple fact.

Yet he also said:

> What I would personally prefer would not be a centralisation of power in the hands of the State, but an extension of the sense of trusteeship; as in my opinion the violence of private ownership is less injurious than the violence of the State. However, if it is unavoidable, I would support a minimum of State -ownership.

It becomes obvious to the reader that Gandhi believed that the dilemmas of ideology must all be resolved through the inner discipline of human beings, not by some external mix of unreconcilable political forms or remedies. Schism within a man can be tolerated while he works toward its solution. Delegated to institutions, schism leads to conflict, war, breakdown, and social dissolution. Gandhi never fails to direct attention to this basic distinction. It is at the heart of all his social philosophy.

Finally, the radical unity of Gandhi's thought is perhaps its most important lesson. This leads to a consideration of the over-arching philosophy which is always present, but seldom expressed save in brief reference, or by illustration from one of the world religions—often for the purpose of making an almost unheard-of but morally straightforward application of a familiar idea.

There could be no greater challenge to originality and inventiveness of the West than an attempt to take Gandhi's ideas and find corresponding projects and undertakings for rebuilding Western civilization.

COMMENTARY
THE TERMS OF SELF-RESPECT

LAST January, James Farmer wrote in the *Progressive:*

> The black man must find himself as a black man before he can find himself as an American. He must now become a hyphenated American, discovering the hyphen so he can eventually lose it. This involves accepting the stark reality that the black ghettos of our cities are not going to disappear in the foreseeable future. . . . Paradoxically, the black man must I think, strengthen his ghetto on the one hand, and continue to provide the exit on the other.

This is a black man speaking. He says that the ghettos can only be abolished from strength. A portion of Mr. Ferry's *Saturday Review* article (not quoted in this week's Frontiers) develops some of the implications of this idea:

> Blacktown, to be sure, wants more of everything this nation offers: more education, health care, decent housing, economic opportunity, mobility. These can be supplied by whitetown, though not on the terms conceived by whitetown's leaders. But what blacktown *most wants*, whitetown cannot confer. Blacktown wants independence and the authority to run its own affairs. It wants to recover its manhood, its selflove, and to develop its ability to conduct a self-reliant community. In the best of times it no longer wants whitetown's patronizing customs and benign guidance; nor in the worst of times will it suffer whitetown's neglect and humiliations. It wants the experience of self-reliance, that highest of whitetown's virtues, with all its satisfactions and pains. Blacktown does not want to withdraw from the American way, but to enter it for the first time. It does not care to be victimized by whitetown's magnanimity any more than by its machine guns.

Ghettos are refuse heaps and dependencies. If the objectives Mr. Ferry is talking about can be achieved, they won't be either, and the idea of getting out of them will have less meaning because they'll be good places to live. The fundamental appeal of Mr. Ferry's article is for understanding that the conditions for self-respect on the part of black people are the same as the conditions of self-respect for all people. Self-reliance means defining those conditions for yourself. All humans are the same in this.

All the moral failures of the white community in relation to black people grow out of a narrow, inflexible idea of self. The machinery of change will run exactly to the extent that whites are able to *feel* what black people feel and to honor those feelings as if they were their own. If they ignore this requirement, the machinery of protest—the only machinery effectively in the hands of black people—will run even more furiously to demonstrate what happens when selfhood is denied. Protest says one simple thing: This is what you would do, if the activities in which you are supposed to recognize your human dignity were "magnanimously" defined and shaped by other people. Color will become irrelevant only after it is *made* irrelevant by people who no longer need "evidence" on the subject and refuse to listen to either devious or angry arguments about race.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
NATURE RECREATION

THE book of this title by William Gould Vinal (McGrawHill, 1940) is likely to fill the reader with welcome ideas—especially if he has some responsibility in the education of children—yet it could also make him feel uncomfortable. For the book is pervaded by a suppressed sadness. You get the impression that the author cannot forget that, for most people, getting acquainted with "nature" is a marginal piety, like going to church. It is a "good thing," in a class with other "good things" we don't have enough time for.

So the reader may feel uncomfortable because, somewhere in his "subconscious," he knows that getting to know Nature ought to be the very breath of human life. There shouldn't be any part-time nature-loving, such as even nature books seem to settle for and expect.

Well, what would happen if everybody turned into some kind of a Thoreau? The question is probably out of order, although it needs private reflection. Nature deserves poems and hymns. Argument is for finite considerations.

What are the consequences of not brooding about Nature?

One result is that we get into the habit of expecting "specialists" to explain it to us. We listen to one of these specialists, tell him he is "inspirational," and later on decide to hire some really sensitive person to take our children out in the wilds and teach them nice things about animals and plants.

Another consequence is that, since only specialists think seriously about nature, we become accepting of a culture in which the lover and protector of nature fights a losing battle in defense of what he loves. There is a sense in which a civilization which leaves matters of ultimate concern to specialists also practically condemns them to be people invaded by despair. We explain that this is the way things are, although we agree that a person can get "uplifted" by reading a good nature book, now and then.

The real objection to the life chosen by Thoreau is that he did not accept the finality of the way things are. Once this is established, he seems a little ridiculous. But a good man—ah yes, a good man.

Of course, it's better to have a few good specialists than all bad ones. The fundamental need, however, is to avoid getting *adjusted* to having a few good specialists who remain faithful to an ideal. For then even they, being human, may become adjusted too, and turn into dues-collecting moralists instead of remaining prophets and redeemers. Any ultimate concern will shrivel and die in the hands of dues-collecting moralists. It suffers the same fate as religion—which means that people just pay their dues and don't know the difference.

But this *doesn't work.* It never has. A man with a lot of money, for example, can't really start a really good school unless there is a sense in which he wants to *teach* in it, learns how, and does. We live in a rich society which impoverishes all its important causes by hiring specialists to look after them. An ultimate concern is a concern that cannot be served by a hired man.

This situation is the cross that every good specialist is condemned to bear. He is expected to "do good" in surroundings filled with mechanical devices not geared to the transmission of understanding what is good. He *knows* that he cannot succeed except by abolishing his specialty—and even his most benevolent and brightest followers may fail to grasp this problem. They pat him on the back, give him a generous check and expect him to be "grateful." But there is no such thing as buying the kind of progress a nature-lover must be after. It must be paid for, but not with money. Yet in the meantime the good specialist needs the money to go to

Washington to argue with the specialists in making laws. It *seems* to get down to dollars and cents. But the money is only symbolic, and it buys only a symbolic sort of conservation.

Perhaps money is like the bad-tasting medicine sick people take to keep going. It doesn't make them well. Medicine is only guerilla action against disease, and you use it because you don't know what else to do. The people to look out for are the ones who tell you that there *isn't* anything else to do.

The really good specialists know the truth about their specialty—that its fabric is made out of layers of popular misconception. So they have to be careful what they say. They can't get too far ahead of the rest, or nobody will listen to them. But they say what they can. They sandwich it in with practical things, like how to plan a camping trip. Take for example the section on conservation in Mr. Vinal's book, which has in it this short paragraph:

> *Conservation must be based on ethical laws.* No man-made law can bring about conservation. It must be based on understanding and ethical law. It is immoral to shoot the last duck to make a profit. The world is a place to save, not to kill. The natural law of universal brotherhood—we are brothers of the wild—is a tremendous force. This is the challenge of conservation. It is an American ideal.

Well, conservation may be an American ideal, but it is not an American practice. "The United States," Mr. Vinal says a little later, "holds all speed records for man-made deserts." The question is, then, how do people get into the habit of living by ethical laws? The familiar answers don't apply. If the familiar answers applied we would be living according to ethical laws.

It follows that a realizing sense of ethical laws is not a mode of thought in our civilization. We are familiar with these laws only as critics, not as natural practitioners. We know them in terms of the abstractions that are formulated *after* the gross effect of ignoring ethical laws begins to inflict punishment that can't be ignored. We know these laws as sinners know sin. And often the sin is just as vicarious as the hoped-for salvation. Those *farmers* did it.

People began talking a little more about conservation after the event that Mr. Vinal describes in his book:

> In May, 1934, in Cleveland, a dust storm came out of the West. When it rained, it "rained mud" from the "dust bowl." Earlier in the day, a rainstorm had washed my auto clean. Now it was muddied from the sky above. That night I left on a sleeping car for New York City. The next morning I arrived, but the dust storm was in Manhattan before me. Since that time alone, the winds have robbed 5,000,000 acres of their topsoil. As a result, 12,000 farm families between January, 1936, and July, 1937, migrated from the "dust bowl" to the Pacific Northwest. That is desert-making on a stupendous scale.

So, we are confronted by the reality of ethical laws in our status of violators. We don't know them; we only experience their effect. Yet Mr. Vinal's book has another intention. Woven into the particulars of a wide variety of ingenious programs for nature study and recreation out-of-doors are countless small applications of ethical law. One sees in these suggestions a method of education which opens the young to many opportunities for spontaneous development of ethical conviction. It may be a pity to have to "objectify" this quality in nature study, where it should—and would under ideal conditions—operate taoistically. No one understood this better than Thoreau. But until the quality of human awakening is more widely recognized, it remains necessary to speak of "remedial measures," and to raise money for "conservation." It will be a great day when no specialists of this sort are required. For the present, this seems one of Nature's most closely guarded secrets.

FRONTIERS

Progress Comes Where Options Lie

A GOOD society, as everybody says, is a society open to orderly change for the better. This means that its decision-making agencies are staffed by imaginative men. It means that its places of learning are shelters for free exploration of alternatives. It means that the leadership of the society is able to make a clear distinction between what is and what ought to be, and obtains a working knowledge of the means of turning the one into the other.

That, at any rate, is the classical scheme. Practice is somewhat different. In other words, societies, as such, aren't often "good." The far-reaching social changes that actually take place are generally engineered by people who start outside the controlling institutions. They can't budge the controlling institutions. They find ways to by-pass the decision-making agencies. They are ignored by the major institutions of learning. They gain public support mainly from crisis and widespread unrest.

So a man who studies history tends to have small hope for any "mature" society. He doesn't expect it to do anything important. It hardly ever has. Good things are generally accomplished by individuals and small groups in spite of "society." So, for such a man, talk about what society "ought to do" is usually the rhetoric of self-deceit. We ought, it seems clear, to find another way of talking about social change.

People who mean seriously to work for change are commonly driven out of conventional institutions. These institutions can't endure the rhythm of actual growth. This brings a general testing of the common intelligence of the people. Labelled wisdom becomes known as lethargy and conceit. Good things tend to happen only in unexpected places. The biggest institutions become the most laggard, and the press is totally unreliable except for the most unimportant facts. The foci of change have gone underground and will surface later on, bringing various surprises.

Meanwhile criticism grows strident and shrill, and easy, too, because all the obvious targets so plainly deserve the criticism. But now it is really too late to aim at them. Easy criticism is always too late. The big institutions have no real life in them, and the people are all anonymous. In such circumstances, criticism is a waste of time. Prodding never made anybody "creative," anyway, and innovation is worthless if it is not free and voluntary in its main drive. Lectures and reproaches and hustling people along may work with the stragglers, but these methods have no meaning for people capable of doing pioneer work.

In a recent (June 15) *Saturday Review,* W. H. Ferry, of the Santa Barbara Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, deals with a kind of social innovation that breaks up a lot of stereotypes. Briefly, Mr. Ferry reports on the intelligent response of a handful of businessmen to the common-sense meaning of Black Power. Their idea is to help black men to become free of white benevolence and supervision:

> A very few undaunted corporations have already stepped into this chancy new world with undertakings that aim finally at ghetto ownership and in the meantime at black management. These include ingenious corporate schemes by E.G. & G., Inc., in Roxbury, Massachusetts, Aerojet General and its Watts Manufacturing Company, AVCO, also in Roxbury. All have discarded precedent; all are coping steadily with the novel challenges of industrial coexistence. . . .
>
> The terms of corporate participation in blacktown are still being worked out by the pioneers. They are unlike contracts that corporations usually agree to. The management of the corporation settling down in blacktown must be black from top to bottom. From the outset the aim must be ultimate black ownership.

One cutting edge of the meaning behind these projects is shown by the following:

> When the Reverend Albert Cleage turned down $100,000 from well-meaning Detroiters because there

were white strings on the grant, he provided millions of dollars worth of pride and self-confidence to blacktowns everywhere. It is possible to reject the white man's benevolence!

Now comes another important point:

Foundations and corporations and cultural centers and self-help plans in generous variety are afoot. We hear little about them, thanks to the inclination of the mass media to see blacktown only as a source of trouble and danger. But many things are happening there which lack only the appropriate machinery and resources from whitetown. It seems to me that whitetown's worries about rebellions and civil disorder would evaporate once blacktown's residents become engrossed in the problems of building their community on a fresh and exciting base. What would there be to riot about?

Question: Is there more capability for innovation in these pioneers of the business community than in educational institutions? Is its freedom to act without being subject to or imposing "strings" a sign that the business community is undergoing a "growth-process" of its own?

We know from endless analyses and reports that the cumbersome processes of the state usually waste and sometimes strangle the best aspects of what it attempts. State projects just go through the motions. New growths *have* to be free, and the state, quite obviously, is now so convention-bound that it no longer knows how to allow freedom to the growing-tips of change.

Then there is the matter of the general ignorance of these efforts. The mass media are totally inadequate for spreading the word. And academic publications do not seem much better. Elegant studies of the intricacies of self-defeat seem more to the taste of the practitioners of social science.

In an age of convention-bound institutions, stereotyped "morality," and an unimaginative commercial press, room and substance must be found for new institutions, independent of the paralysis and lockjaw of the present. This is the communication of the bizarre devices and fanciful drop-out behavior of many of the young; and it is the message, if not the argument, of the New Left. People who have any sort of stake in human freedom will have to begin using what freedom still remains to them, in individual and independent ways.