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THE USES OF SOCIOLOGY

THE reading of a large text made up of papers by sociologists has a variety of effects. One reaction may be that you keep waiting for one of the contributors to get excited and stop being a sociologist. You want him to lift up his eyes and declare something, not as a social scientist but as a human being. Then there is the feeling of impotence that results from reading about migrant farm laborers or the hopeless people disappearing on skid row. And the vague, objectless sympathy generated by a careful and friendly account of the diversely confused attitudes among students who come to the colleges and universities for the first time. They want and hope for so much, and find so little there.

Will it really make a difference in the long run—this studying of sociology? Is anyone affected or moved to action by such means?

In this book we have been reading, *Conflict and Consensus* (Harper & Row, 1973), edited by Harold M. Hodges, Jr., one of the contributors gives this account of "engaged sociology":

> One social scientist who has gone beyond the non-involved, observer-participant category is Robert Coles, a psychiatrist. He went to study the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in Mississippi during the Summer of 1964. Once down there he found that no one in SNCC was interested in talking to him. To them he seemed to be just another social scientist asking what they thought were irrelevant questions. But instead of just asking his questions and getting "put on" answers, he decided to stay for the summer and offered to become their doctor. Gradually he came to be trusted by them enough to begin group psychotherapy.
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> Coles came to occupy a key position in the organization. As part of the inner circle he helped to make decisions and then participated in the action they took. He thus knew what was going on from the inside. The insight and knowledge he gained thereby was far greater than that of the sociologist who flies down on the "Civil Rights Special" to ask Stokeley Carmichael "How's it going, baby?"
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> SNCC trusted Coles and he was able to tape record and take notes without having to ask any questions. He was interacting in a real life situation. His resources and materials were drawn from his daily life. He learned more about what was happening that summer than any sociologist could learn by any other sociological method. No outside observer, no one coming in with a questionnaire, or sending a questionnaire down, or coming down there to do depth interviewing, could learn as much as he did as part of the decision-making apparatus. Like any other social scientist, when he returned North he scientifically checked and evaluated his research.

Dr. Coles made good use of what he learned in the South, and reading about him has value in showing how one learns from other people most effectively—by working with them, side by side—but we are still wondering about books on sociology. How do people "use" it in their lives? Now and then, in any good collection of writings on almost any subject, you come across some unmistakable wisdom, and you can always use that—but the "wisdom" can't be categorized the way a subject-matter like sociology is categorized. A flash of insight doesn't seem to belong to any particular field, and the best work done in any specialty often results when the writer stops being a specialist. In that wonderful moment when he rises from the confinement of a given science and speaks as a man, he may say something unforgettable.

Or the excellence may be in the mood of a piece of reporting—description which comes out of the feeling of the writer, with some of his own life in the writing. This sociology book has an article by Vivian Gornick, reprinted from the *Village Voice*, which is an account of her visit to the communes in New Mexico. Toward the end she says:

> Mine was the so-called Silent Generation. It was a generation caught in the struggle between the desire, on the one hand, to succeed and the desire, on the other hand, to change the world. What made it silent was the very real fears caused by an inquisitorial government and fed by our own passionless liberalism. We paid for our fears: we got pasted to the wall.
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> This cool generation has resolved the conflict by simply refusing to succeed. It looks middle-class America in the eye with an unwavering, unblinking expression. "Not interested," it says. "No man. Simply not interested. No. Don't sweat it. Just not interested. We won't go to your schools. We won't be drafted into your army. We won't hold your jobs. We won't administrate your bureaucracy. We will not, in a word, become the heirs apparent. We won't go into the business. We won't perpetuate the life."

Mrs. Gornick visited many of the New Mexico communes, growing sure that, for all the messiness and failures, something good is happening in these places. What most impressed her was the healthy, happy children, and, she remarked, they were "a good deal sweeter and less hysterically selfish than they are where I come from."

About the people:

> Coming as they do from places where they have performed years of meaningless labor, they are determined that now their labor shall be with meaning. They plant fields to feed themselves, they build houses to protect themselves, they cook meals to sustain themselves. They take as much pleasure in the doing as in the accomplishing: bread is baked lovingly because the baking is as significant as the bread that is to be eaten. Earth is dug thoughtfully as it is as good to feel your body in use while wielding a shovel as it is to turn that earth into an adobe that will become your house. . . .
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> They live, many of the commune dwellers, in dreadfully primitive circumstances. They do so without affectation or complaint. And once you've experienced a cold, dirty wind blowing across that open mesa or a tepee in a rainstorm or an open A-frame in the freezing cold mountains or an attack of hepatitis or day after day of rice or corn for breakfast, lunch, and dinner or an outhouse half a mile from your sleeping bag, you begin to realize that a year of this kind of life is no mean feat. And you also begin to realize these people are serious. They are serious about themselves and about their life here. Their present is their future. They are living today but building for tomorrow.

This article is intensely interesting, but it doesn't have to be called "sociology" and probably wasn't written as sociology. Why read a book on sociology? Reading books is for what you can use of what you read in your life. Understanding the world and the people in it is part of living a life, and the portions of *Conflict and Consensus* we have quoted seemed to help in this way, but neither of them was especially "sociological." Understanding people is Robert Coles's profession, but what he did is very basic in every sort of human relation: knowing is becoming a part of. If you don't become a part of what you're studying, you can't know it from the inside, and the outside is often transitory or artificial.

It is a melancholy thought that a great many readers of this book will have to read it because they are taking a course. The course is not likely to be a part of their lives, but just something they have to take. There could hardly be a worse reason for reading a book.

The life of a human being develops around his conception of the world, of himself, and of the meaning he wants to increase and realize. Culture is the community of meanings belonging to his time and people, on which he draws for background in making his own decisions. Culture, then, insofar as it is self-conscious, represents our common resources of knowledge or summarized experience for rendering into materials we can use in our lives. The deliberate part of this rendering process is called education.

If this is reasonable, then it is a task of education to render science into humanly usable terms. Well, then, what about social science? A passage from Ortega's *Mission of the University* should be of assistance here:

> In our age, the content of culture comes largely from science. But . . . culture is not science. The content of culture, though it is being made in the field

of science more than elsewhere, is not scientific fact but rather a vital faith, a conviction characteristic of our times. Five hundred years ago, faith was reposed in ecclesiastical councils, and the content of culture emanated in large part from them.

Culture does with science, therefore, the same thing the profession [of medicine] does. It borrows from science what is vitally necessary for the interpretation of our existence. There are entire portions of science which are not culture, but pure scientific technique. And vice versa, culture requires that we possess a complete concept of the world and of man; it is not for culture to stop, with science, at the point where the methods of absolute theoretic rigor happen to end. Life cannot wait until the sciences may have explained the universe scientifically. We cannot put off living until we are ready. The most salient characteristic of life is its coerciveness: it is always urgent, "here and now" without any possible postponement. Life is fired at us point-blank. And culture, which is but its interpretation, cannot wait any more than life itself.

This sharpens the distinction between culture and the sciences. Science is not something by which we live. If the physicist had to live by the ideas of his science, you may rest assured that he would not be so finicky as to wait for some other investigator to complete his research a century or so later. He would renounce the hope of a complete scientific solution, and would fill in, with approximate or probable anticipations, what the rigorous corpus of physical doctrine lacks at present, and in part, always will lack.

The internal conduct of science is not a *vital* concern; that of culture is. Science is indifferent to the exigencies of our life, and follows its own necessities. Accordingly, science grows constantly more diversified and specialized without limit, and is never completed. But culture is subservient to our life here and now, and is required to be, at every instant, a complete, unified, coherent system—the plan of life, the path leading through the forest of existence.

Now, so far as we can see, the most profitable reading in sociology, and also the most enjoyable, is by writers who relate what they have observed to the vital interests of life, including the life of the reader. If the writer calls himself a sociologist, he writes as a specialist in process of becoming a generalist, converting science into culture as he goes along. It is this activity which meets the need of the general reader; at the same time, it exercises a transforming influence on the practice of science, since this sort of social science helps to balance and correct the trend of diversification and specialization to which Ortega referred.

This seems a way of saying that a sociologist who is also a teacher will do more than describe to students the "objective" findings of his science. He will also suggest how the student can "identify" himself with situations and persons and events, so that he will become able to turn the sociologist's experience into his own. This follows from the fact that all knowing is a kind of being. Does "science" then fly out the window? Is "objectivity" impossible when there is identification?

To say that subjective response has no part or place in science is to deny the unique capacity of human beings to be *both* objective and subjective in relation to experience. The individual has a world to understand and a life to live. "Relevance" applies to the part of experience that can be seen to apply to our lives—which has, that is, evident meaning to be used in our own lives as either individual or social beings. Recognition of relevance comes from our capacity to identify—to see ourselves in the position or predicament of others. So there is no "life" in studies which give no opportunity for identification. Of course, sometimes, seeing the relevance depends upon a sustained use of the imagination. So we may feel it necessary to learn what we cannot immediately use or apply. This requires patience and discipline. But the end of our studies is use and application of what we learn. Ecological studies, for example, lead to a sense of wholeness and the feeling of our unity with the world. There also comes a realization that interrelatedness may be complex, the understanding of which requires more than "feeling." Understanding involves objectivity. The *reason* for the practice of objectivity in observation and study lies in the need of the subjective side of our being to enter

more fully into the endlessly differentiated parts and functions of all the living formations which surround us, and with which we interact. Objectivity and subjectivity, then, go together, are inseparable and interdependent, for from objectivity we gain wisdom and from subjectivity we feel compassion, and from the depths of such feelings are born the motives of a worthy human life.

Uninstructed feeling is likely to violate the findings of objective observation, while uninstructed observation can be the means of shutting out the inner, higher qualities of human beings. This much is evident. Therefore, the balance between objectivity and subjectivity is admittedly maintained only by deliberate effort and continued awareness of the play between the two sides of our being.

One good reason for reading a book on sociology would be to see in what way this science is being transformed by teachers into the stuff of culture. The contribution of Henry Anderson to *Conflict and Consensus*—reprinted from MANAS—helps to make clear the change that is strongly under way:

> The best sociology is not usually by sociologists, but by those who are free from any obsession with statistical methods: anthropologists, existential psychologists, theologians, philosophers, novelists, playwrights. For example, Buber is most often thought of as a philosopher—the founder of the "philosophy of the dialogue," or what we have called here "humanistic psychology." . . .
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> Without dialogue, there is no such thing as society. Without listening to this dialogue, tactfully, attentively, lovingly, there is no such thing as an adequate sociology. . . .
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> It does not strain the imagination excessively to visualize institutions of higher learning, twenty years or so from now, in which sociology departments occupy approximately the same kind of place that classics departments do today. Since the academy changes cautiously, a corner will be reserved for the present crop of bright, young, mathematically oriented assistant professors of sociology, by then grown into full professors. . . . But their version of sociology will be regarded as an anachronism by most students, and without students any academic field grows old, sere, crotchety, quaint, and irrelevant. Students will gravitate toward the promise of greater wisdom, which will lie in such areas as the psychology of Maslow, the philosophy of Kierkegaard, the theology of Tillich, and, even more, in areas we can presently only vaguely foresee.

Conflict and Consensus begins with an extract from C. Wright Mills' *The Sociological Imagination.* In one place Mills says:

> Problems of leisure, for example, cannot even be stated without considering problems of work. Family troubles over comic books cannot be formulated as problems without considering the contemporary family in its new relations with the newer institutions of the social structure. Neither leisure nor its debilitating uses can be understood as problems without recognition of the extent to which malaise and indifference now form the social and personal climate of contemporary American society. In this climate, no problems of "the private life" can be stated and solved without recognition of the crisis of ambition that is part of the very career of men at work in the incorporated economy.

One could say that Paul Goodman wrote "sociology" in *Growing Up Absurd,* since this book was a direct attack on the "problems of work." But Goodman wrote, not as a sociologist, but as a contributor to culture and education, helping people to realize what they had felt and not expressed for too long—that what a great many people are doing with their lives isn't worth doing *for any reason.* And so, more and more people are refusing to do it. These people, as Mills suggests, have no "leisure time" problem. Leisure has a very different meaning for those who find pleasure and renewed strength in their work.

It is well to take into account the fact that the movement away from the kind of society we have—described by Vivian Gornick—was not so much the result of sociologically informed liberal politics, but rather took the form of unorganized but massive noncooperation on the part of the young, and also a considerable number of the not-so-young. There is a kind of organic revulsion followed by endless improvisation in order to have

as little as possible to do with the typical patterns of commercial and social activity of the present. The acts of rejection came before the instruction in sociological understanding.

One essayist in this volume proposes that sociology is a discipline which comprehends what can be said about human behavior without reference to the individual—identifies its "constants," so to speak, regardless of the individuals involved. There may be some justification for this, but one wonders about the habits that might be engendered from thinking in this way all the time. It might be overlooked, for example, that a single man sometimes has the capacity to move millions, and that the characteristic tendencies of an age *do* come to an end during periods of rapid transition in which unusual individuals may play a leading part. There is also the consideration that it is not really good for human beings to study one another as the functions of patterns that can be "scientifically" determined. It is too easy to forget their humanity and to think of them as neutral pawns. And it is certainly not good for anyone to think of himself as no more than an "offprint of his times" or of the surrounding society. He may be partly that, but to be entirely that would be to stop being human. Freedom has been defined as knowledge of necessity, and there is much truth in this idea; but freedom is also transcendence, which means to choose which set of "necessities" is the best one to live by, by reason of the values involved, and *not* because of our past conditioning.

What else can be said about this book? Most important, perhaps, is the extraordinary diversity of its contents, illustrating the veritable endlessness of human experience and how much we need to understand.

REVIEW
SOME OLD BOOKS

TO look through books that were printed thirty, forty, or fifty years ago is to realize how few of them are still worth reading, except for the purpose of exciting a healthy suspicion that today, as in those past times, we are lost in a sea of verbal irrelevance. So there is a sense in which these old books reveal what they do not declare.

One such book, *Now It Can Be Told,* by Sir Philip Gibbs, presents the revelations of a writer who was a war correspondent during World War I. While the war continued, Gibbs was only a chronicler of events, but in 1920, when this book was published, he told what he *felt* about the war and what the men who fought it had suffered. He weaves a fabric everywhere threaded with agony, and describes a "victory" purchased at the cost of universal degradation. The war was undertaken as a remedy for evils too great to bear, but no remedy was found for war itself, which proved a still greater evil.

There is an unforgettable passage which tells of the execution of a soldier for cowardice in the face of the enemy.

> The chaplain asked him whether he had any message for his relatives. He said, "I have no relatives." He was asked whether he would like to say any prayers, and he said, "I don't believe in them." The chaplain talked to him, but could get no answer—and time was creeping on. There were two guards in the room, sitting motionless, with loaded rifles between their knees. Outside it was silent in the courtyard, except for little noises of the night and the wind. The chaplain suffered, and was torn with pity for that sullen man whose life was almost at an end. He took out his hymn-book and said: "I will sing to you. It will pass the time." He sang a hymn, and once or twice his voice broke a little, but he steadied it. Then the man said, "I will sing with you." He knew all the hymns, words and music. It was an unusual, astonishing knowledge, and he went on singing, hymn after hymn, with the chaplain by his side. It was the chaplain who tired first. His voice cracked and his throat became parched. Sweat broke out on his forehead, because of the nervous strain. But the man who was going to die sang on in a clear, hard voice. A faint glimmer of coming dawn lightened the cottage window. There were not many minutes more. The two guards shifted their feet. "Now," said the man, "we'll sing 'God Save the King'." The two guards rose and stood to attention, and the chaplain sang the national anthem with the man who was to be shot for cowardice. Then the tramp of the firing party came across the cobblestones in the courtyard. It was dawn.

There was fear everywhere, but also heroism and determination. Each side amazed the other by its resistance. All the general staffs made terrible mistakes. Incalculable numbers of men were uselessly sacrificed.

Gibbs, an Englishman, wrote for the British press. Other journalists said about the same thing. After it was over, they agreed that the war had worsened mankind. But all of them—or nearly all—put brave words at the end of their books. These were Gibbs' brave words:

> . . . millions of men today who went through the agony of the war are inspired by the humble belief that humanity may be cured of its cruelty and stupidity, and that a brotherhood of peoples more powerful than a League of Nations may be founded in the world after its present sickness and out of the conflict of its anarchy.

That, he said, was the vision which leads men on.

Next we picked up a book published twenty-two years later—*A Time for Greatness* by Herbert Agar (Little, Brown, 1942). Mr. Agar called the war against Japan and Germany a blessing in disguise—an opportunity to put into effect all the reforms we had been too complacent and self-satisfied to make after World War I. We must fight, he said, for an "idea"—"The American idea." For if "the American idea is presently extinguished, the future will be dark for uncountable years." Again the brave words, this time at the onset of the war.

What was "the American idea"? Agar found it embodied in a speech made by Prof. George

Fox earlier in 1942. Answering the question, What shall we fight for?, Fox had said:

> Let's not fight for money. Let's not fight for markets. Let's not fight for a higher standard of living. Let's fight for an idea. . . . We can say, "We, too, are strong, but we will use our strength, not to take away from the weak, but to defend the weak. We do not like strength for its own sake. Strength for its own sake is ugly and brutal and blind. We exert our strength to defend the only things that make life tolerable: honor and beauty and truth and lovingkindness." . . .

It's not so easy to read a book like that today.

What is to be done when the strength most in evidence is "ugly and brutal and blind," and when you can't find much "honor and beauty and truth" anywhere?

Is this a time to study history? James Bryce, if he were alive, might say it was. At any rate, partly because we'd never really read his book, we started on the first volume of *The American Commonwealth* (1888) to see what he had to say about the United States. There was some encouragement in the introductory chapter. Speaking of the tendency of the European to see the political behavior of Americans in an unfavorable light, Bryce remarked:

> What he probably fails to do, because this is what the writer is most likely to fail in enabling him to do, is to realize the existence in the American people of a reserve of force and patriotism more than sufficient to sweep away all the evils which are now tolerated, and to make the politics of the country worthy of its material grandeur and of the private virtues of its inhabitants. America excites an admiration which must be felt upon the spot to be understood. The hopefulness of her people communicates itself to one who moves among them, and makes him perceive that the graver faults of politics may be far less dangerous there than they would be in Europe. A hundred times in writing this book have I been disheartened by the facts I was stating: a hundred times has the recollection of the abounding strength and vitality of the nation chased away these tremors.

Does America still have the moral resilience Bryce believed we had eighty-five years ago? It doesn't seem likely that any current book will tell us much about that. And stories about Watergate leave no room for much else in the papers.

Where, anyway, would you look for "abounding strength and vitality" today? You wouldn't really expect to find it in the "silent majority." Is it in the highly audible minorities? It is not really practical, now, to make an optimistic judgment about the country the way Bryce did in 1888. There doesn't seem to be any way to "sweep away all the evils which are now tolerated," since the nation is divided in so many ways.

What might be done, however, is to make a small inventory of the moral excellences that have come to light in recent years. There was Rachel Carson with her *Silent Spring*, for example. This book began a "sweeping" campaign, but if we admit the truth we must acknowledge that the evils—most of them—still persist. Shall we say that her strength was not "abounding" enough, or shall we begin to add to that strength by studying what she said, and helping those who have been working on the same project ever since?

There is Ralph Nader, who wants every citizen to do his duty as the means of cleaning up the environment, bringing irresponsibility in corporate enterprise to account, getting the regulatory agencies to do their jobs conscientiously in a public-spirited way, and in general improving the morality of public life and increasing the private virtues so that they can at least bear the light of day.

There are the tireless efforts of the peace movement, whose workers point out that the war in Vietnam isn't really over until all the political prisoners held in jail in South Vietnam are released, and until all the bombing stops; and there are the campaigners for amnesty who believe that the thousands of young men who fled to Canada to escape the draft, and those who realized, after they were in the armed services, that they didn't believe in the war and couldn't help to fight it—

that all these men should be allowed to come home without threat of prosecution.

Well, there would be objection to the claim that these are signs of strength and vitality. The country is not really united on these questions, although there are various groups which are strongly united among themselves.

But we wonder if there was enough unity in the country in 1888 to justify Mr. Bryce in writing the way he did—in saying that his recollection of the strength of the nation could "chase away" all the "tremors" he felt about the state of the nation. And perhaps we shouldn't try to chase them away, if we happen to feel them now. They may represent an important part of any complete inventory made in the present. For it is just possible that a new version of "the American idea" is in the making, and feeling a tremor now and then might help to get the project under way full strength. Already people are setting out to live lives to which wars and war-making are irrelevant. There is some space left for new beginnings, and room for a future that won't repeat the dreary mistakes of the past. Books which serve such purposes aren't easy to find, but they exist, and more of them may get published as time goes on. Meanwhile, there is need to be selective about what we read.

COMMENTARY
THE INFLUENCE OF A. S. NEILL

THE reasons for the uncomfortable feelings one sometimes gets about A. S. Neill are in Ray Hemmings' book (see "Children"), but the writer does not underline them. They are simply there. The chief reason for the feeling, we think, lies in the fact that freedom is the other face of responsibility, and instinctively we know this. Another fact is that responsibility, to be first-grade, has to be self-assumed. It can't be successfully pushed on anyone, and not pushing seems the main idea in Neill's conception of freedom.

He has found, as have others, that people who have been taught "responsibility" in a heavy-handed way don't get any sense of freedom from their righteousness. Somehow, they are "spoiled." So the ex-Calvinist went the whole way in refusing to make or "pressure" anyone to do anything. Why was his influence on other people, young and old, so strong, then? It grew, we think, from his *total* conviction in relation to what he thought—his complete inability to compromise. The quality of doing 100 per cent what you believe in has a kind of magic. Any man with this quality exercises influence, and no one can imitate him, since that kind of conviction is home-grown.

But if freedom is really the result of assuming responsibility, how can responsibility be taught? Not, Neill would say, by preaching. Can responsibility be taught without talking about it? Well, a man can try to be an example, but this doesn't succeed unless he refuses to think of himself as an "example." So teaching responsibility, if it can be done at all, requires some kind of double standard. What you require of yourself is very different from what you expect of others. After all, you live your life, and they live theirs.

Teaching other things is much simpler. A dancer shows his pupils the movement. A craftsman shows his students how to use tools.

What does a free human being do? Or a responsible human being?

Well, a free human being commits himself to some course of action, and after that his freedom is expressed through a focus which may be very demanding—it may claim most of his freedom; and, being also responsible, he willingly gives up his freedom in order to act in that particular way. So freedom may be lost in responsibility. But it isn't real responsibility unless it has been freely accepted, chosen, and borne. One who actually learns the meaning of freedom from observing free people usually stops complaining about his own lack of freedom, because he has seen how freedom is created—he recognizes that its radius defines the area where responsibility has been accepted and fulfilled.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE STORY OF A. S. NEILL

A NEW book about Summerhill by Ray Hemmings, *Children's Freedom* (Schocken, $6.95), does just what it ought to do—tell the reader about A. S. Neill's life and thinking, and how Summerhill came into being and what happened there, leaving all the basic questions unsolved. More than ever is it evident that no one will find it possible to make Neill's example and ideas into the formula for another school.

Neill has been a wholly independent human being and an untypical schoolmaster. While there were certain clear influences in his life, his thinking has always been his own, no mere repetition of the thoughts of other men. He early decided that complete freedom from either coercive or indirect authority is essential to the welfare of the child, and has never wavered from that belief. His point of view is embodied in the following by Mr. Hemmings:

> Neill faced the issue of the freedom of the individual in the context of the demands of the society in which the individual lives. In doing so he defines the limitation on this freedom much as did John Stuart Mill who wrote in his essay "On Liberty": "The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it." There is the important difference that Mill specifically excludes children from the right to such freedom while Neill, of course, was demanding freedom for children, and insisted that the community should refrain from interfering with the child's actions so long as those actions did not encroach on the freedom of others. Further, discussing civilized adult societies, Mill would have allowed all efforts of persuasion even in areas of private action, but Neill ruled out persuasion and suggestion as vigorously as he resisted compulsion.
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> Thus, if Jimmy is throwing stones, other children will try to stop him and Neill is content that they should do so only because theirs is a counter-persuasion to Jimmy's attempts to impose his will. This would be a lesson in social education. So long as Jimmy is interfering with the freedom of others the crowd is within its rights to restrain him, but it would have no rights to influence, for instance, Jimmy's decision as to whether he should go to his lessons. That is entirely his affair, and however he chooses he will not be infringing the liberty of others. To compel a child to learn Latin was on a par with forcing a man to adopt a religion by Act of Parliament, Neill thought. And he added that it was equally foolish, because the child would learn much more efficiently through his own volitions than as a result of compulsion. However, Neill was not proposing some subtle form of manipulation. It was the child's right of decision that was his passionate concern, and he was genuinely unworried as to whether or not his pupils learnt Latin—or anything else, for that matter. They would learn because they were human beings, but precisely what they learnt did not matter and did not have to be prescribed.

The main effort, it seems, was toward not weakening or confining the child's natural inclinations to act according to his own interests or aspirations—which, Neill was confident, would be adequate for whatever "education" that child would want and eventually seek.

Neill's first experience of "school" was in the village school of Kingsmuir, where his Scottish father taught. Dominie George Neill began teaching there in 1876. There were then twenty-five pupils in the single-roomed building. Ten years later, when enrollment reached 139, another room was added and George Neill then had one assistant and a pupil-teacher to help out. The school was conducted in the stern Calvinist tradition. A. S. Neill gained his longing for freedom and his dislike of "moral" training from this home and school environment. When he was nine, his grandmother told him: "If you want to know what hell is like, hold your finger in the flame of a candle." Later Neill wrote: "It was a grim religion which inspired nothing but fear.'

Not caring for study, he was regarded as the family ne'er-do-well and was sent away at fourteen to clerk in a factory. This didn't work, nor did trial employment as a draper's assistant. Finally, his parents decided in despair that their son was fit only to be a teacher, so he began as an

apprentice pupil-teacher in his father's school. After completing this training he worked in other schools and, after several years, was able to qualify for entry into the University of Edinburgh. There he studied English under Saintsbury, profiting mainly from the experience by gaining ammunition for his lifelong campaign for educational reform. Of his teachers, he said:

> They stand upon their dignity and their whole attitude says, "I don't want any of your familiarity. I am a Professor . . ." If he fails to be a man of charity, of kindliness, of love, the honorary degrees count for nothing; he is unfit to be a professor, for, in teaching, the man is greater than his subject.

After leaving the University, he worked for a while as editor of an encyclopedia, and then was engaged to be art editor of a new magazine—which, as it turned out, never got started, since the war began in that year (1914) and the plan for the magazine collapsed.

Neill went back to teaching, getting a job as head teacher of the village school at Gretna. Here he gathered the material for his first book, *A Dominie's Log.* His teaching was successful, but the school inspectors weren't satisfied with Neill's ability to attend to "detail." One of his critics spoke of the need for more "discipline," observing that the children talked too much. Hemming describes Neill's experiences in this Scottish community, saying that most people regarded him as an oddity and refused to take him seriously. But there were other reactions:

> A few parents, however, objected strongly to Neill's refusal to force children to work at subjects they had no taste for, especially when this threatened their success at the examinations for entrance to the Academy. A few removed their children when the Ministry of Munitions opened another school for the children of the workers at the new factory in Gretna. On the other hand Neill is remembered now with affection and some admiration by several of the people still living in the neighborhood who as children were in his class or who had friends or brothers or sisters there. It is generally an amused pleasure that lights the faces of these people when they are reminded of this distant dominie, and however unfavourably some of the older people may have regarded him there is no doubt that those who were his pupils thought him "the cat's whisker" (as one of them put it). If, for most, their year or two with Neill is just a pleasant and curious memory, some were affected more deeply by his example. . . .

Since Neill still had literary ambitions, he had written *A Dominie's Log* with a humorous edge, and it was featured, surprisingly, in some of the more sensational newspapers. But his serious defense of freedom for the children was recognized by others, and Neill began to get attention from educators who were thinking along the same lines. Most eminent among these was Edmond Holmes, who wrote that classic of child education—*What Is and What Might Be.* Holmes, as a former inspector of the schools, helped to stir much interest in new thinking about education, and the London *Times* began publishing a monthly supplement devoted to the subject. Neill's book was favorably reviewed at length in this supplement.

The rest of Mr. Hemmings' volume is devoted to the effect on Neill of various people, chiefly the practice and beliefs of Homer Lane, who had become convinced that the tendency to do good was just as strong in criminals and delinquent children as in law-abiding people, but that the offenders had been exposed to a distorting environment. Neill read Freud and knew Wilhelm Reich, and interpreted their ideas in terms of their justification of his firm belief in freedom for the young.

In 1921 Neill joined an old friend in Dresden, becoming head of an international school that was being reorganized there. This school, which was in Hellerau, only lasted about two years. Neill sometimes found himself disliked in Germany, as an alien, but after he explained that he was a Scot, the attitude of his neighbors changed immediately, since the Scots also belonged to an oppressed nation! However, with the school no longer in existence, he returned to England, bringing some children with him as the nucleus for the start of another school—Summerhill. In 1926, Ethel Mannin, later Neill's enthusiastic supporter, came

to see about registering her daughter as a pupil. She rang the bell, but no one answered, although she heard shouts and whoops of laughter through the walls.

> However, after a while a "black haired, stockingless, sandalled young woman" smilingly appeared and led her into another somewhat shabby room with basket chairs, rugs on bare boards, rickety shelves overflowing with books, "English and German, novels, poets, works on psychology and psychoanalysis," and a grand piano. The cedar tree outside stretched towards a tennis lawn, and beyond that was the sea.
>
> After a while, people began to appear. A boy and a girl rode up outside on ponies (Ethel Mannin later learned that the girl was Homer Lane's daughter). And then Neill came in, "a tall, slightly stooping figure with a lean, clever, sensitive face. . . . He wore grubby white flannels, an old and sagging tweed coat and a gay, careless sort of tie—and sandals. . . . He gave the impression of shyness, and one felt that he hoped he wasn't going to be asked a lot of tiresome questions."
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> Other members of the staff drifted in, and though there were no introductions there was a feeling of casual acceptance "because you were there." This is recognizably the manner in the Summerhill staff-room today, a casualness that can be felt as an off-hand lack of interest when you are unused to it, but which is actually a routine absence of formality and an assumption of privacy within the community.

This is a book about the struggles in behalf of children in one man's life, and how they worked out.

FRONTIERS

National Conference on Land Reform

CALIFORNIA agriculture comes close to being a disaster area in the nation's economy, but no one could reach this conclusion simply by a visit to the state. Its fertile valleys are heaping up produce for the tables of Americans, while its fruits are famous throughout the land. Where, then, is the disaster? This question could be answered by doing a little farming, but it would be safer, easier, and quicker, to do some reading and attend a meeting or two—such as the recent National Conference on Land Reform which was held April 25 through April 28 in San Francisco, under the sponsorship of the National Coalition for Land Reform.

Is land reform needed in the United States? Sheldon Greene, general counsel to the Coalition, who spoke at the Conference, told his listeners:

> We know that each year 100,000 farms are abandoned and that rural America has sustained a population loss of 40 million people in the last so years. Concomitant with the abandonment of small farms and the migration to the cities of a heretofore agriculturally dependent rural population has been the increasing entry into agriculture of multipurpose business interests, bringing with it an increase in farm size and absentee ownership of the land. Once-populous areas occupied by independent small landholders interspersed with small rural service communities are being transformed into feudalistic estates—possibly one of the most significant economic and social transformations to be experienced in our history.

The obvious comment is that transitions of this sort are "normal" in a competitive society. Survival is for the strong, the most efficient producers. But the strength of these enormous farms, Mr. Greene says, is not due to their ability to produce food more efficiently at less expense:

> Studies have demonstrated the family farm to be the most efficient unit of agricultural production. Summarizing the studies made on the subject of farm efficiency, G. P. Madden concluded, "All of the economies of size could be achieved by modern and fully mechanized one-man or two-man farms." The study concluded that the major difference between the small and medium-sized farm and the large farm was simply that the latter had the potential to produce more profits for the farm owner.

This becomes true, not necessarily from more efficient farming, but through the power of the conglomerates and syndicates which go into agriculture to conduct vertical operations, supplying machinery and other equipment, fertilizer, seed, and feed at one end, while they also process and market the product at the other. Profits taken as suppliers and distributors make up for any losses in the farming, which are frequent. But the small farmer must live on farming alone. He cannot sell his produce at a loss. Meanwhile, the agribusiness, while sustaining a farming loss, may find its real estate increased in value. "Last year," Mr. Greene remarks, "the largest item of increase of agricultural assets was the enhancement of real estate value a growth of $6.3 billion."

The idea behind land reform is to make land available to those who want to live on it and work it. In most parts of the country, the farms used to be small. This was the original ideal of the founders of the country, later reflected in the Homestead Act; but little by little, from a variety of causes, the land came under the control of large land companies and real estate syndicates. This trend, which still continues, the land reformers hope to reverse.

Robert Swann, of the International Independence Institute, of Ashby, Mass., proposed the community land trust as an instrument for holding the land in trust and allocating its use to farmers who would lease it in perpetuity. The trust is a quasi-public institution, chartered to hold land in stewardship, with power to protect the use-rights of those who have taken up leaseholds. Explaining the idea, he said:

> Trusteeship and stewardship can be built on a long tradition in many societies (Indians of North and South America—the ejidos of Mexico, the tribes of Africa, the "commons" of England and New England, the Crofters' system in Scotland, the Eskimos of

> Alaska. And in recent history, the Gramdan movement in India and the Jewish National Fund in Israel) .

With the trusteeship approach to the problem, land would be purchased, not expropriated. Experience with land trust operations in Georgia has shown that application of this plan can be far-reaching:

> A trust can be used as a holding mechanism for all sizes and tracts of land. Some of these tracts may be large enough to build entire new towns (large or small) or simply used as farms or as conservation tracts.
>
> Because large segments of land are held as a unit, the trust can utilize the greatest flexibility in planning, taking into account the entire region. This is, from a planning viewpoint the most logical unit for resource planning. . . . This flexibility permits both short and long range strategies which can include small farms, large farms, or combinations of both. In this way the modern technology of the large scale farm can be utilized while, at the same time, the trust can encourage and promote the new ecological fertilizers and farming systems to avoid the dangers of monocultures and pesticides. In the short range, at least, large scale use of machine technology is necessary to compete with the agribusiness farm system. Land redistribution or resettlement creates more small farmers, but does nothing to insure their survival.

Land management of this sort is not without precedent. Swann says:

> In Israel the advantages of flexibility in planning can be seen very clearly, since over two thirds of the best land is held in trust by the Jewish National Fund. There, everything from small farms, Kibbutzim, Moshavim [cooperative villages], and whole new towns are planned and established on trust land.
>
> In short, the trustee concept is an activist approach to the problem of redistribution of resources, and while it is initially aimed at the land, as it grows and develops strength as a movement it can begin to reach out into other areas of resource management.

The dream of the National Coalition for Land Reform is to provide access to the land. This opportunity, for those who want it, is seen as "the key to alleviating rural poverty, easing urban overcrowding, reducing welfare costs and unemployment, protecting the rural environment, and building a stronger democracy."

Land reform is not a new idea, but the participants in this Conference felt that they were witnesses of a historic occasion. The mood of the discussions was high-pitched and exciting. Nearly 500 people were there, from every part of the country, to share their knowledge, hopes, and plans. Their objective is a fundamental change in the relationship of people to the land. Further information may be obtained by writing to the National Coalition for Land Reform, 345 Franklin Street, San Francisco, Calif. 94102. For details on the Land Trust idea, write to the International Independence Institute, West Road, Box 183, Ashby, Mass. 01431.