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MEN AND GODS

THE best world for a moral agent," Josiah Royce observed many years ago, "is one that needs him to make it better." We can't think of anyone else who has defined the role of human beings in just this way, unless we add the gods to the category of mankind, for then Prometheus and various other saviors can be counted as exemplary human beings. This is not of course the familiar way of thinking about "the gods," who are usually considered to have had a more sublime origin. But in recent years even theologians have begun to suggest a humanist reading of great scriptures, and one modern interpreter has proposed that all the high religions are primarily concerned with the nature of man, not with "God." In the June, 1968, issue of the Blaisdell Institute *Journal* (Claremont, Calif.), Dr. John A. Hutchison, in a paper devoted to the quest for self-knowledge, wrote:

> In many of these sources such as early Buddhism the idea of deity is declared to be extraneous, and in some, such as Jainism, it is specifically denied. Where the idea of deity enters, as in the monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam it is with reference to the human situation.

In short, Dr. Hutchison declares, when the - Lord speaks, it is "invariably something about the nature of man." After providing support for this view from anthropological research, he says:

> If this evidence is accepted, then it follows that the interpretation I am offering you does not turn religion upside down, but just the opposite, turns it right-side up. If time permitted, I would like to argue that in the modern West roughly since the enlightenment, there has been a massive misconception of religion as a hypothesis concerning a remote being called God whose dwelling place is just beyond the reach of our furthest telescope. Theists accept this hypothesis and atheists and skeptics reject it; but significantly they agree, and I would say mistakenly, in the primary meaning or reference for religion. I would call this the fallacy of the Head Spirit (I am tempted to say the Head Spook) Out There.

On this view, then, it is possible to call Prometheus a fully developed (self-actualizing?) man. And we are entitled to adopt, if we wish, the hypothesis of the Promethean theory of human nature, for Prometheus was certainly a moral agent who sought to make the world (or human universe) a better place. Emerson saw in Prometheus the Jesus of Greek mythology, the titanic hero who gave himself in sacrifice because of his love for mankind. In Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, the fire which the hero stole from the gods became the power of consciousness and reason. Until the people received his gift, Prometheus tells the Leader of the Chorus, they were psychically as yet unborn:

> . . . like children . . . seeing they saw not, and hearing they understood not, but like as shapes in a dream they wrought all the days of their life in confusion . . . like the little ants they dwelt underground in the sunless depths of caverns.

The scope of the Promethean gift to mankind is described by Harry Slochower in *Mythopoesis* (Wayne State University Press, 1970):

> "Understanding" and "a portion of reason" are more than reflective thought. By *sophia* or "wisdom," the Greeks understood *practical application* of knowledge. Prometheus taught man "to discern the seasons by the rising and obscure setting of the stars." He gave them understanding of their rituals, "of the altar-flames that before were meaningless." No longer would they need to propitiate a capricious "seasonal god," but could predict and provide for the workings of the natural phenomena. He revealed the technique for coping with disease, taught the use of "the secret treasures of the earth . . . copper, iron, silver, gold." In this context fire becomes a technical-social lever for freeing human power, a *tool* which raises man from the animal towards the human stage.
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> Prometheus' "reason" went beyond the rational meaning of language; he "found the subtle interpretation of words half heard or heard by chance, and of meetings by the way." He even penetrated into the realm of the unconscious as revealed in dreams:

> "From dreams I first taught them to judge what should befall in waking state."
>
> At the same time, Prometheus stressed the value of tradition: "I taught them the groupings of letters, to be a memorial and record of the past, the mistress of the arts and mother of the muses." Prometheus thus combined bold re-creation of the human heritage with piety toward its valuable residue. In sum, "all human arts are from Prometheus."

Who is Prometheus? He is the god-man or man-god who has won foreknowledge, who sides with Zeus when the other titans seek to make themselves rulers of the world or "lords by force," but who serves man in defiance of Zeus when he grows tyrannical, preferring to keep mankind in its unenlightened state. Prometheus is punished by Zeus, but his true offense is not his resistance to the Olympian ruler, but in giving the fire of creativity and mind to a mankind not disciplined enough to use these powers wisely. Vultures tear daily at the liver of the suffering titan, since the liver is a symbol of uncontrolled passions, yet each day his liver is renewed, since Prometheus did not act selfishly, but gave the fire for the enlightenment of humans. In the final denouement of the myth, in which Prometheus is released from his tortures by Hercules, thousands of years later—a promised liberation still far in the future, we may suspect—Zeus is also restored to his better self, since the gods, like men, have also a dual nature. Slochower remarks, "As in the Book of Job, the Prometheia rejects the narrow tribe] god, but reaches an understanding with a god who approximates a universal deity." Yet Aeschylus' drama suggests that the mission and ordeal of mankind, now personified by Hercules, goes on and on. As Slochower puts it:

> Prometheus is rescued by Hercules, the son of Zeus' union with a mortal woman, Alcmene. In turn, the deliverer must engage in his "Twelve Labors" and serve as woman-man to Omphale. Once again, the hero has the task of cleansing the stables of the rotten state.

If we accept the Roycean conception of man—Man as the moral agent needed to make the universe better—then we have no difficulty in recognizing the gods as beings who typify man, and in some cases as Personages who fulfill the highest human potentialities. This may be seen from various statements made by the god Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. The difference between a god and a man is in the human lack of self-knowledge which is complete in the gods. In answer to a question by Arjuna, his disciple, Krishna says (chapter four): "Both I and thou have passed through many births, O harasser of thy foes! Mine are known unto me, but thou knowest not of shine." Earlier, in the third chapter, Krishna had explained, in effect, that men and gods have the same obligation to fulfill their duties, since "whatever is practiced by the most excellent men, that is also practiced by others." Continuing, he says:

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

The call to duty, then, is the call to altruistic service. But one could say, following Dr. Hutchison, that since the Enlightenment this aspect of the nature of man, constituting his highest purpose or role, has been dropped out of both religious and philosophical tradition. Altruism is a duty of the gods, not of men, who, if they are believers, are merely the beneficiaries of the services rendered by divine and distinctly *other* powers. Interesting evidence of this reduction of the idea of man, of human selfhood, is found in the dictionary definitions of "Promethean," an

adjective used to assign the qualities displayed by Prometheus to unusual human beings. A Promethean, we are told, is one who is "creative," or "boldly original." Promethean self-sacrifice, the titan's love of human kind, is not mentioned. Our "Promethean men" suffer, too, but seldom for the reason given by Aeschylus, "For that to men he bare too fond a mind."

One effect of what Hutchison called "a massive misconception of religion" has been a shallow and somewhat impoverished sense of ethical responsibility. The only ethical obligation Western man has taken seriously in recent centuries has been in terms of a "just division of the spoils." Certainly the ideological argument that has shaken the world during the past hundred years—or since, say, publication of the *Communist Manifesto*—has turned on who gets how much of the wealth of the world, and in consequence has the power to rule. That the world might have a purpose in which man could be, or even was meant to be, collaborator has not occurred to anyone until quite recently. It is now generally admitted that man has wasted the fruits of nature and mutilated the face of the planet in various ways, but this is mostly a response to the threat of famine and shortages of energy, and only a few of the more thoughtful ecologists speak of the need of reverence for both nature and life, or that we must learn to love the land, as Aldo Leopold warned some twenty years ago. We have a long way to go before we exchange the idea that we are the people chosen to enjoy the rewards of earthly existence for the deeper conviction that we are burdened with responsibility for the welfare of the world and all it contains. The glib situational ethics of the day is little more than a playboy's credo, when compared, say, to certain ancient faiths—as for example the Hopi Indian conviction of the crucial importance of human behavior to the entirety of life. In *The Hopi* Way (University of Chicago Press, 1947), Laura Thompson and Alice Joseph give this account of the Hopi view of the universe:

> Theoretically all phenomena, natural and supernatural, living and dead—including man, animals, plants, the earth, the sun, moon and clouds, the ancestors and the spirits—are interrelated and mutually dependent through the underlying dynamic principle of the universe—which we shall call the law of universal reciprocity. This law implies the concept of immanent or cosmic justice. The emphasis is not, however, on the idea of rewards and punishments or on punishments alone (retribution), but on the mutual exchange of essentially equivalent but not identical values according to fixed traditional patterns, in the interests of the commonweal. Man, the elements, animals, plants and the supernatural cooperate in an orderly fashion, by means of a complex set of correlative interrelationships, for the good of all.
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> This concept of the universe is not "mechanistic" in the usual sense of the term, on account of the special role played by man in the scheme of things. Whereas, according to Hopi theory, the non-human universe is controlled *automatically* by the reciprocity principle, man is an active agent who may or may not acquiesce in it. While the world of nature is *compelled* to respond in certain prescribed ways to certain stimuli, man not only responds but also *elicits* response. Hence, man, in the measure that he obeys the rules, may exercise a certain limited control over the universe.
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> Hopi philosophy, therefore, ascribes to man an element of choice—which, it seems, is dependent on his will. . . . It is interesting to note in this connection that the Hopi use the same word (*nawakna*) for "to will" and "to pray." Praying is willing. The Hopi believe not only that man can control nature to a limited extent by observing these rules, but that if he does not do so, the universe may cease to function. That is, the movements of the sun, the coming of rain, the growth of the crops, the reproduction of animals and human beings depend (to a certain extent at least) on man's correct, complete and active carrying out of the rules.

While the authors of this book call the Hopi cosmology a "stone-age theory of the universe," it is hardly appropriate to speak of their thinking as "primitive." There is for example this sentence in their report on the Hopi I.Q.: "We found that on the Grace Arthur Point Performance Scale Hopi children made very high scores, which were in fact by far the highest among all those of the Indian tribes studied, and also remarkably higher than

those of the White school children on whom the test was standardized."

In any event, it is clear that the Hopis, and to some extent other Indian tribes, felt an obligation to the world as a part of their role in life, a view which is in dramatic contrast to the Western feeling, more or less taken for granted, that the world and all its resources, animate and inanimate, is a vast refectory table or *smorgasbord* with no other purpose than to serve human needs, appetites, and whims. In his now famous paper, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," Lynn White, Jr., maintained that the irresponsible, exploitive habits of modern technology were a quite logical continuation of the Christian tradition that the deity planned all the earth "explicitly for man's benefit and rule." The pagans of antiquity saw spirits and life in "every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill," but with the destruction of the old religions, Dr. White says, "Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects." It seems to him, therefore, "first, that, viewed historically, modern science is an extrapolation of natural theology and, second, that modern technology is at least partly to be explained as an Occidental, voluntarist realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature." At the outset, he suggests, this may have seemed a welcome sequence, but now, after about a century of the union of science and technology, we recognize that together they have given mankind "powers which, to judge by many of the ecologic effects, are out of control." If this is the case, he adds, then "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt." However, it should be noted that the Greeks lost a great part of their top soil through deforestation before conversion to Christianity, and that China was denuded of her forests during the rule of non-Christian emperors. For a long time, only the Buddhists planted trees in China.

The point of this discussion is not to fix blame so much as to establish the fact that the habit patterns of "moral" thinking in the modern world are either hostile or indifferent to the idea that men may have a mission to fulfill on earth—either a Promethean responsibility to all men, or a Hopi-like guardianship of the harmony of the world, in behalf of all its inhabitants.

Yet there is another side to the question, which may be recognized from the fact that, in many of the contemporary arguments about the world and its needs, the contestants often harbor private metaphysical assumptions which are indeed akin to Hopi beliefs, or Promethean vision. They don't identify these assumptions, even though it is just such underlying convictions which give enduring strength to movements devoted to conservation of natural beauty, to wildlife sanctuaries, to wilderness areas, and to the right of simple peoples to continue in their old ways of life without invasion by marauders of any sort.

Ethical or moral principles have no standing in scientific reasoning, so these motivating ideas are usually submerged or disguised, or given a pseudo-logical foundation by strained reasoning, as though man's love for his fellows, or his altruistic longings, must be concealed as some sort of subversion of the scientific method. This, Michael Polanyi shows, is precisely what happened to Karl Marx's Old Testament passion for social justice, which was de-moralized and made over into a conclusion of dialectical materialism (see Polanyi's *Tacit Dimension*, page 55 *et seq.*); and similar hidden moral feelings and assumptions are involved in the never-ending battle between environmentalists and eugenicists concerning the betterment of the human species.

Some day, perhaps, it will be seen that *all* spontaneous moral longings and ethical convictions come from the heart, and that while they need the close inspection and criticism of reason, they do not originate in reason—not, that is, in reason as a kind of logic machine for processing the data given in experience and arising from the innate qualities of human beings. One need be ashamed of having ethical assumptions no

more than the mathematician has reason to hide the axioms which he must postulate, and which are tested only by their consequences. Axioms are *sui generis.* Likewise moral or ethical principles.

A modern critic has said:

> The sciences are being taught without any awareness of the presuppositions of science, of the meaning and significance of scientific laws, and of the place occupied by the natural sciences within the whole cosmos of human thought. The result is that the presuppositions of science are normally mistaken for its findings.

It is plain enough, if you study the historical genesis of the sciences, that their materialism once had a strong moral impulse behind it. The "enemy" was bigoted, dogmatic religion, but the lusty child of the Enlightenment, modern science, decided to make a clean sweep and get rid not only of that sort of domineering religion, but *all* religion, and all metaphysics, too, since metaphysicians were after all potential theologians. In this way ethics, or the idea of moral law, was driven from the scene. In time, there was very little space left for the exercise of the moral instincts, except for the narrow area concerned with "sharing" the material bounty which science was to place at the disposal of the social managers in control. And since, in the predictions of not so many years ago, the ample supply of goods and services would satisfy all imaginable needs to overflowing, even the sharing problem would be rendered unimportant by the genius of technology under scientific guidance.

But neither the physical constitution of the planet nor the psycho-moral endowments of mankind have confirmed these predictions. And it is time to take note of the possibility that the lack of moral resources may be a far more serious insolvency than the threatened exhaustion of fossil fuels, of certain essential minerals and other elements upon which the life to which we are accustomed is said to depend.

There is one aspect of science, however, which ought to be carefully cherished and retained. That is the scientific devotion to difficult truth, and scientific wariness of all easy beliefs and effortless solutions. The Western world has been through a long cycle of *unearned* materialism and disbelief, in which the great majority simply followed their leaders in the opinions they held. Independent thinking was difficult—it is *always* difficult—and therefore seldom pursued. But today there is danger of a sudden fever of unearned *belief;* today faiths are acquired merely by the swing of the pendulum of popular views, instead of, again, by hard thinking.

There would be great value, then, in some careful examination of the great ethical systems of philosophy of the past—to be found in Eastern works such as the *Upanishads,* the *Bhagavad-Gita,* and in the writings of Plato and Plotinus among the Greeks, and some few others, such as Emerson, who taught philosophies to live by. Metaphysics and ethics are disciplines which are as exacting as any science, and if the works of certain scholars are consulted, might even be recognized as the parents of all sound scientific thinking.

REVIEW
WORKERS FOR THE WORLD

IN what may well be the best available account of the Catholic Worker movement and the quiet, self-effacing genius of Dorothy Day, Robert Coles says: "What Simone Weil saw as killing French factory workers and threatening its peasants, Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin founded a political and social movement to fight against: a world in which man has become the digit, the bribed Rotarian or Optimist, the applauded Stakhanovite." This sentence comes toward the end of the text of *A Spectacle Unto the World* (Viking, 1973, $10); a book combining the photographs of Jon Erikson with the insight of the psychiatrist who wrote *Children of Crisis.*

People like Dorothy Day make us wonder what they would do, what their lives would be like, if the world with which they struggle were different—better and decenter—or if such people were not so few. For, quite plainly, it is the cruelty and indifference of the world to human breakdown and suffering that has given direction to the efforts of Dorothy Day. Her heroes are Dostoevski and Tolstoy, and the chief characteristic of the Catholic Worker movement is an "unfailing concern for ordinary working-men and -women, matched by an equally emphatic involvement in the life they live." There are socio-political objectives, to be sure, which could be described as anarcho-pacifist, if a label is required, but what came through for Robert Coles is the moment-to-moment quality of everyday life in Dorothy Day's undertakings.

> She accords great importance to *becoming.* We not only *are,* we not only stand for this and that and live in such-and-such a way, but have within us a whole range of possibilities or potentialities. Given a chance for expression, they might emerge and make us different, a little bit so, or altogether so, in which case Saint Paul's description of "new men" might be considered applicable. Unquestionably, those in the Catholic Worker movement make up a religious community, but they are also a band of *workers.* They have chosen to seek after their ideals in a manner that makes the search a living experiment.

Robert Coles has the title of research psychiatrist, but the wholeness and simple humanity of his communications push the matter of his professional qualifications into the background. You get the feeling that he must be a very good doctor because he doesn't sound like one at all. His specialty does not intrude, doubtless because for him it is not a specialty, but only a tool. In short, this is a lovely book, and Jon Erikson's photographs of Dorothy Day (who is now in her seventies) and of scenes in the Catholic Worker hospitality houses are a perfect accompaniment for Coles' words (who would probably prefer this said the other way round).

The hospitality houses started by the Catholic Worker movement and the spirit in which they are conducted are strongly reminiscent of the work of the lay fraternities of pre-Reformation Europe, the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Lot. The members of these communities practiced voluntary poverty and devoted themselves to lives of service to the poor, having all things in common. The founder of this movement, Gerhard Groot, believed that men could live in fraternity without monastic vows. The first community, begun by him at Devanter, in Utrecht, was the home of Thomas à Kempis for seven years (1392-99). It was not long before there were some forty of these communities established in the chief cities of the Low Countries and north and central Germany. Volunteers who joined the communities came from every walk of life—nobles, artisans, scholars, students, laborers. The idea was to live and work in the world, teaching and doing good.

Since the members of the communities did not beg, but earned their keep, they were criticized by the mendicant orders of the Church. The schools of the Brothers of the Common Lot contributed a great deal to the awakening of northern Europe from medieval ignorance and apathy, and the brave services of the Brothers

during the scourges of the plague won the gratitude of common folk.

The idea of opening hospices or hospitality houses was proposed to Dorothy Day by Peter Maurin, a French wanderer of peasant origin who had worked in Europe to help children and orphans with the De La Salle Brotherhood, and had been deeply impressed by Kropotkin's *Field, Factory and Workshops.* He believed in return to the land, yet "he spent day and night with ordinary men and women who were simply trying to get by, survive today so there would be a tomorrow." He sought out Dorothy Day in 1932, and together they made an extraordinary team. "He was full of ideas, given to abstractions, bursting with programs. She was resourceful, sensible, quick to figure out the concrete approaches, a useful and practical beginning, a plan of operations." They began the *Catholic Worker* on May Day in 1933, getting 2500 copies printed for $57. Within a year or two, circulation soared to one hundred and fifty thousand. Apparently there was a hunger for the kind of material they prepared, and Dorothy was an accomplished writer and editor. Interestingly, the first hospitality house grew out of the needs of the down-and-outers who came to the office of the *Catholic* Worker to offer their help in getting out the paper. They needed food and clothing, and so a center came into being. "Within a few years there were thirtythree houses of hospitality and farms in the United States."

Through the years Dorothy Day and her colleagues have won the admiration of many, by simple consistency and faithfulness to certain principles:

> Even the unpopular and unrelenting pacifist stand that was taken by Dorothy Day and her associates during the late 1930s and through the Second World War earned grudging respect from many proudly atheistic radicals, especially those of more anarchist persuasion. In earlier years they may have dismissed Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day as well-meaning reformers, severely limited by their strange and sentimental involvement with the Catholic Church—of all nonprogressive institutions. Yet here were these devout Catholics willing to take on the United States government. Here were Catholics who opposed the concentration camps for Americans of Japanese descent, who would go to jail for opposing the cold war in the late 1940s and 1950s, even though it was a war directed at "atheistic communism. And as the years mounted up and became decades, here was a radical movement that *lasted.* In the 1950s and 1960s Dorothy Day and her friends committed themselves willingly and energetically to the civil-rights movement, to the cause of Cesar Chavez [her most recent jail term was in Fresno, last month, where she picketed for the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee], to the peace movement (one more war to be protested!) as they had to the stunned, unemployed families of the 1930s. So it is at least understandable that this movement came to be admired by those who simply ignored or glossed over some of its tenets.

Perhaps the best thing to say about this book is that Dorothy Day wholly deserves to be written about by a man like Robert Coles. Puzzles and contradictions there may be, but a review of a book like this is not the place to examine them. Reproducing the spectacle of how some humble people live what they believe is the work he undertook.

Centers for the Urban Environment (Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1973, $24.95) by Victor Gruen, is a very different sort of book, yet it is equally natural to ask the same question about its author: What would Victor Gruen be doing with his rare intelligence and apparently limitless energies if he lived in a world that didn't stack the cards so heavily against the way things ought to be? For again, erasing the effects of abuses and trying to put decencies and amenities in their place is his full-time occupation.

In two paragraphs he sets the stage with the facts and forces with which he and like-minded designers must contend:

> Science is academically divided into "humanities" (human sciences) and other types which, by implication, are "inhuman." In our emphasis on short-term, materialistic gains, we have allocated to human sciences only a secondary role to "applied" sciences or to technology. Technology—and technological progress--have become the expressions of mankind's highest ambitions. Through

> mass hypnosis man has been cowed into a condition of slavish servility to the monstrous tools he himself has created. He stoically accepts mass murder by movement machines, the undermining of his physical and mental health, the destruction of his living environment—in the same manner that our forefathers accepted destruction by such natural events as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, lightning and storms, as by divine forces. In our blind admiration for the achievements of technology we are even willing to overlook that "progress" is directed one-sidedly to quantitative standards, whereas quality has received only scant attention. We are being swamped with shoddy merchandise and incompetent services which could not pass the lowest quality standards set up in many civilized countries for the products of agriculture and livestock raising.
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> This condition becomes obvious when under pressure of public opinion certain manufacturers of certain products are called upon to show greater responsibility and when, in specific cases, governmental regulations are enforced. For example, when the American tobacco industry was attacked on a broad front for selling a product which causes cancer, it pointed out, with a certain legitimacy, that its contribution to the poisonings of mankind was modest in comparison with the achievements of industry generally and of the automobile manufacturers specifically. In order to defend their own position they played the role of "environmentalists," attacking vehemently all the other bigger polluters of the air we breathe. When they were forced by law to print on their packages of their product that it may cause cancer, they asked, with some justification that similar labels should be attached to every automobile in the salesrooms.

Mr. Gruen makes it clear that the problem is deeper than ideologies by showing that Austria, where industries are nationalized, has exactly the same sort of buck-passing problems. The solution, obviously, lies with the people themselves:

> If we change direction from striving for short-term, avarice-motivated, self-defeating aims to the long-term goal of protecting and enriching organic life, we can yet re-establish the biological balance and save ourselves.

Centers for the Urkan Environment is a large book (8½ x 11) of 266 pages with many photographs and illustrations to show how cities can survive and be turned into attractive, habitable places. Mr. Gruen *likes* cities and points out that they give people a variety of opportunities not available in rural life. He discusses at length and gives the plans for shopping centers, multifunctional centers, and urban cores. He has designed a considerable number of the improvements in the cities of the world and is in a position to consider the pros and cons of practically all aspects of urban planning. Obviously, there is no lack of the talent needed to reform our cities, our towns and rural areas. The problem lies in the way people think about themselves and what they are doing with their lives. It is, after all, openly infantile for grown human beings to suppose that if they can find someone who is spreading more poison than they are, their own offenses can be tolerated. But this, as Mr. Gruen shows, is the going state of mind. It is the same world of blindness and indifference that Dorothy Day and others are fighting against.

COMMENTARY
DAWNING SANITY

LLOYD KAHN, who edited the *Domebooks* and several years ago built seventeen domes at Pacific High School, in Los Gatos, Calif., sets down some second thoughts about homes and shelters in *Place* (Vol. II, No. 1), a new quarterly issued in Menlo Park by several of the people who used to get out the *Whole Earth Catalog.* His article is called "Smart but not Wise," which is what the California Indian, Ishi, thought of the whites. From an admirer of Buckminster Fuller Kahn has changed into a designer and builder who believes in owner-built structures made out of local materials—wood, stone, dirt—with as much hand labor as possible. He is trying to recover almost lost knowledge about building that was widespread a hundred years ago.

Attendance at a conference of architects at MIT made the occasion for this article. Kahn's criticism of what is happening at MIT in the name of architecture is low-key but devastating. The bright young men there are using computers to reach a great new "breakthrough," and one test they made was to stack blocks in the way of sixty hamsters to see what arrangements the hamsters like and don't like. "Apparently," says Kahn, "what happened was the hamsters didn't like *any* way the machine stacked blocks, they didn't like the blocks, they didn't like being in the museum, and they just banged around in and out of the blocks."

Enough of that. Kahn on wood and rock versus plastic materials:

> Consider that a tree is rendered into "building materials" by the sun, with a beautiful arrangement of minerals, water, and air into a good smelling, strong, durable building material. Moreover, trees look good as they grow, they help purify air, provide shade, nuts to squirrels, and colors and textures on the landscape. And, *wood is the only building material we can regenerate.* On the other hand, most plastics are derived by pumping non-renewable oil from the earth, burning/refining/mixing it, with noxious fumes and poison in the rivers and ocean, etc.

Kahn sees the urgent need for better forest management and plans to give time to getting trees planted all over the country, so "our grandchildren's children will have wood to build with."

He told the MIT architects that they were "professionals," not "people," and were "playing academic futuristic games." Plastics may have slick seductive appeal and produce flashy shelters, but they are not really practical. MIT technicians would do better to work on non-polluting energy sources such as solar heat, wind electricity, methane from compost, and waterwheels like the ones that used to run the sawmills of New Hampshire. Kahn's work is available from Shelter Publications, P.O. Box 279, Bolinas, Calif. 94924.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE EARLY YEARS

THE problems of small children change hardly at all. This is at once evident from reading Susan Isaacs' *Troubles of Children and Parents* (Schocken paperback, 1973, $2.95), a book made up of letters to mothers and nurses—or "nannies." Susan Isaacs is a name well known in England among those concerned with child education. She is regarded as having laid the foundations for the modern British infant school, and her own school, which she began in Cambridge in 1924, the Malting House School, is said to have been the first "open classroom." Eva Glaser, who contributes an introduction to the present edition of Susan Isaacs' book, says that the Malting House School "embraced the ideas of both the integrated day and family grouping."

Troubles of Children and Parents, Susan Isaacs' last book, was first published in 1948, the year she died. The letters it contains were written during the years from 1927 until her death. Some of them appeared in *Nursery World* between the years of 1929 and 1936. A deep regard for the growth and freedom of children is joined with basic honesty and informed common sense in these letters. Often it is enough to tell the parents that what is happening with their child is natural and to be expected. As Mrs. Isaacs says in her Preface:

> Similar questions crop up every year with each new family of children. Not only so. Many of these problems are transient and normal, however trying to the parents they may be. They pass away with sensible handling and with the further development of the child. Worried young parents seldom realize this. It is often a great help to them to learn how frequent and typical such happenings are in the developing child. Often the mere lessening of anxiety in the parent through the knowledge that the early years of childhood are bound to have such storms and crises will do much to ease the difficulties of parents, and hence of the children.

The first letter is a good example of both the inquiries by parents and Mrs. Isaacs' answers. This mother has a girl four years and four months old. The trouble was precipitated when there was a change in nannies and the mother told the girl her old nannie had gone on a long holiday. Later the child began clinging to the mother, refusing to be left with the new nannie. The mother wrote:

> She seems quite unable to help these outbursts and it is pitiable to see her; she works herself up to such a pitch of crying, and imploring to be with me. I have been firm over these scenes and insisted on her going out with nannie, having meals, etc., though she is sometimes left alone until she has "recovered." I have *never* deceived her, and I have reasoned with her and explained that I cannot always have her with me. But when the occasions crop up she seems quite unable to control herself.

Mrs. Isaacs replied:

> I would suggest that the chief trouble with your little girl is that you have not been strictly truthful with her about the loss of her nannie. She is terrified to let you go out of her sight because she does not feel sure that yon will come back, even though you promise to do so. A child of her age knows perfectly well that holidays do not last as lone as this and that nannie's absence must mean much more than a holiday. You can be sure that she has sensed from your manner, whenever you told her that nannie was on holiday, that this is not strictly true. Intelligent children are extraordinarily quick to sense signs of evasion of the truth in grown-ups.

She recommends that the truth be explained to the child, remarking that children respond readily to frankness. Mrs. Isaacs then tells the story of a mother who learned to deal honestly with her small boy:

> When the boy was about two and a half the excellent nurse he had always had was knocked down and seriously injured by a motor car. The mother and father quite naturally feared to tell the truth about this to the little boy, and when he asked for his nurse they told him that she had gone on a long holiday. They were quite sure that the boy had heard no conversations about the real facts of the matter, but after many months—nearly a year—they came to the conclusion that, in spite of their great care, the boy had sensed the fact that they had not told the truth.

> He had appreciated the subtle expression in their manner and voices that something serious had happened, and the fact that they were evading when they said that the nurse had gone on a holiday. This was brought home to the parents by a change in the boy's emotional attitude to life. From being a happy, stable child he became not merely rather difficult but characterized by a special quality of facetiousness and excessive lightheartedness, which hinted at strong anxiety and distrust underneath.

So, at an appropriate time, they told him the truth and answered his questions, with the result that the strain in his manner disappeared, his facetiousness dropped away, and he "returned to a normal, confident attitude, with complete trust in the grown-ups around him."

Another letter was in reply to a mother whose three-and-a-half-year-old daughter sucked her thumb. The mother feels that she must break the child of this habit and has promised her a tricycle for her next birthday *if* she stops sucking her thumb. She has tried other methods without success. Mrs. Isaacs responded:

> I wonder why you feel so strongly about your little girl's thumb-sucking, especially seeing that she only does it when she is going to sleep? Few people like to see it when it happens in the daytime, but there really is no good reason why we should feel so strongly about it when it is merely the child's way of comforting herself to sleep. I don't know whether what you fear is that the child's teeth and mouth may be pulled out of shape. No good grounds have been shown for believing that thumb-sucking does permanently deform the mouth and teeth. I think you have probably made it ever so much harder for your little girl through starting punishment and prohibition so early. It is very rarely that the bitter aloes, or the gloves put on at night, or tying the hands, does cure this habit. I have had case after case reported to me in which these methods have been useless. I expect the reason why your doctor's advice to leave the little girl alone about it did not work may have been because you were not really convinced about the wisdom of doing so, and so the child sensed your distress and disapproval, and therefore still felt guilty about doing it. And three years of age is very young to be appealed to as a "big girl" to give up such a habit. The fact that she lies awake so long at night when she tries not to suck her thumb shows how very sensitive she is about your blame. I see no good grounds for distressing a tiny child about an innocent habit so as to make her lie awake night after night in this way. And I wish you had not got yourself in such a quandary about the birthday promise. There isn't any way that can be guaranteed to break her of the thumb-sucking before her birthday, in February, unless it were something that would terrify the child, and thus be infinitely worse than the thumb-sucking could ever be. . . . It is useful and legitimate to appeal to the "big girl" idea if the habit is not given up by six or seven, but it is disproportionate to do this at three years of age. Now, don't you think the best way of dealing with the problem about the promise would be to transfer the emphasis to the child's *attempt* to give up the thumb-sucking? That is to say, to let the pram or the tricycle be the reward for the *effort* to give it up? I don't see how you can wisely make the present contingent upon the actual *success* in giving it up. I would comfort her by saying, "I know you have tried hard, and we won't mind about it at present, as I am sure that when you *are* a big girl, and go to school you won't feel you want to do it." I think you will find that such an attitude of understanding and sympathy would be far more helpful to her.

Susan Isaacs' book is filled with this sort of sense, from beginning to end.

* * *

Back in 1970 (Dec. 16) we summarized a Los Angeles *Times* article about Pat Conroy, a young man who had some wonderful adventures teaching in a one-room schoolhouse on a small island off the coast of South Carolina. The material in that article has since been expanded into a delighting book, *The Water Is Wide,* by Mr. Cronroy, published by Houghton Mifflin and Dell (1972). And we now learn from an observant movie-goer that Martin Ritt, who directed *Sounder,* recently completed *Conrack,* a film adapted from *The Water Is Wide.* Our volunteer movie critic expects it to be every bit as good as *Sounder.*

FRONTIERS

Ingenuity in Community

COMMUNITY COMMENTS for last July (published by Community Service, Inc., Box 243, Yellow Springs, Ohio) provides especially interesting material on self-help in community. Self-help doesn't just "happen," of course. Somebody with imagination gets a cycle of self-help going, but the exciting thing is the way it catches on and involves others. First in this issue is a story about a group called FIGHT in the ghetto area of Akron, Ohio. FIGHT means Food in Ghetto Homes and Tenements. It began with the attempt of Gale Miller and a partner and his partner's wife to start a "soul food" restaurant that would be a great success and solve all their problems. But it didn't. As Dale Miller tells it:

> After a couple of months we found that we didn't know enough about the restaurant business to stay alive, so we decided to close it up and just walk away from it. Rather than stay there until we had sold out the remaining food, we decided to give it away. It was wintertime and the school children were going back and forth to school from a pocket of 1700 families in an eight-block housing development. So we decided to give the food to the children in the morning on the way to school. By the next morning we found them there and they had doubled in number. We didn't have enough to feed these people so we said, "Well, we'll have to do something. Come back at lunch time and we'll have something." Well, most big supermarkets instead of giving to charitable organizations will give a certificate for $5 worth of merchandise in their store. So we covered twenty or thirty different supermarkets in the city and, using these certificates, by lunch we had stew, chili, and crackers. We went to the unclaimed freight depot and got things that had been damaged.
>
> It was such a good feeling that we couldn't stop. So we said, "We'll need some help in order for this to develop into something. Let's keep it going." We didn't know what we were going to do or what it was going to develop into. And we had no idea of what the community spirit could do. . . .
>
> We were right across the street from some beer taverns; nearby was Alcoholics Anonymous. Some of the adults couldn't understand how we could feed the children. They came in and they were hungry. So we fed them, too. Then we thought, "Wait a minute. Sometime this has to stop." We would have to provide some method by which we could keep going and not get bogged down just giving.

They found that the adults felt better about taking the food if they could do some work. One man said he could paint the place, and he and some others began painting. Women offered to do baby-sitting. So exchanges of various sorts spread out. Dale Miller and his partner hustled some food at low cost from food processors and kept on feeding people. Some local police asked what they could do to help. After three or four months they saw it wasn't going to stop so they thought up their name and then, when they had an "identity," politicians began to give them small grants. So they added some bookkeeping records and a little structure:

> We had to move ahead in our own way. We opened a clothing factory, got on television, made a brochure, and a community project magazine. Suddenly people thought we were part of the Black Panther Party. I managed to become spokesman for some of the minority labor groups in the area. We began to work with the school dropouts and started with Ellen Margolis in a free school. And we had enough numbers to make an impression on the authorities to help the free school to continue. . . .

A leaflet tells what the FIGHT group has done to date: established the Berth, a coffee house and cultural center; started the Akron Free School, now in its third year and praised as a model for educational change; started "Fix-It," which does home repair without charge to the poor; works for equal opportunity for minorities, helping two Black contractors to get going; initiated a bond program with counseling on personal recognizance bonding; and advises as to filing complaints of civil rights discrimination.

There are several pages of an interview by Griscom Morgan with Dale Miller and some of his associates, who tell how their methods cut through red tape and provide exchange services, with the result that a lot is accomplished quickly:

> We've never changed the thrust of how we get people together who have different skills and

> exchange them. For instance, we have a secretary here, she's been here for two years now; she's never been paid, but we can support her because we are providing low income housing. Now, in providing low income housing we are able to rent a home that we have fixed up for a tenant and have a room to spare for a person who can't afford rent, and maybe take five dollars out of the rent and give it to the girl in the office if she has some specific need. For instance, if she needs a tooth pulled and we don't want to wait on the Beacon Journal Foundation to screen her and go through the application, we create a circumstance where she can get her tooth pulled. Or a pair of shoes or whatever. We generate these circumstances by our relationship in a thorough on-going knowledge of the resources of the city and the people that we come into contact with.

And so on. These people could also call themselves Ingenuity, Inc., the *Inc* standing for in community.

Another story in *Community Comments* is quoted from the July *Ms.*, which tells about nine of the forty-four women who were machinists in a shoe factory in England that decided to close its doors. These nine women did a "work-in" in the factory, continuing to work without pay. The London *Times* reported favorably on their exploit, so the owner of the company stopped trying to drive them out. The women began making various things out of scrap, which they sold. Then, after four months of struggle, the Scott Bader Co., Ltd. gave them a low interest loan and a friendly lawyer volunteered to organize a company for them. The women became equal shareholders in a common-ownership business and at the time of this report they had three contracts to make products they had developed.

There are other good stories in this issue of *Community Comments.* The paper is edited by Griscom Morgan and appears six times a year. A subscription is $3.50.