VOLUME XXV, NO. 40
OCTOBER 4, 1972

THE FORM OF HUMAN LIFE

PEOPLE who know what they want achieve at least one desirable thing: their lives have definite form, and this form, which grows out of deliberated action, is plainly evident and usually admired by others. The man who has been able to define to himself what he wants to do, where he wants to get, has the basis for order in decision. He reads his entire environment in terms of its relationship to his purposes. He looks at the world as one who is consciously moving through it, and what he sees in the world takes on meanings that depend upon his ends.

Does he delude himself? How can he possibly have any "objectivity" toward what he experiences? Should any of his conclusions about what is in the world be called "knowledge"? Surely, what is "out there" is more than mere stepping-stones to individual human objectives. But then the question arises: Is there any such thing as "knowledge" apart from movement toward goals? If something is really happening in the world, if there is *meaning* in existence—whether of a rock, a star, or a man—then knowledge about the world ought to be in terms of that meaning, which is a way of speaking of fulfillment of some sort. If this should be true, then there is a sense in which the language of knowledge must be the language of fulfillment, of movement toward ends, and to speak of anything without reference to its progressive fulfillment is to talk about only its shadow, not its reality. It is at least conceivable that a man who is himself pursuing fulfillment has a better chance of understanding the world than one who rejects the very idea of fulfillment as a "bias" which makes objective knowledge impossible.

Whatever the resolution of this dilemma, it is a fact that we are spontaneously drawn to people who have firm purposes. If the purpose of an actively engaged man seems an admirable one, it may be adopted by others who are hungry for meaning, and then a social pattern develops, or even a social movement. More broadly, the spirit of an entire age may be determined by the development and expression of related driving purposes in many men, such as the great westward expansion of the American population during the nineteenth century, in pursuit of land and gold. An ideal of rugged and adventurous manhood rose out of this great migration, generation after generation of the young being moved by the promise and romance they saw in the purposes of the first adventurous settlers, to seek similar fulfillments.

It is probably safe to say that the character of all civilizations and cultures has been initially shaped and differentiated in this way. Even the hierarchical structures of ancient traditional societies can be traced to the example and teachings of legendary religious leaders who proposed varying duties and functions for men according to their capacities and needs.

So much for the idea of purpose as determined by social influences. What, then, of individual purpose, dictated by inner longing? Is it really possible, one wonders, to separate the inchoate urge to do, to be, to know, from the intense desire to break out of the confinements which have been superimposed on very nearly everyone by the time in which he lives? What might be the individual longing of someone isolated, say, on a desert island, completely free of any alien pressure to conform to some approved social pattern? This question is rendered useless by the sensible comment that such a person would probably want above all to get off the island and have contact with other human beings. Yet there is nonetheless a difference between a man's longing for freedom and the feelings which, once allowed expression, cause him to take up a

particular course of action. If his action leads to some kind of fulfillment, produces meaning, and gives his life a form distinctively his own, then he *did* have an independent purpose, along with the desire to break out of some circumstantial prison. Some remarks by William Irwin Thompson in the September *Harper's* are pertinent here:

> The imaginative individual leaves the universities and the government agencies behind to move out into a new space, but the leftist radical stays behind. Like a guilt-ridden Sampson he is attracted to the Philistines and can mask only his guilt by bringing the whole thing down on top of himself. The imaginative individual must walk out because he wishes to create new things rather than destroy old ones. The man who shoots horses as a way of changing agrarian society does not invent automobiles; the man who bombs refineries as a way of changing automotive society does not design cities in which cars are unnecessary.

Mr. Thompson is talking about what is, unfortunately, a very rare species. He means people who have courage, independence, and who envision purposes which are authentically useful to other people. They are not just dissenters, but dissenters who are determined to build. Was there, will there ever be, a time when such individuals do not have to be dissenters—when the spirit of the age is in harmony with their vision, enabling them to start right out and do what they want to do? Perhaps that is what the ancients meant when they spoke of the Golden Age. A time like the Golden Age is hard for us to conceive of, yet children imagine it very easily—and the young, the students not yet made cynical, seem to be looking for someone they can *trust*, and with very deep longing. They want help in finding ways to fill their lives with purpose, but they have learned not to expect to find it in any of the familiar places.

We are getting around to our real point, which is that this sense of having engrossing purpose, of knowing what you want, or want to do, and to be busy developing the means for doing it—that this is a deep and abiding hunger felt by human beings. It is so deep, so fundamental, that when the longing begins to be satisfied people don't talk much about it—just as, when people know a truth, they don't talk about it as "the truth," but simply embody it in what they do.

The other aspect of this point is that the modern world is a really terrible place in which to turn loose young people, or any kind of people who are looking for a purpose to give meaning to their lives. In the past, that need was met in diverse ways which were illustrated by how older people behaved. Parents had *ends;* they were not, perhaps, the best conceivable ends, but the children didn't know that, and neither did the parents, most of the time. But today, the ends people pursued in the nineteenth century, or in the first half of the twentieth century, having been raised to a higher power by the "how-to" methods of technology, have either been reached and so lost their savor, or can be seen to be completely unattainable by reason of various self-defeating effects. In any event these ends no longer attract because they are not what we thought them to be. In short, the purposes of the nineteenth century, consolidated, socialized, institutionalized in dozens of ways and made the foundation of modern education, are increasingly a kind of hearsay in which the present and coming generation can hardly believe. Unmotivated, formless lives are the common result.

How, actually, does this disillusionment—which is also a kind of awakening—work? An article in the Summer-Fall issue of *New Directions in Teaching* by Sondra Zeidenstein gives one answer to this question. Mrs. Zeidenstein wanted to be an English teacher. In her autobiographical article she tells how she became one, and also what happened in the process:

> In the fall of 1949 I had just graduated from an Andy Hardy sort of high school where the little writing I'd done was an imitation of *Reader's Digest* rhetoric rather than an attempt to find my own style. The university I was now entering seemed a giant, cosmopolitan, unassailable institution. Like the rest of the incoming freshmen, I never thought of questioning its standards and practices, I was pleased

to have made it and determined to succeed and learn everything that was being taught. And, of course, whatever judgment the institution made of me was bound to be right.

That first semester I took French, Botany, Great Books and English Composition. In the other courses we did things that made sense to me, like talking French, looking at leaves under microscopes, and discussing Plato, but in Freshman Comp, I simply accepted on faith that the strange things we were doing made sense to someone. We read long essays on abstractions about which I'd never thought before. We analyzed the structure of these essays and discussed their conclusions. I say "we" but in the class of about sixteen there were two or three students—from New York and Chicago—who did all the talking. They seemed to know what the essays were about and were able to speak in abstractions. I couldn't even follow them most of the time. . . .

The course was pretty much of a mystery to me. I never saw any relationship between the papers I wrote and the essays I read and heard discussed and, of course, none between the papers and me. . . . I never submitted a paper during my whole academic career that transmitted the voice of a living, feeling being. And for that I was rewarded very highly.

She began to teach, but her own sense of something being wrong—probably everything seemed wrong—made her realize that "many educated people write as if language had no connection with life." Further—

It was painful to realize that in teaching Freshman English essentially as I had been taught it, I was perpetuating an empty, even harmful, tradition. But the realization set me free, because it showed me what "college-level" had meant to me. Liberated from that abstraction I could begin to consider changes in a positive way.

During this same period, I was paying close attention to my responses to the language I was experiencing around me. I found that I was responding with suspicion and wariness to language that was studied, rhetorical. I felt awakened and refreshed by language that revealed a person trying to create meaning out of his experience. Politicians turned me off . . . so did announcers, newscasters, catalogues, applications, memos, airline "personnel," doctors, telephone recordings, and most people who answered telephones, sat behind desks or stood behind official counters. Instead of being connected with experience, I felt cut off from it by a grey mass of words. It didn't seem strange to me that people were turning to drugs, immediate sensation, pummeling music and "oh, wows!" So much else in the environment was deadening.

The propagandists for the war annoyed me but its logicians terrified me. They were like scholastics whose arguments of formal perfection hovered darkly over the real world. I think the recent publication of the Pentagon Papers exposed the power and sterility of modern scholasticism. The editors of *The New Yorker* expressed the kind of response I felt as I read the crucial memos written by our academic establishment's most exemplary users of language: "In the *Times* story, we can overhear the voices that counted, and they are cold, cold voices. . . . The men writing these memos seem to have suppressed all human faculties except certain overdeveloped accounting abilities, which are too narrow even to be called intellect. Seen through such lenses, the world grew remote and dim."

The rest of Mrs. Zeidenstein's article is about the changes she instituted, first in herself and then in her teaching. What did she do? She read people like Carl Rogers, Paulo Freire, and John Holt, but most of all she consulted her own feelings about what was the good and healthy thing to do. She adopted some basic principles, such as that she didn't need to mold or remake the students, who could do that themselves if they needed to. She concludes this discussion:

The "convictions" that now guide me as a teacher are, I hope, only working hypotheses, liable to change and modification as my experience indicates. I hope that I will have the ability to stay open to experience because I believe that "going through changes" is the appropriate condition of man.

What can be said about the "changes" this teacher went through, in order to reach her present outlook? Initially, we might say, she wanted to teach. This was her purpose, her idea of meaning and fulfillment. But teaching involves other questions, such as what to teach and who is to be taught, and the kind of results or fruition teaching may be expected to produce. A teacher, like all the rest of us, has a malleable, suggestible side, and during her training and the beginning of her career Mrs. Zeidenstein accepted from others

answers to the *philosophical* questions concerning the content and goals of teaching and the nature of the students. Then, for the reasons she gives, a cycle of painful doubt drove her to look for other answers. The old conceptions of meaning and fulfillment which she had absorbed from others, which were embodied in the institutions of learning and other social authorities of the day, led to activities which she felt to be not only meaningless but harmful. She found counsels which, unlike the education she had endured, and for a time believed in, did not provide her with "authorities," but encouraged her to rely upon her own immediate perceptions of what was good and true. Little by little, she found her sense of purpose confirmed and supported by working to stir and foster similar awakenings and growth processes in other human beings, as distinguished from teaching the "finalities" which the purposes of past generations had declared. Her subject-matter was no longer the last word about the world and the things in it, as revealed by certified experts, but the wondering human mind and heart.

Why does making a change of this sort involve the individual in an order of experience which may be very difficult to bear? Mainly because experience of this sort never submits to final definitions, nor will it divide into neat categories. The kind of thinking it provokes gives no security to the impressionable, dependent part of human nature. This thinking can have little relation to static structures, but animates, instead, the living organism of an active, daring imagination. Transcendence is its principle of being, vision the basis of its order, which is revealed only by the dynamic flow of growth.

Every human being has this polarity in him—this passive dependence and its opposite of selfhood—and no one in whom the sparks of changing purpose are trying to burst into flame can evade the ambivalences and false starts, the desperate flights followed by shy, new beginnings, which moving from one to another and perhaps far higher plateau of being inevitably involves. There is an extraordinary range of evidence suggesting that the age in which we live is more and more characterized by the trembling uncertainties this change is bringing to people in every walk of life. If this is the case, then the appearance of formlessness, of lack of purpose, of mournful passivity disturbed by sudden and often abortive impulse, enormous self-pity and endless outcries of complaint—all these depressing phenomena of the times are "natural" concomitants of the psychological disorder which overtakes human beings who are being forced to let go of the past—because the purposes and rules of the past no longer work—yet have not yet found paths into the future which they feel able to trust.

The confusion might be likened to the turmoil and fright that commonly mark a birth—any sort of birth. It is the peculiar virtue of those who undertake to teach to be able to see the fragile outline of a new purpose within the disorder of the multiple exhaustion and death of old purposes. The teacher *understands* birth processes and is not unduly upset by the lashing about and reflex rebellions which are likely to be no more than old and now useless habits wearing themselves out. Ideas and beliefs, after all, are not neutral counters, but have a life which was obtained from the driving energies of human beings, and when their time for dissolution comes they fight for their existence like cornered animals. The teacher knows this because in him this struggle has become a *conscious* process. To move from being a collector of "true facts" to a life of awareness in a world of growth is an ordeal of the spirit—the teacher's initiation into the world of human reality. Mrs. Zeidenstein finds this reality, which she learned from the inside, best expressed in a passage by Paulo Freire:

> Unlike men, animals are simply *in* the world, incapable of objectifying either themselves or the world. They live a life without time, properly speaking, submerged in life with no possibility of emerging from it, adjusted and adhering to reality. Men, on the contrary, who can sever this adherence

> and transcend mere being in the world, add to the life in which they have their existence which they make. To exist is thus a mode of life which is proper to the being who is capable of transforming, of producing, of deciding, of creating, and of communicating himself.

She comments: "I also am convinced that the purpose of education is to help man make his existence."

This teacher is one of those whose purpose is to try to convert the world to feeling and acting on the reality that man makes his existence out of himself—that this, indeed, is the dignity and promise of being human, as Pico della Mirandola affirmed so long ago. One of the tasks of literate intelligence in the present is to show that this view, this purpose, is indeed the spirit of the transformation that now affects many, many human beings, each according to his own conceptual vocabulary and field of experience. Teachers are especially good spokesmen concerning this work, by reason of their own struggle to reach to principles which awaken and free instead of confining their students. But there are other spokesmen, too, and the present diversity of the idiom of self-discovery is its best protection against falsification and imitative fraud.

REVIEW
A VANISHING PEOPLE

WE come quite late to Farley Mowat's *People of the Deer*, which was first published by Little, Brown twenty years ago, but there are compensations. Not only does this book afford much good reading for only seventy-five cents (in a Pyramid paperback), but it is also the kind of book that does not go out of date. Mowat, a Canadian now about fifty years old, is one of the most effective writers of our time concerning man's relationships with nature. We have read two of his other books, one on how well the Russians are developing Siberia, and *Never Cry Wolf*, which is a gripping and at the same time extremely witty defense of a much maligned species.

The People of the Deer may be the swan song of a vanishing tribe or race of Eskimos. In 1947 and 1948, when Mowat explored the country of the Ihalmiut in the Northwest Territories of Canada, there were only forty of these inland Eskimos alive, and it seemed as though they, too, would soon succumb unless the Canadian government suddenly changed its policies. The fate of these people is closely bound up with the caribou, the arctic deer which supply them with food and clothing, and the caribou are being killed off by white sportsmen and hunters. Other factors are also taking their toll, since malnutrition leads to disease, and the sporadic attempts of welfare agencies to help these Eskimos have been peculiarly unintelligent—neglecting, for example, their requirement of a heavily fat diet. Feeding Eskimos starchy food is equivalent to dooming them to death.

There are two sides to this book. The most important side is the report of how the Eskimos live, what they believe, and how they treat one another and the occasional stranger who comes among them. It is a long book—more than 300 pages—and Mowat lived with the Ihalmint for two years, giving him much to describe. The other side is the voice of the accuser, telling of the continuous cruelty of the whites against these people—an unconscious cruelty for the most part, side-effect of the customary pursuit by white men of their own interests. This indifference was continuing when Farley Mowat wrote, and may continue today.

What sort of thing happened? An Eskimo friend of Mowat told him that when the white men first came, they gave the Eskimos rifles and showed them how to use them. So, the people put aside their spears and bows. The white traders wanted furs, so the Eskimos trapped them, expecting to exchange pelts for food. But then, one winter, they brought their pelts to the trading post only to find it empty of both trader and food supply. The fur market was depressed and the pelts were worthless. That was one of the winters when many Eskimos died of starvation, since they had trapped instead of hunting for food. Five years passed, and then the trader came back, wanting more furs. Again the Eskimos trapped instead of hunting, and again, after a time, the trader disappeared. Mowat's Eskimo friend, Ohoto, asked:

> Why is it you white men should come for a time, stay for a time, and then suddenly vanish when we are most in need of your help? Why is it? Why can we not take our fox pelts to the trader and have the shells for our guns in return, for this is what the trader has taught us to do? This mystery I cannot understand.

One very bad winter when famine had killed many, a party of Eskimos came upon a trader's cabin. They were so hungry and tired they fell in the snow in his yard. When the trader came out—

> We got to our feet and stood there not sure what we should do. At last Ootek pointed to the hollows that lay on his cheeks, and showed how his ribs stuck out from his belly. I lay down again in the snow and dosed my eyes like a dead man so that the *Kabluna*—the white man—would know how it was at the camps.
>
> And the trader—did not understand!
>
> He went into his cabin and brought back a fox pelt, holding it up with one hand, and stretching the

other hand out to us. Then a great sickness filled me, for we had no fox pelts to trade. Starving men cannot trap fox pelts and I saw that if fox pelts were demanded there could be no help for the People.

When we showed him we had no foxes the white man suddenly grew very angry and I thought that perhaps he had not understood why we came. Again and again we tried to show what our need was, and again and again we lifted our parkas so he could see the bones of our bodies. But something was wrong and he did not understand.

At last, perhaps from fear, because the Eskimos had rifles, the trader gave them a small bag of flour a child could carry and slammed his door. The flour provided one meal for the people in the camp, but made many of them sick. They began dying off, one by one. Then, finally, the deer came on their great migration, so that thirty-two of the forty survived. That was in the spring of 1947.

Mowat was drawn to visit the Ihalmiut Eskimos, who then lived at the mouth of a river emptying into Nueltin Lake, by memories of a train ride from Winnipeg to Churchill (on Hudson Bay) when he was fifteen years old. He had seen the river of caribou from the train window—watched the great migration, the reindeer of the Canadian North, plodding without haste to their fawning grounds in the lake regions west of Chesterfield Inlet. The train had to wait an hour for the deer to cross the tracks. This was in 1935. After the war, when Mowat was released from the Canadian army, he read what he could find on the region of the People of the Deer, as an explorer of a century before had named them, and found that hardly any white man had been there since. So, Mowat persuaded a flyer to drop him at a lonely trader's camp near the timber line. There he found a part Indian trader, a young man who had adopted two Eskimo children he had saved from starvation. Before long they visited the Eskimo camp, and Mowat's great adventure began.

Who are the Ihalmint? They have legends to account for their origin, and their memory goes back to a time when they migrated eastward to the great barren plains of the Keewatin Territory. They are unwarlike, and the region was a refuge from the attacks of the Chipewyan Indians, who went southward when they were no longer pushed by Crees, whom the whites had practically destroyed. The Ihalmiut lived for a time in peace at the edge of the forested areas and in the barrens, and at about the turn of the century numbered some two thousand, Mowat believes. Then came the traders, followed by the white killers of the caribou, accomplishing "the destruction which two millenniums and countless hazards of the flesh had been unable to achieve."

Determined to understand the People of the Deer, Mowat began by showing his desire to learn their language. His Eskimo friends were pleased by this interest and performed a little ceremony which not only made him "a man of the Ihalmiut," but also what they called a "song cousin" of two of the tribesmen, which meant that he shared in all they possessed. Then they began to teach him to speak their tongue:

In a month's time I was able to make myself understood and I could understand most of what was said to me. I became pretty cocky, and started to consider myself something of a linguist. It was not until a year had gone by that I discovered the true reason for my quick progress.

The secret lay, of course, with Ootek, who, with the cooperation of the rest of the People, had devised a special method of teaching me a language that is, in reality a most difficult one. They had approached the problem with great acumen, first reasoning that a white man probably possesses a rather inferior brain which cannot be expected to cope with the full-blown intricacies of the language. They made a plan and, apparently letting me lead the way, they actually led me by a shortcut invented solely for my personal use.

Later he came to know more of the complexity of the Eskimo language, which has, he says, "a flexibility and a delicate shading of meaning that is probably unsurpassed by any tongue spoken today." He realized that he had known only a "basic Eskimo" which his friends had invented and taught to him. Finally he became more expert, finding that the Eskimos

were indeed capable of thinking in abstract terms. While he could never speak as they did, he was able to record their folk tales and something of their history.

From daily relations with the People, Mowat absorbed a working knowledge of their outlook on life. During a small incident in which he departed from Eskimo custom—he was trapping mice (as a zoologist), and not fur-bearing beasts—he noticed that he was not bothered by many questions about his odd ways. There was this explanation:

> This is the first law of the land: that a man's business is sacred unto himself, and that it is no part of his neighbor's duty to interfere in any way unless the community is endangered. However, this does not mean that assistance is withheld in cases of need. In fact the second and perhaps the most important law of the land is that while there is food, equipment, or bodily strength in any one of the tents, no man in another tent shall want for any of these.
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> This belief has led to a communization of all material things in the most real and best sense of the word. Nevertheless, individual ownership still exists in the camps, and this paradox may seem hard to grasp. Put it this way: every item of equipment is the personal property of one person, or of a family group. But if a stranger in need of a spear should come to the place, any spear is his for the taking. He does not necessarily need to ask permission of the owner, though he usually does, and no direct recompense is expected or offered. He may or may not return the spear when he is finished, for the spear is now *his* property, and is not just something he borrowed.
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> Obviously the system is not abused. Used with discretion and only under pressure of real need, it has greatly assisted in making man's existence possible in the Barrens.

When Mowat, during the period of learning the ways of the People, violated their code again and again, they neither reproached him nor retaliated in any way. They seemed to regard him as a child who had not yet grown up to mature ways. "Anger," he says, "is a luxury in which the People dare not indulge." They see it as a sign of savagery. Their chief punishment of serious offenders is isolation, and a small dose of ostracism is usually enough to cure a man of a bad tendency or defect. There is never any "revenge" or permanent stigma because of wrong-doing.

Reading this book brings many long thoughts. Why, for one thing, should a life lived under what we should regard as unbearable difficulties and privations, produce such wonderful people? What besides sheer hardship is involved? Could a "civilized" race learn to accomplish so much with so little? And why do such fine books have so little effect on the policies of organized society in relation to such peoples? We have not even begun to understand these things.

COMMENTARY
TOWARD ANOTHER ORDER

LAST April, in an opinion which dissented from the Supreme Court decision rejecting the Sierra Club's plea that the ski resort at Mineral King would harm the interests of its members, Justice Douglas declared that inarticulate species of the ecological web have a right to spokesmen. He had reference to threatened forms of life "the pileated woodpecker as well as the coyote and the bear, the lemmings as well as the trout in the streams"—but he plainly included advocacy for voiceless members of the human community as well.

In *People of the Deer*, Farley Mowat speaks for the last remnants of the inland Eskimos of northern Canada, who surely have a right to be heard. His presentation of their case has a moral authority that should be recognized and made more widely known. In Review, we said his book might be the swan song of the Ihalmiut. By now, it may be only a memorial, considering the rate of the decimation of these people. And if they are now gone, a shrugging reference to the potency of Darwin's law would only add to the disgrace, since Mr. Mowat described a practical plan for saving them by importing European Reindeer and training the Eskimos as herdsmen—something they could do well and with great self-sufficiency. He noted, too, that the Danes have set a splendid example in relation to the Eskimos of Greenland. There, he says, "The descendants of men who speared seals on the ice packs of Baftin Bay now not only teach in schools but take an important, and increasing, part in industry—not as brute labor, but as men, of equal stature with all other men." Further, "The type of white men who know how easy it is to make a rich living from the hearts' blood of a primitive race are forbidden to enter Greenland and they have no power there."

What do spokesmen like Farley Mowat accomplish? They help to generate attitudes of mind which lead to spontaneous actions in behalf of the humanity of all peoples; and since, in books like *People of the Deer*, there is insight as well as good intentions, the action it inspires is likely to be both intelligent and useful—not careless, sentimental, and often bumblingly destructive in effect.

"It is possible," Arthur Morgan remarked recently, "to develop within the old economic order a separate, independent order of the economy that is committed to ethical values and disciplined social solidarity." Conscious efforts in this direction are strengthened by such books.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
TEACHING IN A DISORDERED WORLD

THE best writing about teaching and education is often anecdotal—telling about situations involving real people. The mysterious transaction of learning remains mysterious, but the reader feels that it actually took place and he shares something of the joy that flowed spontaneously at the time. Passages in Herbert Kohl, John Holt, and George Dennison illustrate this. Then, less frequently, one comes across really great generalizations, such as Tolstoy made in his criticism of the idea of Progress, and which Ivan Illich formulates with notable frequency.

Both the example and the principle are needed to generate a full-bodied educational ideal. The example is likely to be timeless; that is, the prejudicial factors of oppressive systems, whether social or pedagogic, either play no part or are merely the background for what takes place. The *teaching,* in other words, is the thing. You might say that an event of this sort creates a truly utopion moment, since it is whole, free, and needs no irrelevant comparisons.

That such moments are rare cannot diminish their reality, their Golden Age quality. One might think that visionary conceptions of education are an imaginative expansion of such moments—not so that they would happen "all the time," which would hardly be natural, but so that the general temper of the community is always favorable to the rhythms of human awakening. It follows from this that books which propose far-reaching educational reforms, outlining actual changes for the schools to put into effect, are at the same time demands for community regeneration.

When you go from visions of what might be to books by persons who are working within some existing system, the clarity is diminished, not because these writers lack vision, but because they are very much aware of the dead weight of past practice and the grip of habit on both administrators and teachers. The beautiful simplicity of the anecdote, the wonderful reaching of a child's mind, fades in the presence of countless negative pressures when the discussion turns to "systems" of education. Of necessity, perhaps, the professional shorthand of the educationist intrudes, dulling the vision for the lay reader.

How can these heavy-handed systems, with which so much fault is found, be made to change? To whom are the books which speak of- changing them addressed? The quality of the schools is at once a cultural, political, professional, and individual problem. There is no specific audience for books on changing the schools, since "control" of the schools is not really assignable to any particular group. The really fine books on education have only one quality that is memorable: they are *wise.* And we really shouldn't speak of "controlling" the schools. The idea is practically meaningless, for the reason that schools should be places where wisdom is present and allowed to prevail, and wisdom cannot be served by control. It controls itself.

So books on education, when they are worth reading, have to do with how wisdom may be invited and fostered as an ever-present element in the environment of the young.

This is very difficult to write about, so that much in even the good books on education is about the barriers to wisdom in the schools of today. The writer whose book we have for review says in his first chapter that "our schools, instead of being foyers leading into the universe of human discourse that human life could be, have become sideshows at a trades fair where the young are led to take potshots at knowledge." The teachers run the sideshows or exhibits, competing for the students' capital, which is time. They teach "subjects" evolved by specialists who have interests apart from the need of the students, which is to gain their own equilibrium in a vastly complex and changing world. A brief sampling of

a "subject" contributes little or nothing to this end. The student has a life to live, not a long list of "subjects" to master.

In *Collaborative Learning* (Agathon Press, 1972, $6.95), Edwin Mason, an Englishman who has worked on curriculum reform at Goldsmith's College in London, proposes far-reaching changes in what is taught in secondary or high schools, and in the ways of teaching. He is himself an intensely concerned teacher, having worked in both primary and secondary schools in England.

What has he in mind? First of all, abandonment of the assumption that we know enough about the world and how it works to teach the young any important "certainties." We have, then, to admit the extent of our ignorance, and to transform the teaching of the young into preparation for and participation in basic investigative enterprises. The teacher is not an "authority" on a subject, but someone with some particular experience in how to look at the world and try to understand it. So the teacher works with the students toward a common objective, and this is "collaborative learning."

The suggestion seems simple enough, yet it involves great changes in attitude, not only on the part of educators but by many other people. As Mr. Mason says:

> The current academic fashion . . . is to limit discussion of education severely to the design of short-term programs aimed at achieving clearly defined objectives. The school is to become even more like a behaviorist laboratory. Learning is thought of as a process in which an agent—the teacher—does "the right things" to a client—the student—in a prearranged optimum environment designed for the performance of the operation. I intend to argue that learning is not like that and life should not be. But I cannot pretend to find it strange in a world where surgery is the most prestigious mode of medicine and warfare still the trade which attracts the most investment (space exploration is a military byproduct) that the imagery of the two professions is not only confused, but dominates most human endeavor. The battlefield is a "theatre of operations" where some malignant part of the enemy is your target. To remove an objectionable "ism" (commun- or capital-) we perform an operation. It may be devastating the land; it may be washing the "ism" out of an individual mind. And at this point it becomes difficult to distinguish between military objectives and some educational objectives. Bombard the cancer and the evil will disappear. Bombard the child and defeat the devil. Aversion therapy is a new name for an old process familiar to anyone who ever went to school.
>
> The model provided by the use of the term objectives is easily manageable because we have all been brought up to it and it is part of a paradigm, a whole group of assumptions we are unlikely to question. It belongs with the assumption that it is both desirable and possible to prefabricate the human future. If you reject these assumptions, as I think we now must, you will mistrust the model. It is time to work from something vaguer and stronger, a hope to see our children grow, to seek in a positive and curious way better ways of stabilizing human welfare than we ourselves have achieved. Looking at our world as it is (not at some even more frightful future) I take it to be an impertinence to be talking still of education as a process of passing on our own culture. What in our traditions is still worth preserving is in fact the unpopular part, that which questions all authority. It is however a commonplace impertinence performed daily in all the classrooms of the world, where a set of descriptions is being passed off as reality.

This book is filled with searching critical observations, all aimed at the restoration of the environment to surroundings that are not hostile to natural learning. For example, the following:

> The breakdown of community into society passes the danger mark when the division of labor into specialist productive functions, which may be held to make sense economically, is extended into a community's central collaborative work of maintaining itself as a community. To replace conscience and custom by law and policemen, to replace normal human care and concern by welfare officers, to replace knowing how society works by professional sociologists, knowing about people and their human feelings by professional psychologists, and to replace the experience of growing up, seeing what people must do to survive and enjoy life, by professional teachers actively destroys society.

The division of learning into "subjects," Mr. Mason maintains, falsifies reality by offering "a picture of a stable, orderly world nailed over all the windows through which we would see, if we could look, a world in crisis which demands our urgent attention." Toward the end of the book he says:

> The real world is not in order, it is in chaos. And it is in chaos because of the respect we are teaching for the old order of *laissez faire* and for science, because our educational system is still an obstacle race designed to maintain a selective recruitment to power of fairly docile clever hacks, because it systematically alienates by making us not care about what is happening as well as by dividing us into specialist groups each with its own kind of information to deal with.
>
> Unless we both explore the real information world (the one in which events happen rapidly) and somehow intervene in the real social world together, we must go on falsifying.

Mr. Mason ends by remarking that while the collaborative teaching and project curriculum he has been describing can be applied to schools, the undertaking might work even better with no schools at all—just meeting places "to be used as bases for exploration of the world."

FRONTIERS

Program for Community Regeneration

IN its January 1972 issue, the English monthly, *The Ecologist*, devoted twenty-two pages to *A Blueprint for Survival*, the compilation of a team of professionals involved in the study of environmental problems. The body of this report is titled "Towards the Stable Society: Strategy for Change." The lucid intelligence of *Blueprint* will make it of interest to many readers. Here we offer only a brief summary together with a few quotations to indicate the character of the proposals made. The address of *The Ecologist* is 73 Kew Green, Richmond, Surrey, England.

The objective is a stable society, for which the necessary conditions are held to be minimum disruption of ecological processes, maximum conservation of materials and energy, a non-growing population, and a social system enabling individuals to enjoy rather than be confined by these conditions. The requirements are taken up one by one. In relation to reducing ecological disruption, for example, it is pointed out that the dispersal of wastes is a poor and only temporary solution; what is wanted is *reduction* of wastes, which means increasing use of materials that can be recycled. The serious threat of pesticides must be met by immediate substitution of non-persistent pesticides, with study of natural controls for the long-term alternative. The ultimate solution for the problems produced by inorganic fertilizers is the gradual substitution of organic manures and the development of diversified farming instead of the present emphasis on monocultures—single cash crops. In the matter of sewage, the undeveloped countries have an advantage, since their wastes can be used as fertilizer. The technologically advanced nations produce wastes which are contaminated by industry and often accumulate sewage in large quantities far from agricultural areas. Such conditions ought to be corrected by separating wastes and decentralizing industry.

Recycling could be encouraged by taxation of the use of new raw materials and by rewarding production of goods which have a longer life. Disposable products would be made of easily disposable materials. "Plastics, for example, which are so remarkable for their durability, would be used only in products where this quality is valued, and not for single trip purposes." Craftsmanship and employment-intensive industry would be supported by low taxation.

The importance of using materials which are ecologically appropriate—something much stressed by Barry Commoner—is illustrated by the displacement in the United States of natural products by synthetics:

> (*a*) In the U.S., *per capita* consumption of synthetic detergents increased by 300 per cent between 1962 and 1968. They have largely replaced soap products, *per capita* consumption of which fell by 71 per cent between 1944 and 1964.
>
> (*b*) Synthetic fibres are rapidly replacing cotton, wool, silk and other natural fibres. . . .
>
> (*c*) The production of plastics and synthetic resins in the U.S. has risen by 300 per cent between 1958 and 1968. They have largely replaced wood and paper products.
>
> All of these processes consume the non-renewable fossil fuels, and their manufacture requires considerable inputs of energy. On the face of it, therefore, a counter-substitution of naturally occurring products would much reduce environmental disruption. However, it is possible that such a changeover, while it would certainly reduce disruption at one end, might dangerously increase it at the other. For example, many more acres would have to be put under cotton, thus increasing demand for pesticides, more land would have to be cleared and put under forest monocultures, and so on. This problem can only be solved by reducing total consumption.

The section, "Creating a New Social System," seems the key to a great many of these problems. The objective is many small communities in which cultural diversity and autonomy are supported by self-sufficiency:

> Small farms run by teams with specialized knowledge of ecology, entomology, botany, etc., will then be the rule, and indeed individual small-holdings could become extremely productive suppliers of eggs, fruit and vegetables to neighborhoods. Thus a much more diversified urban-rural mix will not only be possible, but because of the need to reduce the transportation costs of returning domestic sewage to the land, desirable.

Small-scale industry will be responsive only to actual felt demand, and will not attempt to "create" demand because of some theory of industrial expansion, and the idea of consuming only what one really needs will have an opportunity to take root. By such means there will be a natural switch from quantity to quality, which in itself would be a stabilizing influence. Following is a concluding paragraph in *Blueprint:*

> Industry can completely fulfill its new role only in harmony with particular communities, so that the unreal distinction between men as employees and men as neighbors can be abandoned, and jobs then be given on the basis that work must be provided by the community for the sake of that community's stability and not because one group wishes to profit from another group's labor or capital as the case may be. As industry decentralizes so will the rest of society. The creation of communities will come from the combination of industrial change and a conscious drive to restructure society.

The proposals and arguments of *Blueprint for Survival* show that its authors have done a great deal of thinking-through, and have tried to anticipate the major consequences of what they suggest. In general, the conception of a decentralized society seems the only practical solution. There are no special interests to be served, only the ecological and human welfare of all. While the plan is mainly for Britain, its application is in principle worldwide. Publication of a program of reform which is good for everybody, and which has both science and moral common sense for its support, deserves widespread circulation. Only by this means can such proposals gradually gain acceptance.