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TO BE, OR NOT TO BE

THE question of whether or not to become "involved"—or how, and how much involved—has endless versions and endless answers. If you start reading a magazine (say the *Nation*) which is seriously concerned with human and social affairs, it is likely that by the end of a year—if, that is, you read with the intention of finding out what ought to be done, or what you should do—by the end of the year you will have been confronted by literally scores of decisions. Each week you are served up new problems and issues on which to take a stand.

Brief reference, here, to this predicament is not to dispose of it cavalierly, as though there were really no use in paying attention to problems which multiply like the heads of Hydra. There is a quality in human beings that insists on engagement with difficulties and problems. Biography, as a category of literature, is largely a study of how exceptional individuals have selected problems to work on, and how, in the course of years of effort and struggle, they found or developed the meaning of their lives.

But if you read the *Nation* for forty or fifty years—it has been published for more than a hundred—it will be natural to wonder what is actually accomplished by "involvement." Like repeating decimals, the problems are still all there. They change in form but seem as inevitable as breathing, and in new form some of them are plainly worse.

Epic and philosophic literature enables us to look at this question in the perspective of centuries, or even millennia. In the *Bhagavad-Gita,* Krishna, the man who became a god—or the god who became a man—explained some five thousand years ago his reason for being continually involved at the level of his god-like function. His disciple, Arjuna, had complained that he didn't know *what* to do with his life, since it seemed filled with such terrible contradictions. Krishna replied (in Ch. III):

> Even if the good of mankind only is considered by thee the performance of thy duty will be plain, for whatever is practiced by the most excellent men, that is also practiced by others. The world follows whatever example they set. There is nothing, O son of Pritha, in the three regions of the universe which it is necessary for me to perform, nor anything possible to obtain which I have not obtained, and yet I am constantly in action. If I were not indefatigable in action, all men would presently follow my example, O son of Pritha. If I did not perform actions these creatures would perish; I should be the cause of confusion of castes, and should have slain all these creatures. O son of Bharata, as the ignorant perform the duties of life from the hope of reward, so the wise man, from the wish to bring the world to duty and benefit mankind, should perform his actions without motives of interest. He should not create confusion in the understandings of the ignorant, who are inclined to outward works, but by being himself engaged in action should cause them to act also.

This is Krishna's account of how the world works, and the obligation of humans to become involved is generalized as the fulfillment of duty or *dharma.* The *teacher's* duty is distinctive, since it consists in doing whatever needs to be done as an example, and not because he needs to do it for himself. This scheme of things has great meaning for those able or willing to take literally the old Indian teaching of various grades of dharma, or duty, as all together making the grid of interdependent functions which holds the universe together in a vast reciprocity. In this view, the universe constitutes at the same time a sort of cosmic "school" through which every entity or soul must pass in order to learn the perfection of all duties or roles, until there are no longer any confining bonds of Karma. The "teachers," however, undertake voluntary involvement. They *choose* what they will do. When they have

finished their own development (worked out their Karma), they establish new relations with others in order to instruct them in the skills and perfections of action. For this reason Krishna explains: "There is nothing in the three regions of the universe which it is necessary for me to perform . . . yet I am constantly in action."

Even without accepting as a whole this Indian psychomoral cosmology, it is possible to recognize certain pragmatic justifications of what Krishna says. A kindergartner, for example, has no personal need to play the games, sing the songs, and draw the pictures that she does with little children. She is showing the children how to do things that are the natural functions—both the delight and the means of growth—of childhood. Children without teachers have little hope of balanced development. And when we think about "community," we expand to a social scale all the "organic" relationships of family and school, since that is what community life amounts to—what the Greeks meant when they spoke of *Paideia.*

But what about societies which have developed alienating structures that impoverish or destroy the qualities of community? There seems little in the *Gita* about how to cope with institutionalized evil. Well, let us consider the judgments or recommendations of another teacher, in this case Plato. Plato also discussed the question of "involvement." In his Seventh Epistle, he explains his decision to withdraw from politics, which resulted from his observation of the extreme corruption of public life in his time:

> Now as I considered these matters, as well as the sort of men who were active in politics, and the laws and the customs, the more I examined them and the more I advanced in years, the harder it appeared to me to administer the government correctly. For one thing, nothing could be done without friends and loyal companions, and such men were not easy to find ready at hand, since our city was no longer administered according to the standards and practices of our fathers. Neither could such men be created afresh with any facility. Furthermore the written law and customs were being corrupted at an astounding rate. The result was that I, who had at first been full of eagerness for a public career, as I gazed upon the whirlpool of public life and saw the incessant movement of shifting currents, at last felt dizzy and, while I did not cease to consider means of improving this particular situation and indeed of reforming the whole constitution, yet, in regard to action, I kept waiting for favorable moments, and finally saw dearly in regard to all states now existing that without exception their system of government is bad. Their constitutions are almost beyond redemption except through some miraculous plan accompanied by good luck. Hence I was forced to say in praise of the correct philosophy that it affords a vantage point from which we can discern in all cases what is just for communities and for individuals, and that accordingly the human race will not see better days until either the stock of those who rightly and genuinely follow philosophy acquire political authority, or else the class who have political control be led by some dispensation of providence to become real philosophers.

So Plato withdrew from public affairs and devoted the rest of his life to the difficult project of helping men to become philosophers. This seemed to him the only worthwhile level of involvement. Now and then—perhaps to avoid being called an "ivory tower" thinker—Plato attempted to apply his plans for a community ruled by philosophers to some existing city, as in Syracuse under Dionysius, but with no success. Asked what a man should do when he found it impossible to practice utopian vision on a social scale, he said that the wise man would nonetheless live by his principles, no matter what the result. When, in the ninth book of the *Republic,* an inquirer questioned Socrates about this, commenting that if the philosopher was true to his principles, he would "not willingly take part in politics," Plato's spokesman replied:

> Yes, by the dog, said I, in his own city he certainly will, yet perhaps not in the city of his birth, except in some providential juncture.
>
> I understand, he said. You mean the city whose establishment we have described, the city whose home is the ideal, for I think it can be found nowhere on earth.
>
> Well, said I, perhaps there is a pattern of it laid up in heaven for him who wishes to contemplate it

> and so beholding to constitute himself its citizen. But it makes no difference whether it exists now or ever will come into being. The politics of this city will be his and of none other.
>
> That seems probable, he said.

This was Plato's way of becoming "involved"—to live by the philosopher's principles, *as if* there were an ideal society, and to enter into public affairs only during "providential junctures" when there seemed to be a chance of exerting effective influence.

There are other ways of stating this general outlook. In 1910, Ortega y Gasset, fresh from his higher education in Germany, and already recognized as a man of attainments by his countrymen, spoke before El Sitio, a society which had among its members the most eminent and thoughtful citizens of Spain. What would this youth of only twenty-six say to his sophisticated elders? The Spanish intelligentsia were not commonly attentive to the opinions of the young, but in 1910 the culture of Spain was in deep depression. Trounced in war by the impudent *yanquis* a few years before, torn by internal dissensions such as the separatist movements of the Catalans and the Basques, and exhausted by failing military campaigns against the Moslem guerillas of Spanish North Africa, Spain could no longer be proud of what she then was, but only of what she had been. So the members of El Sitio invited this promising young man to speak to them about the welfare and possible regeneration of their country.

Ortega began by telling them to put away their preoccupations with the splendid past. What we have been and are, he said, is not the true nation. The land of our fathers is not as important as the land of our children. The reality requiring attention is "something that yet does not exist, that, even more, cannot exist unless we struggle energetically to fulfill it by ourselves." He left no doubt of his meaning:

> The country is, in this sense, precisely the conjunction of virtues that were and are lacking in our historic home. The nation is what we have not been and what we must be under penalty of feeling ourselves erased from the map. . . . By so understanding the country, patriotism becomes for us an incessant activity. . . . Our country becomes a task to complete, a problem to solve, a duty.
>
> Thus, this dynamic . . . and futurist patriotism finds itself constantly obliged to combat the other, the voluptuous and quietist patriotism. To know what our country should be tomorrow, we have to weigh what it has been and accentuate primarily the defects of the past. True patriotism is criticising the land of our fathers and constructing the land of our children.

What is the work of constructing a land for the children? It had little to do with official politics—the politics that Plato has also rejected. As Robert McClintock shows in *Man and His Circumstances: Ortega as Educator* (Teachers College Press, 1971), on which we have been drawing, Ortega made a crucial distinction between the effort to gain power, to occupy office and obtain government, and the *art* of governing. And what is revolution? Mr. McClintock summarizes Ortega's views:

> Revolutions wrested possession of the state apparatus from the established groups. Real improvement, he thought, did not come from this act alone. Real improvement came from the art of governing, which was quite different from holding possession of the state. Yet, in the past, revolutionary movements had concentrated on taking the state away from the old order. Obsessed with the art of obtaining the government, revolutionary movements had had great difficulty with the art of governing. Only at tremendous cost could they manage to build a new state. There was a better way.

The *art* of governing must be learned and widely understood, Ortega maintained:

> With the art of obtaining the government, a few mer work within a given system to conserve their conventional affairs, jockeying incessantly to aggrandize their personal positions. With the art of governing, all men interact in every walk of life to transform, slowly but ineluctably, the giver system of authority, and its concomitant conventional affairs, inspiring each other to reject the old and to pursue new aspirations.

Pedagogy, in short, is prior to politics.

> Ideals described not how men in fact behaved, but how they could and should behave. By reference to ideals mer gave themselves a particular character. Doing so, the, gained a certain dependability that under trying circumstances they would act in accordance with their self-imposed obligations. To the degree that men shared ideals, creating a common character, they formed communities. Ideals of conduct, taste, and thought enabled men to moderate their divisive passions and to live in harmony, in a common harmony attained without brute subservience of the multitude to a single member.
>
> If the political theorist would seek, like Plato, to en gender an authentic community, he would find that his task is not only philosophical, devising the ideals by which men can discipline their character; his task is also pedagogical, leading each man towards the personal formation of the common, rational ideals that the philosopher has discovered. . . . Pedagogy would be a foundation of public affairs: men can live in common and in freedom only by reference to rational, consistent conceptions of truth, beauty, and goodness, and the acquisition of these conceptions is education, the continual process through which men are entering into their social compacts, forming and re-forming their communities.

How is communitarian pedagogy carried on? Those who have consciously formed ideals need to take part in community life, apply their ideals, set an example, each in his own way, through his own calling, and thus raise the level of everyday practice. This *is* the art of governing, which would eventually be reflected in what are commonly thought of as political affairs.

Ortega thought deeply about these questions and his own life was his way of showing what he meant. He was both journalist and teacher, and for him the priority of seeking governing ideals was always self-evident. Man becomes what he wants or thinks he ought to be, and for this reason Ortega believed that we "should approach pedagogy with a religious dread." He asked: "What idea of man should be held by the man who is going to humanize your sons? Whatever it is, the cast that he gives them will be ineffaceable."

This is a fine, almost a classical statement of the Platonic view of involvement, but let us complicate the matter by looking at some of the difficulties which now attend applying it. Hannah Arendt begins *Between Past and Future* (Viking, 1961) by quoting from the French poet, René Char, on the experience of fighting in the Resistance during the Nazi occupation of France. Curiously, the men of the Resistance found out something about themselves—something that probably could not have been discovered in any other way. It was the most intense experience of their lives:

> It did not last long. After a few short years they were liberated from what they originally had thought to be a "burden" and thrown back into what they now knew to be the weightless irrelevance of their personal affairs, once more separated from "the world of reality" by an *épaissear triste*, the "sad opaqueness" of a private life centered about nothing but itself. . . . they could only return to the old empty strife of conflicting ideologies which after the defeat of the common enemy once more occupied the political arena to split the former comrades-in-arms into innumerable cliques which were not even factions and to engage in the endless polemics and intrigues of a paper war.

The "treasure" of the Resistance fighters was lost, and, prophetically, Char foretold this disaster. "If I survive," he said during the war, "I know that I shall have to break with the aroma of these essential years, silently reject (not repress) my treasure." What was this treasure, which could be known and realized in the extreme circumstances o£ a ruthless invasion of their homeland, but faded to nothing after they were "free"?

Miss Arendt interprets:

> As they themselves understood it, [the treasure] seems to have consisted, as it were, of two interconnected parts: they had discovered that he who "joined the Resistance, *found* himself," that he ceased to be "in quest of (himself) without mastery, in naked unsatisfaction," that he no longer suspected himself of "insincerity," of being "a carping, suspicious actor of life," that he could afford "to go naked." In this nakedness, stripped of all masks—of those which society assigns to its members as well as those which the individual fabricates for himself in his psychological reactions against society—they had been visited for the first time in their lives by an apparition of freedom, not, to be sure, because they

> acted against tyranny and things worse than tyranny—this was true for every soldier in the Allied armies—but because they had become "challengers," had taken the initiative upon themselves and therefore, without knowing or even noticing it, had begun to create that public space between themselves where freedom could appear.

What was that "apparition" of freedom, and what are the circumstances of its invitation and coming? Can we say? Surely, a Nazi invasion is not a good definition of the conditions prerequisite to freedom! Under what ideal provocation, then, do men become "challengers" and begin to create the space in which freedom emerges as a natural reality?

Must men be reduced to a desperate struggle for survival in order to realize freedom in this unmistakable, unarguable way? Moodily, Hannah Arendt comments: "The history of revolutions—from the summer of 1776 in Philadelphia and the summer of 1789 in Paris to the autumn of 1956 in Budapest—which politically spells out the innermost story of the modern age, could be told in parable form as the tale of an age-old treasure which, under the most varied circumstances, appears abruptly, unexpectedly, and disappears again, under different mysterious conditions, as though it were a fata morgana."

This is the real problem and question which confronts pedagogues, and one can see why Ortega recommended approaching it with religious dread. Surely those who think they know "what to do" to educate people in a way that will give them the realization of freedom should be laughed out of town.

Plato's spokesman, Socrates, was wiser by far than any of our modern authorities who speak and write so voluminously on what ought to be done. Socrates called himself a "midwife"—a sterile individual who brought nothing of his own to birth, claiming only to help others to deliver themselves of worthy offspring. Socrates did not teach, yet by not teaching he *taught.* The French Resistance fighters were men who had lost their freedom, yet being without freedom they became free, and when they regained their freedom, they lost it.

Another side of this question is concerned with communication. As Douglass Cater said in his *Saturday Review* (May 31) article on television, our experts give great attention to the production and transmission of material to inform or educate, but seldom ask, "What gets through?" Perhaps we should simply say that if you look at the way people behave you find out what gets through. All too briefly, Mr. Cater observes in passing that "we only dimly understand how, in an all-enveloping informational environment, man chisels his little statues of perceived reality."

Socrates occupied himself with persuading young men to exhibit for inspection those "little statues of perceived reality." He knew, you could say, that that was all the educator has to work with. And the "little statues of perceived reality" are all any of the rest of us have to work with, in our relations with one another. The best sort of "involvement," then, will include continual redefinition of our "problems" in these terms.

REVIEW
A NEW BOOK ON THE NEOPLATONISTS

IN *The Meaning of History,* Erich Kahler has a passage in which he speaks of the decline of the exercise of Reason in modern times, since most of its energies have been drained into the applications of "rationality." Our reason is exhausted in thinking about means to practical ends, such as "increased productivity," greater destructiveness in military technology, and how to beguile the public into buying things they don't need. As a result, thinking about ends, about which ones are worth pursuing, is something we hardly even remember how to do. "Rationality" of the kind we are good at, Kahler said, "grows at the expense of reason."

How does one restore the strength of reason? The powers of reason doubtless grow from its intelligent use—as with all the other powers of human beings. But what is intelligent reasoning, then? A book we have been reading lately, *Neo-Platonism* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972, $10.00), by R. T. Wallis, gives the promise of an answer to this question. It is of course a scholarly work and reviewing it at this level is beyond our capacity. Its inspiration, however, is not. Years ago we admired and read several times Thomas Whittaker's *The Neo-Platonists* (Cambridge University Press, 1901-1928). Mr. Wallis' volume is the only full-dress study of Neoplatonism that has appeared since, and it seems better, richer, more accurate. Scholars know more about Plotinus and Porphyry and Proclus than they did in 1901. They may even know more about what Plato thought and meant.

But we do not contend about these matters. There are passages in Prof. Wallis' study that seem to speak directly to the modern condition, in relation to Erich Kahler's diagnosis of the failure of high reasonableness and thinking. Our review will consist mainly of quotation from these passages, and the attempt to tie them together somewhat, while showing their relevance to the intellectual and moral issues of today. This ought to be enough to cause those who are sufficiently interested to look up the book, or even buy it.

Both Plato and the Neoplatonists provide a rather sublime conception of human potentiality. We are, so to speak, gods in the making. Why, then, do we feel so mean and get into so much trouble? This is Mr. Wallis' reading of what Plotinus says:

> Since experience thus shows the human soul to contain all the divine Hypostases within her, the obvious question arises why she normally remains unaware of this and how she has fallen into her present miserable condition. To answer this question it is first necessary to discover who "we" are who ask it. And this question, like others, may be posed either "statically" or "dynamically." Since the soul, as an "intelligible cosmos, contains not merely all Logoi operative on the level of Soul, but the higher levels of Intelligence and the One, she can choose to live according to any of these principles, and it is her resulting disposition that will determine her future rebirth.

So, from incarnation to incarnation, a soul may go up or down, and may finally finish with the cycle of rebirth by uniting with the supreme Intelligence.

But what business has the soul here, in the first place? This, Wallis says, is a question which is dealt with ambiguously by Plato—perhaps because the answer is complex—and it was inherited by the Neoplatonists:

> On the one hand the *Timaeus* had treated the soul as an intermediary between the Intelligible and sensible worlds and as responsible for the organization of the latter; on the other, the more dualistically inclined *Phaedo* had exhorted her to shun the body and virtually admitted her to full membership of the Intelligible order. That the latter viewpoint should have had more appeal for the ascetically-minded Porphyry is not surprising; in fact it predominates in the *Sentences,* whose main object we have seen to be the distinction between the two orders of reality, and still more in the *Miscellaneous Inquiries,* where the Soul is termed an "Intelligible" entity without qualification.

There is more on this general question:

> The basis of his [Plotinus'] solution is to treat the soul's descent as a biological necessity arising out of the Universal Logos. We have seen that as a living organism the psychical cosmos must be governed by a law similar to those causing other organisms to develop appropriate powers and organs at the appropriate time. We can therefore describe the soul

> as sent here by God in the sense both that her descent is an automatic result of this law and that her government of the body into which she descends assists the divine administration of the sensible cosmos.

A number of logical and other problems are implicit in this idea, and Mr. Wallis discusses them helpfully. Here we hope only to suggest some leading ideas of the Neoplatonic thinkers. One essential is that we have work to do on earth—to assist in the unfolding of intelligence in the cosmos. The Hopis, incidentally, taught virtually the same thing, and also the Buddhists.

The difference between the "theurgy" of Iamblichus and the "divine grace" of the Christians seems worth noting. Theurgy (magic) had for its purpose attuning humans with the gods. But the gods cannot be constrained by human appeals or demands. The gods *may* bestow what they are able to give because of the purificatory rites of theurgy, drawing the aspirants up into the Intelligible order:

> The later Neoplatonists' references to divine "will," it is important to note, do not imply any fundamental change in Plotinus' conception of divine activity. As we have seen, Neoplatonic "sacramentalism" differs from its Christian counterpart in that it depends solely on the world's basic god-given laws, not on a supernatural intervention over and above those laws—an idea as repugnant to the later Neoplatonists as to all Hellenic thinkers.

In the early pages of the book Prof. Wallis gives his reasons for stressing the importance of Plotinus for modern readers. This thinker, he says, transposed "Greek philosophy into a new key":

> This was not due so much to the introduction of the mystical experience itself, which, if not certainly to be found in the Classical Greek thinkers, is present in the writing of the pre-Neoplatonic period, notably some of the Hermetica and perhaps in the Hellenizing Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria. The decisive step was rather Plotinus' identification of metaphysical realities with states of consciousness. From a psychological point of view, his account of consciousness forms a remarkable contrast both with Classical Greek philosophy, which, except for a few passages in Aristotle, had barely recognized the concept, and with the Cartesian identification of "consciousness" with "thought" or "mental activity." For Plotinus, as we shall see, not all thought is conscious; more precisely, our surface consciousness is only one of several levels of awareness and many elements in our mental life normally escape our notice. In fact Plotinus' observations on unconscious mental states form some of the most fascinating and modern-sounding passages of his works. But what concerns us here is that in his view it is states of consciousness that constitute the primary realities, of which material objects are a very poor imitation.

One might note in passing that while to read Plotinus because he is "modern-sounding" may make sense, the linkages of this spirit with ideas that are not modern-sounding at all, yet precisely what we need to consider, may be the most important reason for studying Plotinus.

On the practical side, it is worth recalling that a careful psychic researcher of a number of years ago reported that he found in Plotinus ample correction of modern "one-sided" theories of personality in relation to "spiritualistic" communications. G. W. Lambert explains this at length, with various examples, in the *Proceecdings* of the London Society for Psychical Research (1997, XXVI, pp. 393-413)

In his concluding chapter Mr. Wallis speaks of the particular value of Neoplatonic thought in affording analyses of religious experience. Plotinus is as much experiential as metaphysical in his approach:

> . . . much of the school's best and most original philosophizing comes in its analyses of theological and psychological concepts and of conscious experience. Plotinus, of course, provides the most conspicuous examples, but we should not forget the numerous points, such as the implications of the One's role as the Absolute on which his followers clarified his ideas. And on its empirical side the school constitutes the leading representative of the project mooted by William James and others, of constructing a theology on the basis of religious experience. Hence it should have much to teach those who now essay a similar task.

COMMENTARY
URBAN RENEWAL

IN his foreword to Hassan Fathy's *Architecture for the Poor* (see "Children"), William R. Polk, president of the Adlai Stevenson Institute of International Affairs, in Chicago, where Fathy teaches, said this about public housing and urban renewal:

> We have seen dozens of examples throughout the world where the provision of all the physical accoutrements of development fail to strike a spark and so fail utterly. The fact is, as we have painfully learned in the process of spending a trillion dollars in the period since World War II, that development occurs in the minds and hearts of men or it does not occur at all. Housing, roads, bridges, dams, are necessary but not sufficient conditions. Development without self-help is an impossibility.

This elementary truth seems only now to be dawning on us. During the past century we became experts at working with matter. Now we are beginning—just beginning—to learn how to work with human beings. The lessons come hard. Mr. Polk puts the matter briefly:

> . . . without the participation of the architect, the buildings will be ugly, inappropriate, and/or expensive. Without the cooperation of the people, the project will be sterile, unloved, and untended. Ironically, most public housing in the world today is done without the cooperation of either architect or the people. It is a bureaucratic decision built by contractors, and, whether horizontal or vertical, it almost immediately becomes a slum.

Fathy describes his approach to building a new town for the seven thousand inhabitants of Gourna, the former looters of archaeological treasures whom the Egyptian government decided to move away from ancient tombs:

> I chose to begin work on public buildings for two important reasons. First, from my experience of government departments I suspected that once there was a good number of dwelling houses up, the government would say, "Thank you very much; that is very nice indeed," would rush the peasants into the houses and would cut off all further money for anything else, so that the public buildings would never get built and the new village would remain a huddle of houses with no center. Second, I wanted to allow myself time to observe the villagers and talk to them about their own personal houses. I did not need their advice on the design of the mosque or the schools, but I wanted to make each house just right for the family that was to inhabit it.

As we have elsewhere suggested, the best social thinking seems to come from skillful specialists who broaden the base of their thinking to include the general welfare.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
ADVENTURE IN PLANNING

IN *Architecture for the Poor* (University of Chicago Press), Hassan Fathy tells about the plans he made for the education of the children of the reformed Egyptian grave-robbers of Gourna, while he was designing their new town. Since the people were highly skilled in faking antique statuary and scarabs, they ought, he reasoned, to make good craftsmen. He envisioned an entire range of crafts education—weaving, pottery, silversmithing, and even considered a workshop for producing stained glass windows. "We made some experiments," says Fathy, "sampling the soil as it were to see if crafts could grow in Gourna."

First he worked with the village weaver on dyes for the yarn. He found that, as in other parts of the world, beautiful vegetable hues had been abandoned for cheap chemical dyes, vulgarizing the traditional weaves of Egypt. So, until he could get vegetable dyes started again, he muted the aniline dyes with their complementary colors, achieving surprisingly good effects. The director of a Parisian firm said he would buy all the cloth they produced at Gourna. The Egyptian Minister of Commerce and Industry saw the work and sent a textile expert to help establish the craft:

> This man soon arrived. He was Mohammed Talha Effendi, a very kind-hearted man. . . . Overnight, he collected into the khan a gang of twenty little children to be taught weaving. The first thing he did was give them all a good wash; then he set them down to wind threads, set up looms and so on. It was astonishing to see how some of them took to tapestry weaving with the naturalness of spiders, as if the craft were in their blood.

Another government official saw that the children looked thin and hungry and suggested they be given a bowl of lentil soup every day.

> It was a sensible and practical suggestion that everyone applauded (especially the children), until the ministry asked what budget to put the soup on. It turned out that there was no appropriate heading under which lentil soup might be charged, unless indeed we could start the primary school working, put the children in it, and charge one piastre or so a head to the school meals account. It seemed an expensive way of getting a bowl of soup to build a school and engage a staff of teachers. The problem resolved itself, however, when the ministry fell almost immediately afterwards and Talha Effendi was removed. The children were turned out and left to roam around the antiquities zone begging for baksheesh from all the tourists.

If you are going to do good of this sort, you have to find good people who will work with you, and you also have to outwit, placate, or dodge the bureaucracy, and even then you may fail. But you have to try, if an opportunity comes your way.

Fathy did other things:

> Besides weaving, I wanted to give the Gournis a practical way of making glazed pottery. . . . The problem involved in making tiles is that there is, or was, no suitable glaze that melts at the temperatures obtainable in ordinary peasant kilns. So we had either to find a low-temperature glaze or a cheap and practical high-temperature kiln. I was told by the Japanese sculptor Isamu Negutchi that someone at the University of California had made a glaze that would run at 600°C, but although I have asked many people, no one seems to have heard of it. I did, however, design a kiln, worked on the oil-and-water-drop principle, for firing bricks and lime.
>
> . . . what the peasants needed was very straightforward, simple, usable pottery and tiles. Above all, we needed a technique that the peasants could easily copy, something as cheap and simple as mud brick building. . . .
>
> On the principle that you cannot send a greybeard back to school, I thought that we should concentrate on producing our new tradesmen from among the children of the village.
>
> Knowing that schoolrooms are apt to be insulated from reality by a good wadding of chalk and examination papers, and that children fidget and look out of the window, despite the best intentions of their teachers, I resolved not to teach these new trades in a school. Much better to make use of a system of apprenticeship. The learners would work in the shop of a master craftsman, and from their first day under him would be plunged into the atmosphere of the trade. They would learn all the knacks and tricks,

> they would see in hard cash the use of their knowledge—for from the beginning they could sell their work—and there would be none of that bewilderment that afflicts most students when they try to relate the abstractions of the classroom to the realities of life outside. They would grow into the job, understanding all its snags and earning not praise from a schoolmaster but money from a customer when they did good work. My apprentices would never be like those students discharged from a school with a certificate in their hands, looking greenly for an opening and jumping at the first chance into some office job.

While Fathy was doing this kind of thinking about the lives of the children and the livelihood of the people—he even planned and constructed a beautiful "khan," an exhibition hall to show the crafts work, as a sort of "tourist trap" for the people who came to look at Egyptian antiquities in the area—he was also figuring out how to construct a whole town out of mud brick, how to arrange the homes for village life, and to keep them from looking like a California tract. The government appropriation for the project was based on the assessed valuation of an existing mass of hovels—"in no way related to the probable cost of building the new village." This part of the story is worth repeating:

> The peasants were to be expropriated [from their old grave-robbing headquarters near ancient tombs] and had been allotted L.E. [Egyptian pounds] 50,000 as compensation. This money was to be turned over to me to build a complete village of nearly one thousand houses. Unfortunately it hadn't occurred to the department that a village needs more than just houses, and, though L.E. 50 per house was a reasonable estimate (provided we used the method I had developed on the previous buildings under normal conditions), there was nothing left over for roads, schools, mosque, and the other necessary public buildings.
>
> I was supposed to finish the village in three years, and for the first season's work I was given L.E. 15,000 [approximately $43,000]! At about the same time, for that other project at Imbala where a thousand houses were to be built, all exactly the same and each one cramped enough to be fitted inside the guestroom of one of my houses, the government had granted L.E. 1,000,000.
>
> However, I managed to conquer my diffidence and got down to designing. There was no point in grumbling about the money. Let us put up some buildings, do as much as we could, and trust that more could be provided later to the village. If I asked for more there would be arguments delays, and we should never get started at all.

Well, while it didn't work out as he had hoped, enough of the village was completed in three seasons of work for a photographic record of magnificent community design and execution—in *Architecture for the Poor* there are 132 illustrations showing plans, finished homes, and splendid public buildings, all standing proudly in the bright Egyptian sun.

This was the program, for as long as it lasted:

> We could build the whole village ourselves. We would not depend upon commercial sources for any of our materials; we would make every single article which could possibly be made on the spot; it would be an entirely (though paid) "do-it-yourself" operation. We would make our own mud bricks, we would build kilns, quarry stones, burn lime bake bricks for sanitary units, etc. We would employ no one except the masons from Aswan and the Gournis themselves. In this way the whole project could become a vast technical school where the villagers would learn the various building trades, to go with the others that would be taught to them in the Khan and the crafts school.

The grimy tale of how Hassan Fathy was prevented from carrying the project to a happy conclusion is much too discouraging to be repeated here. In principle, that part of the story is in one brief reflection:

> The aspiring architect must unfortunately develop patience and a technique for working harmoniously with officialdom. Nevertheless, if solving architectural problems gives the satisfaction of climbing a mountain, cooperating with the bureaucracy is like wading through a bog—soul-destroying, nothing less.

FRONTIERS

Could He Have Said More?

BACK in 1908 Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj*, or Indian Self Rule, setting the keynote for what would be the work of the rest of his life. Early in this small book, which he composed on board a steamer which was returning him to South Africa, he spoke of Western civilization in terms which may now be recognized as prophetic of judgments which did not dawn on many thoughtful individuals until about sixty years later. He said:

> Let us first consider what state of things is described by the word "civilization." Its true test lies in the fact that people living in it make bodily welfare the object of life. We will take some examples. The people of Europe today live in better-built houses than they did a hundred years ago. This is considered an emblem of civilization, and this is also a matter to promote bodily happiness. . . .
>
> Formerly, in Europe, people ploughed their lands mainly by manual labor. Now, one man can plough a vast tract by means of steam engines and can thus amass great wealth. This is called a sign of civilization. Formerly, only a few men wrote valuable books. Now, anybody writes and prints anything he likes and poisons people's minds. Formerly, men travelled in wagons. Now, they fly through the air in trains at the rate of four hundred and more miles per day. This is considered the height of civilization. It has been stated that, as men progress, they shall be able to travel in airships and reach any part of the world in a few hours. Men will not need the use of their hands and feet. They will press a button, and they will have their clothing by their side. They will press another button, and they will have their newspaper. A third, and a motor-car will be waiting for them. They will have a variety of delicately dished up food. Everything will be done by machinery. . . .
>
> Formerly men worked in the open air only as mucb as they liked. Now thousands of workmen meet together and for the sake of maintenance work in factories and mines. Their condition is worse than that of beasts. They are obliged to work, at the risk of their lives, at most dangerous occupations, for the sake of millionaires. Formerly, men were made slaves under physical compulsion. Now they are enslaved by the temptation of money and of the luxuries that money can buy. There are now diseases of which people never dreamt before, and an army of doctors is engaged in finding out their cures, and so hospitals have increased. . . .
>
> What more need I say? All this you can ascertain from several authoritative books. These are all true tests of civilization. And if anyone speaks to the contrary, know that he is ignorant. . . .
>
> This civilization is such that one has only to be patient and it will be self-destroyed.

Asked how a country like England, so deeply involved in the disease of "civilization," could have invaded and taken over India, Gandhi replied: "The English have not taken India; we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength, but because we keep them." Indians, in short, were in the early stages of the same infection. Their ancient glory was no defense. Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* as therapy for India and for the world.

Today, little by little, and more and more, Gandhi's vision, purpose, and goals are gaining recognition. The simplicity of his utterances, couched in the common speech, is no longer a barrier to understanding the truth and accuracy of what he said. In a two-part article in *Freedom* (June 7 and 21), Geoffrey Ostergaard shows that Gandhi was a true prophet of what in the West is now called the "alternative society." "The real Gandhi," he says, "is to be found not so much in his highly publicized resistance and civil disobedience campaigns, such as his famous Salt Satyagraha of 1930, as in what he called his Constructive Programme."

> Gandhi's Constructive Programme takes on its true meaning when it is seen as a practical idealist's attempt to move toward his ideal society. . . . Since the state represents violence in its ultimate, organized form, it is a stateless or anarchist society, in which all political and legal authority has been abrogated, relations between people being governed only by moral authority. Structurally, this society is highly decentralized. Considered as a polity, it is, in Dasgupta's phrase, "a great society of small communities," each community being autonomous and self-goveming but linked with others in a non-hierarchic network. The economy is consistent with the polity, each community being self-sufficient in

> respect of its basic material needs for food, clothing and housing. The main industry is agriculture, and other industries and crafts are organized on a cooperative and smallscale basis. There is no large-scale industry involving the herding of people in sprawling industrial cities. Technology is firmly under control, with machines, insofar as they exist, serving men rather than men serving machines.

A great many people are now able to see the sense of all this. A few are already able to see the practical necessity for much of it. In an address titled "Towards a Non-Violent Technology," given last fall, George McRobie, a director of the Intermediate Technology Development Group in London, pointed out the economic factors which will eventually compel the modern world to conform to at least the practical requirements of Gandhi's plan. The moral factors Mr. McRobie assembles are hardly less persuasive, although their urgency is seen only by some pioneers. Presenting themes developed by E. F. Schumacher in *Small Is Beautiful,* he shows that "the need for a new approach to technology within the industrial countries has become not a matter of political expediency but a question of survival." Here is some of the logic behind this claim:

> The rich countries stand no less in need of a new technology, one which will enable them to arrive at decent standards of living based on low energy, renewable resources and which will therefore be sustainable. Whether this will be a lower or higher standard of life remains an open question, but the characteristics of the technology we need are more certain. When oil was cheap, centralization of industry and long transport hauls were the order of the day. In future many smaller production units will be needed. Thus technologies will have to be small and capable of wide geographical spread—to minimize transport costs and maximize the use of the abundant but small pockets of energy in the form of renewable sources such as solar, wind, water and methane. They will have to be relatively simple, so that more people can be involved in constructive work, and be more self-sufficient. They must use less capital, because capital requires energy and scarce minerals. Consequently they would be less violent towards people and other living things, and towards non-renewable resources.

The consistency of the Gandhian program with both the ideals and the facts of life is daily becoming

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