

VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY

II

HAVING discussed some of the major doubts, let us turn to the reasons for simplicity. There are a number of reasons for voluntary simplicity of living, but perhaps not so many as to make the discussion of simplicity itself complex. If it seems complex, it is because so much intellectual clutter and underbrush has to be removed in order to see clearly. Since our thinking runs predominantly to economics, suppose we consider first the economic aspects.

Economics has at least three divisions: production, distribution and consumption. Of material goods we are not all producers or distributors, but we are all consumers. Simplicity of living affects primarily consumption. It sets a standard of consumption. Consumption is the area within which each individual can affect the economic life of the community. Small as his own share may be, that is the area within which every person can exercise his control over the forces of economic production and distribution. If he regards himself as responsible for our joint economic welfare he has a duty to think out and decide upon and adhere to a standard of consumption for himself and his family.

The economic system in which we find ourselves is gravely defective in operation. Greed and competition are two of its harmful elements. Competitive ostentation—"keeping up with the Joneses"—is a prominent feature of modern social life.⁹ Simplicity of living acts as a deterrent to such ostentation and hence to both greed and competition. Therefore, all those who desire to reform the existing economic system can take an effective part by living simply and urging and encouraging others to do likewise. This thing comes close to all of us. Capitalism is no mere exterior organization of bankers and industrialists.

It consists of a spirit and attitude and habitual actions in and among all of us. Even those who desire to reform or end it usually have within themselves certain of its attitudes and habits of mind and desire. If capitalism is to be reformed or ended, that change will alter the lives and thoughts and feelings of every one of us. Conversely, if I wish actively to participate in this transformation, I myself must begin to alter my own life in the desired direction. If I share too heavily in the regime I want to change, it becomes too difficult for me to disentangle myself, and I cease to become effective as a reformer. Those who live on income from investments will not dare to advocate deep economic changes, unless they live simply enough to permit a lowering of their income without too great an upset in their mode of life. My changes must be both inner and outer and must, I believe, be in the direction of more simplicity.

Exploitation of human beings is an ancient evil, older than capitalism. It existed under European feudalism, and probably in most of the older forms of economic and social organization in every continent. It goes on today all around us, and practically everyone of us shares in it at least indirectly. The first step I can take to cut down my share in exploitation is to live simply. All luxuries require unnecessary labour, as John Woolman so clearly showed.¹⁰ The production and consumption of luxuries divert labor and capital from tasks which are socially more productive and beneficial; they often take land away from wise use; and they waste raw materials which might be used to better advantage. This tends to increase the prices of necessities and thereby lowers real wages and makes the struggle of the poor harder. Since poor people imitate the rich, we see girls on small wages buying furs, expensive shoes and cosmetics, and depriving

themselves of proper food and warm clothing in order to do so. In such a case the ostentatious luxury of the rich clearly is a factor in causing hardships and sickness, and resulting in unnecessary labor on the part of the poor, to repair those losses. The fashions in luxuries often change arbitrarily and suddenly, and such changes create unemployment. Those who work at luxury trades are, in time of economic depression, in the most insecure position of all, because then the spending for luxuries is the first thing to stop. Therefore the fewer people there are engaged in luxury trades, the more secure the population will be.

Simplicities must not infringe upon the minimal needs of individuals, or upon even the wise surplus margins above those minima. But inasmuch as the desires of mankind are boundless, and we all tend to rationalize our desires, there is endless dispute as to how wide the surplus margin should be in order to be wise. A recent study by Professor E. L. Thorndike, of Columbia University, indicates that the actual American expenditures for food, clothing and housing are considerably larger than the actual necessities to sustain life.¹¹ He took from the United States census and similar reliable sources the total classified expenditure of the people of the United States. According to the press report, he said, "By the aid of a consensus of psychologists, I have divided each item of our peoples' expenses among the wants to which it probably ministers, and then combined the results into a list of wants and the amounts paid for the satisfaction thereof. . . . The payments for sensory pleasures, security, approval of others, and the pleasures of companionship and sociability, including romance and courtship, are in each case close in magnitude to the amount paid for freedom from hunger. . . . We pay more for entertainment (including the intellectual pleasures and the sensory pleasures of sight, sound, taste and smell) than for protection against cold, heat, wet, animals, disease, criminals and other bad people, and pains." The approval of others, self-approval, pleasure of vision, courtship,

and other elements are strong causes of expenditure for clothes.

In view of all this, it is clear that in our expenditures of money, while elemental necessities must be met, nevertheless there is above that line a wide realm for the application of the principle of simplicity.

A guiding principle for the limitation of property was suggested by Ruskin: "Possession is in use only, which for each man is sternly limited; so that such things and so much of them as he can use, are, indeed, well for him, or Wealth; and more of them, or any other things, are ill for him, or Illth."¹²

We are told that there is a close relationship between economic and political factors in society. It is interesting that three moderns with immense political influence, Lenin, Gandhi, and Kagawa, have led lives of extreme simplicity. Their simplicity has been a factor in their political power. Political power is based on the trust of the masses in the leader. By a life of great simplicity over a long period of time the leader demonstrates his unselfishness and sincerity—two elements which tend to generate and maintain trust. The masses feel that such a leader will not "sell them out." By sharing to that extent in the circumstances of the great majority of people the leader keeps aware of their problems and keeps *en rapport* with them. By so acting he identifies them with himself, as well as himself with them, thus encouraging them to feel that they too, despite small material means, may become significant in the life of the community or nation. In spirit they feel closer to him and feel themselves enabled to share in his greatness, and thus their self-respect, their courage, their endurance and morale are enhanced. If an entire ruling group or intelligentsia were always to live simply, the moral unity, self-respect and endurance of the entire nation would be enhanced. If anyone wishes strong and enduring political power for a great cause, he will be wise to simplify his life greatly.

Havelock Ellis¹³ states that St. Francis espoused poverty and simplicity in order to secure unrestricted contact with nature and with men. "The free play of the individual soul in contact with nature and men, Francis instinctively felt, is joy and liberation." "It is in the simpler and elementary things that our life consists." Such unity with nature and men is something which our industrialized modern society is sorely lacking and which its individual members greatly crave, as indicated by the zest and release which they get from an occasional holiday in the country or at the seashore. Lack of unity between men is now widely prevalent.

To give a concrete instance of what I mean by unity and disunity, it would be consistent with a real awareness of human unity if I should invite into my house for a meal and a night's lodging a starving man who has knocked at my door. But if my rugs are so fine that I am afraid his dirty shoes may ruin them, I hesitate. If I have many valuable objects of art or much fine silverware, I also hesitate for fear he may pocket some of them or tell men who may later steal them from the house. If my furniture and hangings bespeak great wealth I mistrust him lest he hold me up; or perhaps if I am less suspicious and more courageous and more sensitively imaginative, I fear lest the contrast between his poverty and my abundance will make him secretly envious, or resentful, or bitter, or make him feel ill at ease. Or perhaps he is so very dirty that I fear he has vermin and I am revolted by that thought and am so far from him humanly that I do not know how to deal with him humanely. In this case it is clear that my lack of simplicity acts as a barrier between him and me. The prolonged lack of simplicity of our whole society has increased the distance between his thoughts, feelings and ways, and mine, and so adds to the social barrier.

Or again, if I have much real and personal property and am interested in it, my time is very largely occupied in looking after it. I will not have much time for simple neighborliness. A selfish

and aggressive neighbor may infringe on my boundaries so as to use some of my land next to his own. He would not have been so likely to do that if I had previously been truly friendly with him, had shared some of my garden produce with him and his family and had been kind to his children. So my failure to do the things which would have created good feeling and a sense of human unity in him has resulted in trouble between us. The lack of simplicity in my own life has engrossed too much of my time and energy and has been an effective cause in creating disunity.

Moreover, if, as some people believe, we are at the beginning of a period of economic decline, it may well be that great simplicity of living is the main condition upon which the learned professions which require leisure will be permitted to exist. If so, the previous voluntary adoption of greater simplicity by the learned professions would count for their security and make the transition easier for them. Something of that is recognized in the age-old Hindu society in which the Brahmins—the teachers, physicians, priests and other learned professions—are morally bound to and predominantly actually do maintain lives of extreme simplicity as an essential element in their professional code, to which great respect is accorded.

For those who believe in non-violence, simplicity is essential. Many possessions involve violence in the form of police protection and law suits. The concentration of much property in one person's possession creates resentment and envy or a sense of inferiority among others who do not have it. Such feelings, after they have accumulated long enough, become the motives which some day find release in acts of mob violence. Hence, the possession of much property becomes inconsistent with principles of non-violence. Simplicity helps to prevent violence. Again, the non-violent person may some day become a conscientious objector and subject to punishment by governments—possibly jail

sentence. If he has habitually practiced simplicity he will not have so much to lose that it would weaken his stand nor will he be too fearful of jail life. Also, unless he has habitually practiced simple living there will be in the minds of others a slight doubt as to the completeness of his sincerity and unselfishness. That doubt will hamper the persuasiveness of his gentle resistance and voluntary suffering when the time comes for nonviolent resistance.

The greatest gulf in society is between the rich and the poor. The practice of simplicity by the well-to-do helps to bridge this gulf and may be therefore an expression of love. The rich young man was advised by Jesus to sell all his goods and give to the poor and thus simplify his life, in order to perfect his religious life. No doubt such an act would have resulted in more than simplification of the young man's life, but that would have been one of the results.

Hinduism and Buddhism have also emphasized the value of simplicity. The anonymous author of *The Practice of Christianity*¹⁴ believes that tender-heartedness—gentle kindness—is the supreme virtue and the essence of Jesus' teachings. Tender-heartedness, together with great intelligence and strength of character, has in the cases of such leaders as Buddha, Jesus, St. Francis, George Fox, John Woolman and Gandhi, resulted in simplicity. Tender-heartedness seems to have been one of the elements which compelled those men to recognize human unity and to live in accordance with it and to share their property and lives with those who had need. Thus simplicity is, perhaps, a part of utter gentleness, and may be essential to those who would really practice religion.

It is often said that possessions are important because they enable the possessors thereby to enrich and enhance their personalities and characters. The claim is that by means of ownership the powers of self-direction and self-control inherent in personality become real. Property, they say, gives stability, security,

independence, a real place in the larger life of the community, a feeling of responsibility, all of which are elements of vigorous personality.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the greatest characters, those who have influenced the largest numbers of people for the longest time have been people with extremely few possessions. The reason for this is something that we usually fail to realize, namely that the essence of personality does not lie in its isolated individuality, its separateness from other people, its uniqueness, but in its basis of relationships with other personalities. It is a capacity for friendship, for fellowship, for intercourse, for entering imaginatively into the lives of others. At its height it is a capacity for and exercise of love.¹⁶ Friendship and love do not require ownership of property for either their ordinary or their finest expression. Creativeness does not depend on possession. Intangible relationships are more important to the individual and to society than property is. It is true that a certain kind of pleasure and satisfaction come from acquiring mastery over material things, but that sort of power and that sort of satisfaction are not so secure, so permanent, so deep, so characteristic of mental and moral maturity as are some others. The most permanent, most secure and most satisfying sort of possession of things other than the materials needed for bodily life, lies not in physical control and power of exclusion but in intellectual, emotional and spiritual understanding and appreciation. This is especially clear in regard to beauty.

We cannot have deep and enduring satisfaction, happiness or joy unless we have self-respect. There is good reason to believe that self-respect is the basis for all higher morality.¹⁷ We cannot have self-respect unless our lives are an earnest attempt to express the finest and most enduring values which we are able to appreciate. Therefore simplicity is an important condition for permanent satisfaction with life. And inasmuch as national self-respect is a necessary condition for the maintenance of a nation or a civilization¹⁸ it

would seem that widespread simplicity as a cultural habit of an entire nation, would in the long run be essential for its civilization to endure. At any rate, in the two civilizations which have endured the longest, the Chinese and the East Indian, simplicity of living has been a marked characteristic. True, the simplicity of living of the Indian masses has been largely the enforced simplicity of poverty. Nevertheless, among the real intellectual and moral leaders of India, the Brahmans and social reformers like Gandhi, voluntary simplicity has been and still is a definite and widely observed element of their code and custom.

Those by whom simplicity is dreaded because it spells lack of comfort, may be reminded that some voluntary suffering or discomfort is an inherent and necessary part of all creation, so that to avoid all voluntary suffering means the end of creativeness.

There is one further value to simplicity. It may be regarded as a mode of psychological hygiene. Just as eating too much is harmful to the body, even though the quality of the food eaten is excellent, so it seems that there may be a limit to the number of things or the amount of property which a person may own and yet keep himself psychologically healthy. The possession of many things and of great wealth creates so many possible choices and decisions to be made every day that it becomes a nervous strain. One effect of this upon the will, and hence upon success in life, was deftly stated by Confucius:

"Here is a man whose desires are many. In some things he will be able to maintain his resolution but they will be few."

If a person lives among great possessions, they constitute an environment which influences him. His sensitiveness to certain important human relations is apt to become clogged and dulled, his imagination in regard to the subtle but important elements of personal relationship or in regard to lives in circumstances less fortunate than his own is apt to become less active and less keen. This is

not always the result, but the exception is rare. When enlarged to inter-group relationships this tends to create social misunderstandings and friction.

The athlete, in order to win his contest, strips off the non-essentials of clothing, is careful of what he eats, simplifies his life in a number of ways. Great achievements of the mind, of the imagination, and of the will also require similar discriminations and disciplines.

Observance of simplicity is a recognition of the fact that everyone is greatly influenced by his surroundings and all their subtle implications. The power of environment modifies all living organisms. Therefore each person will be wise to select and create deliberately such an immediate environment of home things as will influence his character in the direction which he deems most important and such as will make it easier for him to live in the way that he believes wisest. Simplicity gives him a certain kind of freedom and clearness of vision.

The foregoing discussion has answered, I think, much of the second strong doubt which we mentioned near the beginning, the doubt that parents have as to the harm that simplicity might do to the minds and general cultural development of their children. In regard to aesthetics, simplicity should not connote ugliness. The most beautiful and restful room I ever entered was in a Japanese country inn, without any furniture or pictures or applied ornaments. Its beauty lay in its wonderful proportions and the soft colors of unpainted wood beams, paper walls and straw matting. There can be beauty in complexity but complexity is not the essence of beauty. Harmony of line, proportion and color are much more important. In a sense, simplicity is an important element in all great art, for it means the removal of all details that are irrelevant to a given purpose. It is one of the arts within the great art of life. And perhaps the mind can be guided best if its activities are always kept organically related to the most important purposes in life.

If simplicity of living is a valid principle there is one important precaution and condition of its application. I can explain it best by something which Mahatma Gandhi said to me. We were talking about simple living and I said that it was easy for me to give up most things but that I had a greedy mind and wanted to keep my many books. He said, "Then don't give them up. As long as you derive inner help and comfort from anything, you should keep it. If you were to give it up in a mood of self-sacrifice or out of a stern sense of duty, you would continue to want it back, and that unsatisfied want would make trouble for you. Only give up a thing when you want some other condition so much that the thing no longer has any attraction for you, or when it seems to interfere with that which is more greatly desired." It is interesting to note that this advice agrees with modern Western psychology of wishes and suppressed desires. This also substantiates what we said near the beginning of our discussion, that the application of the principle of simplicity is for each person or each family to work out sincerely for themselves.

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self-respect is one of the greatest harms wrought by unemployment.

¹⁸ *The Domain of Selfhood*, by R. V. Feldman, p. 95, Allen & Unwin, London, 1934.

NOTES

⁹ Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, Vanguard Press, New York.

¹⁰ *The Journal and Essays of John Woolman*, ed. by Amelia M. Gummere, Macmillan, London, 1932.

¹¹ Presidential address at St. Louis meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. See *New York Times*, Dec. 31, 1935.

¹² *Munera Pulveris*, World Classics Library, Oxford University Press, and other editions.

¹³ In *Affirmations*, by Havelock Ellis, Houghton, Mifflin, Boston.

¹⁴ Macmillan, London, 1923.

¹⁵ *Property: A Study in Social Psychology*, by Ernest Beaglehole, Allen & Unwin, London, 1931.

¹⁶ Essay on "Property and Personality," by Henry Scott Holland, in *Property, Its Duties and Rights*, edited by Charles Gore, Bishop of Oxford, Macmillan, London, 1915.

¹⁷ See the psychologists, Wm. McDougal and A. G. Tansley, also R. V. Feldman's book, cited below. The loss of

REVIEW

HERBAL LORE

A BOOK on the benefits of herbs presents something of a problem to a reviewer without background in these matters. Fortunately, such books are often good reading in other ways. In one that came in recently—*Common Herbs for Natural Health* (Schocken paperback, \$2.25) by Juliette de Bairacli Levy—there is the following on the use of herbs in the garden and the orchard:

Herbs to protect other plants and trees must be either pungently aromatic or extremely bitter. Tomato haulm, after the fruit has been gathered, may be hung on fruit trees, as insect pests do not like its odor. Mexican Indians use tomato haulm [haulm means the stems] in their homes to keep away cockroaches and poisonous insects.

Cayenne pepper is sprinkled on the foliage of fruit trees before the fruit ripens, to keep away fruit fly. It is a tonic to the tree itself, and harmless to human beings and birds, if any of this pungent, burning pepper-powder should get on to the fruit. But it is disliked by the invading fruit-destroying fly.

Readers of earlier editions of this book have asked me if I know of a complete cure for fruit fly. I do not know and there should NOT be a complete cure, for in my opinion the fruit fly is sent by nature to spoil much of the tree crops every year, so as to prevent the health of the tree itself being damaged by having to bear unnaturally heavy crops put there by modern cultivation. From my own vines and trees, annually I strip off and throw back to vine or tree almost half the fruits before they ripen. I have less to sell and eat, but quality of fruit is better and the trees keep strong and healthy.

Such statements give evidence of an attitude that is likely to pervade the entire book, and may inspire either confidence or skepticism, depending on the reader. In any event, you know that Mrs. Levy feels and practices deliberated respect for the natural order.

This author lived in Israel for many years, where she first learned the traditional uses of herbs. The herbalist skill, she says, is an inheritance of the "wandering people of the earth," especially the Bedouin Arabs, the Gypsies, and the

American and Mexican Indians. Mrs. Levy works in agriculture and she began writing about herbs for veterinary use thirty years ago. Her volume, *Herbal Handbook for Farm and Stable*, is published in England by Faber and Faber. The present book, on herbs for general human application, lists plants which are easy to find or obtain. There is a chapter on gathering, preparing, and preserving herbs, a herbal *Materia Medica* (listing the plants and describing their uses) illustrated with drawings, and a collection of recipes relating to dietary, medical, and health and cosmetic needs.

These things are good to know:

Herbs have great powers (which no chemist can excel or even imitate fully), as can be shown by countless examples. For instance the purging effect of a few senna pods steeped in cold water, the effect of the male-fern root upon a tapeworm hooked to the intestines of a human body, the soothing effect of raw cucumber juice on inflamed eyes, or -of rue leaves applied to stings of poisonous insects, or of sage tea to relieve a bad cough—and all the other examples of herbal treatments to be found in this book, each one of them powerful.

Important common sense:

But in the treatment of disease, other means are usually needed to help the herbs do their curative work. Sick people need to cleanse themselves through short fasts on herbal teas and fruit juices and to take herbal laxatives, or they should semi-fast on fruits and fresh milk. They also need fresh air, ample sleep and mental tranquility for a complete cure of any kind of ailment, be it a broken limb or a fever. Also faith is needed to persevere with the herbal treatments which are sometimes very slow in their curative action, and which sometimes are seen to worsen the symptoms of the ailment before curing it.

A useful comment: "Chemicals do not mix well with herbs. Use one treatment or the other, but do not try to use both at once."

One thing the reader will notice is the wide variety of herbs which may be used for a single ailment. If one is not available, another may do. The resources of the herbalist vary from region to region so that the specific remedy relied upon in

one country may be unknown in another part of the world. Golden Seal, for example, which is particularly popular with Jethro Kloss (see *Back To Eden*) was unknown to Mrs. Levy until she learned about it from the American Seventh Day Adventists. Her own favorite remedy is Rosemary, which she calls one "of the few cure-all herbs of the herbalist." She speaks of Rosemary in her introductory chapter:

My two children are now aged eighteen and twenty years and have never had other than herbal treatments in their lives, and have always taken an abundance of wild herbs and fruits in their daily diet. They are both Nature children enjoying rugged health. When my son was a child, in Spain, his leg was cut almost to the bone by falling jagged blocks from a newly built wall. I healed this injury speedily, using only Rosemary. Rosemary has remained my favorite herb ever since, and I use it more than any other herb and cultivate it wherever I live. It was also a favorite of a queen of Hungary, and a lotion from it was known to the gypsies as "The Queen of Hungary's Water." It was sold by Hungarian Gypsies on their far travels, and won worldwide fame for its healing properties.

Another book that should prove useful to those who want to substitute herbals for conventional remedies is May Bethel's *The Healing Power of Herbs*, published in North Hollywood (Calif.) by the Wilshire Book Company, 1970 (\$2.00). This author is critical of orthodox medicine for its reliance on extracted chemicals:

Modern chemistry can isolate substances from plants. However, after fifty years or more it has been established that the original herb tea, containing all the principles necessary for healing, is far more effective than the isolated principles or alkaloids.

May Bethel stresses the gentler effect of herbs and the need for general good health in support of herbal remedies. It is apparent from such books that the person who decides to seek cures in this direction can hardly do it simply by "following directions." One who deviates from conventional methods assumes full responsibility for the results, and this means starting out with some first-hand knowledge, however limited at

the beginning. Mrs. Levy makes this point in her concluding chapter, remarking that those to whom this form of medicine will appeal "will become herbalists themselves," and her book gives the names and addresses of suppliers of herbal products.

There is much useful information in both these books. May Bethel has a chapter on going to sleep without the help of drugs, and a good section on the lymphatic system. A chapter on aids to vision gives practical suggestions for the relief of tired or strained eyes. Actually, such helps to regain normal function seem the best approach for the beginner in the use of herbal remedies, as contrasted with attempting to treat serious diseases "out of a book," before gaining considerable personal experience. Yet it is also true, as May Bethel observes, that a century ago "most American housewives were acquainted with the medicinal properties of herbs." As young girls they "were taken into the fields by their mothers, who taught them to recognize many herbs and to know their use in treating disease." Much of this lore was originally learned from the American Indians.

One statement by May Bethel is in need of correction. She blames Paracelsus for the modern preference for chemical treatment, in contrast with herbs. Paracelsus was a first-hand investigator, while his opponents, the sixteenth century physicians who followed traditional methods, had little experimental knowledge. Paracelsus declared (in *Paramirum*) that minerals should never be used in medicine in their crude state, and had his own methods of preparation, which now are doubtless misunderstood.

COMMENTARY BLURRED ISSUES

IN *Food Is Your Best Medicine*, Henry G. Bieler remarked that dietary counsels help only patients ready and able to cure themselves—a comment that applies equally to the herbal remedies discussed in Review. The laws of nature are doubtless universal and unchanging, but people differ greatly, which results in widely varying interpretations of health and the practice of healing.

"India," an Indian doctor told Edmond Taylor, "needs quacks!" He explained that "the quacks of India—the Auyurvedic physicians, the nature-faddists, the tribal medicine-man and the village herb-healer—represent the greatest potential source of medical personnel immediately available." To their traditional lore could be added the rudiments of Western medicine, while the care they offer is understood by the Indian peasant. After elaboration of this idea, the Indian physician concluded:

I am trying to show that Western medicine, which is assumed to be universal, does not fit the context of presentday India. It isn't that a Western drug will not kill an Indian germ or that an Indian symptom cannot be diagnosed by a Western technique. It is the Western concepts of the social role of the physician and the patient, even the concepts of health and disease, which do not fit the Indian context. (*Richer by Asia*, Houghton Mifflin, 1947.)

Another light on such differences is provided by Robert Redfield (*The Primitive World and its Transformations*, Cornell University Press, 1953). He shows that mankind once believed in a universe ruled by moral forces, giving all human activity a religious aspect. The resulting attitudes ranged from the subtleties of high philosophy to superstitious animism and reliance on sorcery. Redfield calls the abandonment of this moral cosmology for the purely physical conceptions of modern science "one of the great transformations of the human mind." Yet many of the people in the world—perhaps most—have not accepted this

transformation, so that incompatible mixtures of the old and the new ideas are everywhere encountered.

This is well illustrated by an article by Loudell F. Snow in the July *Annals of Internal Medicine*—"Folk Medical Beliefs and their Implications for Care of Patients." The writer calls these beliefs—held mostly by Black people in the South—"a coherent medical system and not a ragtag collection of isolated superstitions." Yet much superstition is involved in doctrines which combine ideas from old classical medicine, European folklore, African beliefs, some Fundamentalist Christianity, Voodoo, and elements of sympathetic magic. Here one sees the faint cultural memory of the ancient moral-law world-view, but grossly degraded by anthropomorphism and manipulative magic. So, while the distrust of modern medicine by such believers is partly due to ignorance, a soundly intuitive rejection of its mechanistic materialism also has the effect of confusing issues with righteous emotion.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves SERVICE AGENCIES

YEARS ago some sociologists—possibly the Lynds—made a comparison between two towns—one in Italy, the other in America. The American town buzzed with organizational activity. There were women's clubs, service clubs, agencies to help the poor, to bring relief to the sick, to beautify the countryside, to improve people's minds and refine the culture of the community. The Italian city had none of these organizations. The conclusion, as we recall, was that the social impulse was lacking in Italy. There was little or no will to "do good."

If further points were made, we have forgotten them. But the contrast is easily remembered, and, responding to the natural tendency to defend the "underdog" we have been wondering about possible justifications for the state of affairs in the Italian town.

First of all, an "agency" is not really the best means of doing good. Better than a town filled with welfare agencies would be a community where such service does not need to be "organized" because the people cooperate spontaneously. The needy don't get "referred," they get helped. Is that what happened in the Italian town? Probably not. If you read Ignazio Silone's *Bread and Wine* and his *Seed Beneath the Snow*, and then look into more recent books by Danilo Dolci, some of the reasons for the apathy of Italian towns may become plain.

Meanwhile, it is surely true that the best town of all would be one which had no social agencies because there was no need for them. A crimeless society is better than having an efficient police department; being without alcoholism is better than establishing a public institution intended to reclaim victims of drink. Too often it seems that American society remains totally indifferent to the individual until he falls down half-dead in the

street, or comes apart in some way or other, so that an "emergency" exists. Then all the agencies organized for help or assistance wheel into action—or are supposed to. America has the sort of social and economic relations which grind away at people's lives; we are not efficient at all in putting a stop to these erosions, but noisily effective in organizing remedies—by no means satisfactory or effective—to deal with the harmed human beings after they succumb.

So having all those agencies is not really such a fine thing, although better than nothing, you might say.

But we don't live in a golden age in which people help one another spontaneously. We live in a time and in places where people's lives are cut off from others by numerous barriers. A great many families and individuals, young and old, suffer in isolation. Often only those who are active in helping agencies know about the pain of these people. The comfortable and well-to-do have their lives arranged so that much of surrounding human tragedy is hidden from them. So it will hardly do to be indifferent to the work done by social agencies, until the time comes when they are no longer needed. One way, perhaps, of bringing that time a little closer would be to strengthen them in their work, by increasing their human effectiveness. A "good" institution is one which tries to make its institutional structures of the least importance to the work it does. Meanwhile, those structures are a focus we can hardly do without.

These are thoughts which came from reading about a project conceived and described by Jane Mayer, the wife of Milton Mayer, which has been informally sponsored by the Voluntary Service office of UNESCO. The idea is to arrange opportunity for high-school-age children—fifteen to eighteen—to work with people and places that need help. There are, Mrs. Mayer says, numerous work camps in Europe where this work needs to be done. Young Americans who go to these work

camps learn a lot and accomplish a lot. Mrs. Mayer says:

We spent many summers (and winters and springs before the summers) figuring out work-camps in Europe that would first, take our young teen-agers and then their friends, and the teen-age sons and daughters of our friends, and second, the camps that would best utilize their energies and help give them some answers to where they might go from there. I don't think one of them came out of those experiences unchanged. It altered, in some cases, where they continued in school, the kind of schooling they wanted, what they would do afterward, and how they would spend their time. It changed their habits of both thought and action. And it positively created a consciousness of the need there is in the world, previously outside their own experience, and what they could do to alleviate a little of that need. They dug ditches, cleared land, built foundations for refugee housing, worked with slum area or orphaned children, and didn't ever think of it as work. And they never stopped talking about what they learned from it all.

In every instance every boy and girl who participated in those camps and the seminars that were part of the programs, felt that the experience was one that should have lasted longer, that should be shared by more young people they knew, that the project should be an on-going thing, that it bore repeating.

So, Mrs. Mayer is acting as coordinator, ready to help American schools that want to make such projects part of their program—ready with lists of camps and places where practical help is needed, where good work can be accomplished. Mrs. Mayer knows about the work camps and will help to find schools to cooperate with their programs. Not all these programs are in Europe, and not all the work is ditch-digging or construction:

There have been a few American high schools (private) which have programmed an aid-to-handicapped children project. These have been very successful. There is something special (that appeals to the particular sensitivity of the teen-ager) about a small child in want. It is surprising how many advantaged young people are now interested in and occupied with some phase of this area of need. It is

hoped that some aid to the mentally confined and the elderly will develop as well.

The young people themselves have suggested that such projects ought to be part of the regular schooling, not just vacation-time activity—which is not long enough, anyway. The steadiest of these youngsters, Mrs. Mayer says, "seem to sense that what they're getting in those last two years of secondary school doesn't answer their needs." They're not sure what they need, but feel that while they know more about "life," they know less about its meaning. "And they certainly don't want to be *told*." They want the experience itself, not adult "wisdom."

The program has the over-all designation, "Internee in Social Learning." It will bring young people into useful contact with the sick, the homeless, the handicapped, the elderly, and the poor. Young people "do unusually well with young children, the aged, and the handicapped," and are not always adept at ecological or reconstruction labor.

For further information, write to Jane Mayer, 119 Bay Road, Hadley, Mass. 01035.

FRONTIERS

Changes in Social Thought

A BIBLIOGRAPHY dealing with the broad subject of Socialism can hardly be complete, so it is inevitable that we should miss certain writers in Jim Campen's *Socialist Alternatives for America*. Two in particular, we think, ought to have been included. Dwight Macdonald's *Root Is Man* (1953) is still the most effective humanist critique of Marxism while Jayaprakash Narayan's Gandhian analysis of the weaknesses of parliamentary democracy is indispensable. However, Jim Campen's work includes writers of similar breadth and questioning, and his bibliography will be a provocative aid to those who are trying to think about new directions, starting from a socialist point of view. It should prove an especially useful tool for those who recognize that the issues which stir men to social thinking and action are rapidly changing.

Why have socialist plans and dreams claimed the devoted allegiance of so many people during the past 150 years? The answer is simple enough. Socialism has seemed a way—to some the only way—of gaining justice and improving the quality of the lives of all human beings. If all the people, instead of a class, own the instruments of production, then the tyranny of economic power will be abolished and men will be free to shape their lives to constructive, self-determined ends. That was the reasoning. But it is now realized that this simple equation involves a number of unexamined assumptions which do not prove out in practice. There is for example this passage in *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* (Monthly Review Press, 1974, \$10.00) by James and Grace Lee Boggs, radical thinkers and activists for twenty-five years.

A few years ago we were saying, "All we need is the socialist revolution and everybody will enjoy working for the communal good." Now we know that isn't so. Unless we persuade people to think differently about work in relation to themselves, all we shall end up with will be somebody ordering

others to do what has to be done. What we are trying to discover now is how to persuade people that we are going to arrive at that situation unless, by our own choice, we change our minds about what responsibilities we are ready to accept.

We have to advance the idea that dividing up the Gross National Product equally has nothing to do with the advancement of humankind. We are projecting beyond the concepts of equality and rights. We are not trying to persuade people to get their equal share. We are trying to persuade them to feel and think and act differently. Since Roosevelt, this country has been trying to give the poor housing. We have succeeded in giving them poor housing, and nothing else. Why? Because there wasn't enough difference in the thought the attitude, the search. Until we can persuade people to want something more than just more, we are not going to be able to change anything. Anybody who wants to change something has got to be able to change what he/she wants.

When serious radicals make such declarations, it is plainly evident that socialist thought is in transition.

Jim Campen's bibliography is a booklist prepared for those interested in such deliberately innovative thinking.

In one of the books recommended, *The Case for Participatory Democracy* by George Benello and Dimitrios Roussopoulos, it is said that "the problem of building a new order cannot be pushed into the future and seen as a post-revolutionary one. . . . The revolution must embody within itself the forms it seeks to realize in the new, reorganized society. . . . The essence of a revolutionary strategy is to build new groupings that can simultaneously resist the injustices of the existing order and create an alternative to it." This is a clear departure from the doctrinaire ideological approach, since the practical evolution of alternative social forms, as itself part of the revolutionary process, would continually modify theory, testing plans and proposals in the fire of everyday experience. This was Gandhi's conception of social change. He maintained that resistance to injustice must be accompanied by Constructive Work as the means of generating

self-reliant communities which are both morally and materially self-supporting.

Another item listed is Buber's *Paths in Utopia*, of which the compiler says:

A brilliant account of the development of the utopian, anarcho-communist stream of socialist thought. Buber argues that "the socialist idea points of necessity to the organic construction of a new society out of little societies bound together by common life and common work." From this perspective he critically analyzes the theory and practice of Marx and Lenin.

Those interested in the self-reliant socialism of Tanzania will want to look up Julius Nyerere's *Ujama: Essays on Socialism*, which gives the philosophy and policy of Tanzanian socialism and includes the Arusha Declaration of 1967. In connection with Nyerere's book Campen recommends "Problems of Socialist Development in Tanzania" by M. R. Bhagavan (*Monthly Review*, May, 1972).

Another magazine entry (*Dissent*, Spring 1979) is "The Kibbutz as a Social Institution," by Haim Barkai, of which Jim Campen says:

Excellent survey of the socialist principles, past achievements and current status of Israel's 230 kibbutzim—and of major problems confronting them. Concentrates on the kibbutz economy, particularly on questions of equality, efficiency and the use of hired labor. But since the kibbutzim operate within the larger Israeli capitalist market economy "this social experiment can give no guidance on how to run a democratically controlled socialist economy—which it has not attempted to do."

There are eighteen titles listed under "American Intentional Communities: 19th Century and Today," and seventeen titles on the subject of "Contemporary Alternative Institutions: Cooperative and Innovative." The broad scope of this bibliography is evidenced by inclusion of Willis Harman's "The New Copernican Revolution," Abraham Maslow's essay, "Synergy in the Society and the Individual" (in *Farther Reaches of Human Nature*), and Karl Polanyi's

essays, *Primitive, Archaic, and Modern Economics*.

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