

## THE GREAT MODERN SUPERSTITION

FROM the eighteenth century on, the modern world has been almost wholly occupied with political issues. This may seem natural and right, when the abuses of political power during those two hundred years are taken into account. But the continuous worsening of these and other problems may be due to neglect of the fact that they are not at root political, that they cannot be removed by political remedies, but are rather made worse. However, the one thing we are sure of about the eighteenth century is that its evils were due almost entirely to the injustices of kingly power and to lack of scientific knowledge. The revolutions which came at the end of the century were intended to establish justice through democratic rule, and to encourage the development of scientific knowledge. The revolutionists were almost to a man admirers of science.

Today we are no longer sure about the capacity of science to pave the way to human well-being, and we are questioning the competence of scientists to reveal what Nature has to say, if anything, about the Rights of Man. This phrase—the Rights of Man—was the title of the French counterpart of the American Declaration of Independence and, like that epoch-making document, asserted that "the aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man." The task of the revolutionary law-makers was held to be plain. It was their duty to legislate human rights into being and to see that they were made secure.

But less than fifty years later, in 1835, Joseph Mazzini saw and described the weakness of the Revolutionary credo. In "Faith and the Future" he pointed out that the declaration of the Rights of Man, "the supreme and ultimate formula of the French Revolution," was "a secondary idea, a

deduction, which has lost sight of the principle from which it sprang; a consequence which has been elevated into an absolute doctrine, and granted a life of its own." He continued:

Every right exists in virtue of a law; the law of the Being, the law which defines the nature of the subject in question. What is the law? I know not; its discovery is the actual aim of the epoch; but the certainty that such a law exists is sufficient to necessitate the substitution of the idea of Duty for the idea of Right.

Right is the faith of the individual. Duty is the common collective faith. Right can but organize resistance: it may destroy, it cannot found. Duty builds up, associates, and unites; it is derived from a general law, whereas Right is derived only from human will. There is nothing therefore to forbid against a struggle against Right: any individual may rebel against right in another which is injurious to him; and the sole judge left between the adversaries is Force; and such, in fact, has frequently been the answer which societies based upon right have given their opponents.

Mazzini's metaphysical argument, despite its penetration, found few listeners. After all, people would naturally say, what is a government for if not to get us our rights? "Duty" was what the kings we have got rid of demanded of us, and we have had all we want of that. If there are duties, the legislators we elect will in due time tell us what they are. Meanwhile, we want our rights. Time enough for "duties" later. It was in this way that the State, now by popular acclaim the definer and grantor of rights, became all-powerful.

Some fifty years after Mazzini wrote, Herbert Spencer, a close observer of human behavior, concluded that the giving of rights by government had become the foundation of political religion. He said in an essay published in 1884:

The great political superstition of the past was the divine right of kings. The great political superstition of the present is the divine right of

parliaments. The oil of anointing seems unawares to have dripped from the head of the one on to the head of the many, and given sacredness to them also and to their decrees.

Feeling that the French Revolution was responsible for this childlike faith in legislators, Spencer gathered a great deal of evidence of their mistakes, which he published under the title, *The Man Versus the State*. After showing the follies of a number of well-intentioned laws passed in Britain, Spencer said of the "practical" politician:

. . . he never asks whether the political momentum set up by his measure, in some cases decreasing but in other cases greatly increasing, will or will not have the same general direction with other like momenta, and whether it may not join them in presently producing an aggregate energy working changes never thought of. Dwelling only on the effects of his particular stream of legislation, and not observing how other streams already existing, and still other streams which will follow his initiative, pursue the same average course, it never occurs to him that they may presently unite into a voluminous flood utterly changing the face of things. Or to leave figures for a more literal statement, he is unconscious of the truth that he is helping to form a certain type of social organization, and that kindred measures, effecting kindred changes of organization, tend with ever-increasing force to make that type general; until, passing a certain point, the proclivity toward it becomes irresistible. Just as each society aims when possible to produce in other societies a structure akin to his own . . . so within every society, each species of structure tends to propagate itself. Just as the system of voluntary cooperation by companies, associations, unions, to achieve business ends and other ends spreads throughout a community; so does the antagonistic system of compulsory cooperation under State-agencies spread; and the larger becomes its extension the more power of spreading it gets.

Now comes Spencer's central point:

The question of questions for the politician should ever be—"What type of social structure am I tending to produce?" But this question he never entertains.

The hard sense in Spencer's social studies has been almost completely ignored by reason of the audience he attracted—chief among whom were men like Andrew Carnegie and John D.

Rockefeller. Spencer, author of the phrase, "survival of the fittest," was the advocate of extreme *laissez faire* in political economy. His position, however, has been somewhat misrepresented by liberal and radical critics. Spencer had a fundamental idea in common with anarchist thinkers, and with liberals of the sort whose policies prevailed before the Utilitarian politicians gained power. A brief statement of Spencer's view is this:

A fundamental error pervading the thinking of nearly all parties, political and social, is that evils admit of immediate and radical remedies. "If you will but do this, the mischief will be prevented." "Adopt my plan, and the suffering will disappear." "The corruption will unquestionably be cured by enforcing this measure." Everywhere one meets with beliefs, expressed or implied, of these kinds. They are all ill-founded. It is possible to remove causes which intensify the evils; it is possible to change the evils from one form into another; and it is possible, and very common, to exacerbate the evils by the efforts made to prevent them, but anything like immediate cure is impossible.

Albert Jay Nock, perhaps the most eminent of the intellectual supporters of the social philosophy of Henry George, edited the 1940 edition (Caxton) of *The Man Versus the State*, and in his Introduction he explains Spencer's important distinction between the two kinds of Liberals:

Spencer shows that the early liberal was consistently for cutting down the State's coercive power over the citizen, wherever this was possible. He was for reducing to a minimum the number of points at which the State might make coercive interventions upon the individual. He was for steadily enlarging the margin of existence within which the citizen might pursue and regulate his own activities as he saw fit, free of State control or State supervision. Liberal policies and measures, as originally conceived, were such as reflected these aims. The Tory, on the other hand, was opposed to these aims, and his policies reflected this opposition. In general terms, the Liberal was consistently inclined toward the individualist philosophy of society, while the Tory was consistently inclined toward the Statist philosophy.

Spencer shows, moreover, that as a matter of practical policy, the early Liberal proceeded towards

the realization of his aims by the method of repeal. He was not for making new laws, but for repealing old ones. It is most important to remember this. Whenever the Liberal saw a law which enhanced the State's coercive power over the citizen, he was for repealing it and leaving its place blank. There were many such laws on the British statute-books, and when Liberalism came into power it repealed an immense grist of them.

In the last half of the nineteenth century, as Nock says, "British Liberalism went over bodily to the philosophy of Statism, and abjuring the political method of repealing existent coercive measures, proceeded to outdo the Tories in constructing new coercive measures of ever-increasing particularity." Commenting, he adds:

We may remember, for example, that our great charter, the Declaration of Independence, takes as its foundation the self-evident truth of this doctrine [of early Liberalism], asserting that man, in virtue of his birth, is endowed with certain rights which are "unalienable"; and asserting further that it is "to secure these rights" that governments are instituted among men. Political literature will nowhere furnish a more explicit disavowal of the Statist philosophy than is to be found in the primary postulate of the Declaration.

But now, in which direction has latter-day American Liberalism tended? Has it tended towards an expanding regime of voluntary cooperation, or one of enforced cooperation? Have its efforts been directed consistently towards repealing existent measures of State coercion, or towards the devising and promotion of new ones? Has it tended steadily to enlarge or to reduce the margin of existence within which the individual may act as he pleases? Has it contemplated State intervention upon the citizen at an ever-increasing number of points, or at an ever-decreasing number?

Today, as when Spencer, and later Nock, wrote, this argument has great intellectual force but little popular appeal. And there are many who call themselves "practical" who say that while anti-state doctrine may be sound enough in theory, we are faced with the condition that in our time the State has *all* the power, so that the thing to do is to compel the Government to do what is right. However, there are also those who,

whether intentionally or not, avoid social theory and appeal to common sense and experience, saying much the same thing as Spencer. For example, John Turner, who has spent years in working to help the poor get decent housing, writes in *Housing by People* (Pantheon):

A careful reading of this book will show that what I am advocating is a radical change of relations between people and government in which government ceases to persist in doing what it does badly or uneconomically—building and managing houses—and concentrates on what it has the authority to do: to ensure equitable access to resources which local communities and people cannot provide for themselves. To fight instead for the restoration or extension of public expenditure on conventional housing programmes is as reactionary as the failure to press for land reform and the liberation of housing finance from corporate banking.

Spencer's book is filled with supporting evidence for what Turner says. While Turner has no brief for "economic individualism," and no interest in declaring for the "survival of the fittest," he is convinced that people have a right to build, own, and manage their own homes, and he believes that government ought not to be an obstacle. He also says:

The main motive for personally committing oneself to the always exacting and often exhausting job of organizing and managing, let alone self-building, may be the bodily need for socially acceptable shelter, but "higher" needs for creative expression and personal identity are, in most cases, also present and for many equally important. No self-helper to whom I have ever spoken, and no observer whose evaluations I have read, has failed to emphasize the pride of achievement, the self-confidence and self-respect, or the delight in creativity, however hard the task may have been.

We now come to a man who has looked broadly at the economic lives of people in the present—especially the lives of the poor—and, having seen the same sort of confusions, folly, and waste that Spencer observed, speaks from a different point of view. Karl Hess writes in *Rain* for last November in a way that seems a spontaneous agreement with Mazzini, although his

language is quite different. His subject—when he gets to it—is also housing, but the preceding general discussion has primary importance. He begins:

There are important practical, even tactical differences between an outlook that emphasizes rights and one that emphasizes responsibilities.

On the broadest scale, the difference should be apparent. Politics in most countries, for years now, has been based upon organizing to secure rights. People organize in order to get something. They usually identify the thing being sought as a right. Big Business organizes to get the right to operate its processes in secret and without regulation—except for the sort that will reduce competition to a minimum (e.g. auto inspection and licensing regulations which act against homebuilt cars, medical licensing that prevents self or community health care, highway regulations to obstruct independent truckers, not to mention highways themselves which serve national rather than community purposes, zoning regulations to prevent experimental communities or alternative businesses, and housing codes to prevent experimental or innovative construction).

Professionals, generally, organize to secure the right to exclusively practice a craft—teachers, doctors, some mechanics, even lawyers and politicians.

Poor people organize to secure what they regard as a right to a share of the incomes of working people who are not officially listed as poor. And, of course, the government itself organizes power in such a way that it may decree the right to say who is poor, proper, employed, rich, etc.

Facts of everyday experience leap to the support of this analysis. For example, the long struggle of the members of the United Stand in Mendocino County, Calif., for the right to build homes for themselves without being harassed by officials who insist on conformity to unnecessary code requirements. Then there is the extensive work of Ivan Illich on the replacement of an authoritarian Church with an authoritarian educational establishment and on the various forms of what he terms "radical monopoly."

Karl Hess continues his examination of a society based on the idea of "rights":

Throughout the system, organizing to secure rights is general. And throughout the structure of rights, the notion of rights as power over other people also is general. None of the rights that have become central to modern political and economic activity can in fact be realized without penalizing the rights of someone else. (The reason I include the economic is because the major businesses now all operate on the public utility theory of a *right* to a steadily increasing profit. Because of effective government agreement, this assured upward profitability—regardless of market conditions—is known officially and widely as Progress. Its lack is called a Depression.)

Now comes an especially interesting point:

These modern rights are distinct from the ancient provisions of the common law, incidentally. Common law does not concern itself with positive rights so much as it concerns itself with those things simply felt to be unacceptable civil behavior, by individuals or by institutions—murder, theft, lying, etc. The common law derives from a notion that most human communities, in order to stay together and be pleasantly livable, would prefer that neighbors not kill each other, or steal, and that lords not loot them.

Positive rights, as they have come to dominate politics, say something altogether different. They do not say that such and such an act is unacceptable or impractical to community purposes. They say that such and such an action *must be performed*—performed by someone on behalf of someone else. Positive rights are based solidly and exclusively on the police power of the state. They are paid for, to get at the heart of it, by taxation and taxation is now clearly an act of force, of police authority and not the gracious voluntarism that the civics books say it is. Without raw police power the whole system would collapse—and everyone seems to know that.

This seems of elementary importance. When you try to get the government to satisfy some right, you are adding to the strength of the police state. When your theory of the good depends upon the use of state power, you are relying on the army and the navy and all that goes with it—up to and including the corruption of once honorable educational institutions of the higher learning. Today most of the better schools, and many of the others, are service stations supplying know-how for use by the welfare and warfare state.

The one thing we need to know about "law," Mr. Hess implies, is what cannot be done with it. He goes on:

One more comment before the practical applications of all this. There are no rights in the natural world. Nothing has, for instance, a right to life, although all organisms seem to exercise a very noticeable attempt to live—grass forcing its way through concrete, mosquitoes becoming resistant to pesticides, human beings living on deserts and ice-caps. In each instance, however, the organism can be said to obey the imperatives of a genetic *responsibility* to try to survive. Unless that responsibility is successfully met, the organism dies. It has no way of exercising a right to survive. It must exercise a will and a way to survive. People sometimes think of this arrangement as cruel, applying an understandable emotion to a merely observable phenomenon. Cruel is an opinion. The responsibility of living is a material reality independent of opinion.

To the claim that the poor are victims of exploitation and have the right to be helped through taxation to get what is theirs, Mr. Hess says:

The truth should now be obvious. It is the productive working class that pays the most for all social programs. The idle rich are scarcely touched. But, worst of all, the problems of poverty are not touched at all. Poverty is cured by wealth and wealth is the result of productive activity such as thinking or material work. Wealth that is produced simply by claiming a right to wealth is no more healthy in the long run than wealth produced by a state-sanctioned claim on the title ownership of property—whether earned or not. (The old Populists used to launch tirades against the two great classes of parasites—millionaires and bums. The exercise of rights can make a bum out of anybody, if totally disconnected from creativity. It, of course, makes bums out of millionaires too but in an esthetic rather than a workaday sense.)

How can a man like Karl Hess, who works, as he says, toward a free and decentralized society and away from "hierarchical authority," get anything done without at least some *relations* with the state? He has a sensible answer to this question:

It means, at the start, that your political life is spent in the creation of new ways to work, live, organize, cooperate rather than trying only to levy claims against existing institutions. This doesn't mean some sort of across-the-board refusal to take anything tainted by state ownership—it just means that it isn't the focus. For instance, in work I did in Washington, D.C., a neighborhood technology project, many of the tools used were obtained happily, even gleefully from a license to purchase directly from government surplus stores. Since then I have lobbied a time or two on Capitol Hill to get legislation that would make such surplus materials available to all community experimenters, or experimenters in communities. But that was a means. The end was the community work.

It is true, however, that the means can come to dominate even the best of ends. Thus, every move toward getting, rather than building, has to be carefully kept in perspective as a tool, and a minor one, lest it get the best of you and become a way of life rather than a way to a new life.

This is one man's way of working to overcome the superstition of the divine right of parliaments. It seems wholly in harmony with Natural Law, and with Mazzini's advocacy of Duty. It is no formula, but an attitude of mind.

## REVIEW

### "DEATH IS NOT THE ENEMY"

NOW and then a book comes in for review which forces to the front the question: Should this book have been put together and printed? The one we have now, for example, is a textbook on health. It seems to be a pretty good book. It repeats a lot of common sense. There is also a kind of blandness, as would be the case in any volume intended for the amount and kind of attention that can be expected from a few thousand college students. Considering that this is the purpose of *Core Concepts: Health in a Changing Society* (Mayfield, 1977), by Paul M. Insel and Walton T. Roth, the book may be better than others in this category.

But should there be courses in health? Is a textbook on the subject the best or natural way to inform people of what it means to be healthy? The fact is that health as a topic is of importance or real interest only to unhealthy people. Healthy people have no reason to talk about or think about health. A natural response to this idea is that health can be lost and that healthy people need to be informed of how to live in order to stay healthy. Well, yes. Presumably, people who know about the maintenance of health can write a good book on how to keep it. They don't have to be licensed physicians. Maybe they shouldn't be; after all, doctors are not notoriously healthy. But one wonders about the actual translation of intelligent counsels about health—in a rather large book—into the everyday practice of healthy human beings.

Yet such translations do take place. A book about diet sometimes transforms a reader's way of life. Usually, the books with this effect are sharply focused on particular problems of health which are common and can be overcome. The treatment is intensive and convincing. The book tells you what to do; you try it, and it works.

In this respect, a college text is at a disadvantage. The authors don't write it as an

answer to a specific question or ill. They cover a lot of ground. The students may not have any questions at all. The book must attempt plausible explanations of many things basically difficult to understand, yet without misleading simplification. And it needs to be interesting. On this basis, *Core Concepts* seems to qualify as a good book. It is also lacking in pretense. The subtitle, "Health in a Changing Society," seems appropriate, but it would be more to the point to say, "in a Badly Confused Society." Overwhelming evidence of this confusion is included in the book. For example, the authors say in the Introduction:

A number of physicians admit that many of the standard treatments they prescribe for minor ailments are contrary both to the principles of scientific medicine and to common sense. The therapeutic measures attack the *symptoms* that the disease causes, not the *cause* of the disease. These symptoms frequently reflect how the body's natural system of defense is battling the disease-causing agent, and thus the progress of the disease is observed by the treatment. That can be dangerous if what first appears to be a minor ailment turns out to be a major one.

"Man has an inborn craving for medicine. . . . It is really one of the most serious difficulties with which we have to contend," Sir William Osler said. Today's doctors do not seem to be seriously trying to contend with that craving and the pharmaceutical industry is far from eager to see them do so. Drug companies are not charitable institutions. They are in business to make a profit, and make a profit they do.

In 1970 Americans swallowed some 17,000 tons of aspirin either plain or in combination formulations. That's about 46 billion tablets, or an average of 225 tablets per person. In the same year Americans' total drug bill was estimated at \$66 billion. Some of the drugs for which we paid all this money were harmful, and many of them did little or no good.

The advertising budgets of the giant drug companies are enormous. Some spend as much as \$4,000 each year on each doctor in the United States to promote their products. Literally hundreds of new drugs are offered to doctors each year. In fact, 90 per cent of the prescriptions doctors write today are for drugs that did not exist 20 years ago. In the face of this chemical barrage, it is small wonder that doctors do not know all the side effects of the drugs they

prescribe, the cumulative or delayed effects, or the records of success and failure. Small wonder, too, that iatrogenic diseases (diseases caused by doctors and their activities) have come to be a major factor in 4 per cent of all hospitalizations.

The authors don't quote Linus Pauling on how poisonous aspirin is, but write at some length on the mechanization of medicine and the depersonalization of the patient-doctor relationship, with comment on the blindness of specialists to everything but their specialty. They draw a contrast between the situation of people in our society and the life of the small number of really healthy individuals who "are totally without medical care and health knowledge":

Unmolested by outside influences, they are rarely ill, lead vigorous lives even in old age, and enjoy a longevity that would be considered unusual in a medically coddled society. Their superb health can be largely attributed to their adaptation to their various environments, environments that are physically harsh yet tranquil. Their diets, too, may have much to do with their enduring vitality, although (or because) they are a far cry from the fare of their affluent contemporaries in other lands. . . . The diets of the most long-lived of these people have three things in common: They are low in protein (by our increasingly questioned standards), high in roughage, and limited in amount.

The most interesting thing about this book is the fact that it is now possible for this sort of candor and intelligence to appear in a college text. The right sort of "health education," of course, would be for us all to acquire at least some of the habits and abstinences of those long-lived people, who certainly possess "health knowledge," however limited their ability to describe it. But since we live in a time when so few find themselves even able to attempt a normal existence, books like *Core Concepts* might represent a first step in the right direction.

There is one really fine contribution to this book—two pages on "Death and Dying" by Dr. Nancy M. Caroline. She tells about a man of seventy-eight named Kahn who is in the hospital, and who sees another patient struggled over by

doctors and nurses. He was dying, and their frantic efforts—injections, a pacemaker, and other emergency measures—couldn't save him. Horrified, the old man said to Dr. Caroline, "Don't ever do that to me. I want you should promise you'll never do that to me." Reluctantly, she promised.

But then the old man suffered a congestive heart failure and had trouble breathing. Well, they put a tube down into his lungs and monitored his heart. The doctor talked him into letting them do it, to "help him breathe." The tube was hooked to a ventilator which pumped air into him.

The report ends:

Sometime late that night Kahn woke up, reached over and switched off his ventilator. The nurses didn't find him for several hours. They called me to pronounce him dead. The room was silent when I entered. The ventilator issued no rush of air, the monitor tracked a straight line, the suction machine was shut off. Kahn lay absolutely still.

I mechanically reached for the pulseless wrist, then flashed my light into the widened, unmoving pupils, and nodded to the nurses to begin the ritual over the body.

On the bedside table, I found a note, scrawled in Kahn's uneven hand: "Death is not the enemy, doctor. Inhumanity is."

## *COMMENTARY* THE USES OF TRUTH

THE great misfortune of political thinking is that its most influential truths usually turn out to be half-truths made to serve to partisan purposes. The validity of the half-truths is then ignored on moral grounds by opponents who have competing half-truths to offer. The contest is now between rival forms of righteousness, with truth no more than a resource of rationalization.

The influence of Herbert Spencer on American thought is a clear illustration. In *The American Political Tradition*, Richard Hofstadter says:

Since publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 educated Americans had been learning eagerly of the new biological theory and constructing new cosmologies for themselves. From Darwin and his popularizers they learned that life is a fierce and constant struggle which only the fittest survive. Confusing evolution with progress, as was natural to optimistic spokesmen of a rising class and a rising nation, they concluded that the bitter strife of competitive industry, which seemed to mirror so perfectly Darwin's world, was producing a slow but inevitable upward movement of civilization. Those who emerged at the top were manifestly the fittest to survive and carry on. Herbert Spencer, whose evolutionary philosophy glorified automatic progress, who threw all his authority into support of the thesis that natural economic processes must be allowed to go on without hindrance from reformers, was idolized in the United States as has been no other philosopher before or since. . . . Assured by intellectuals of the progressive and civilizing value of their work, encouraged by their status as exemplars of the order of opportunity, and exhilarated by the thought that their energies were making the country rich, industrial millionaires felt secure in their exploitation and justified in their dominion.

It was natural for the critics of exploitation to turn away from *anything* that Spencer had said. Yet Albert Jay Nock, no apologist for economic injustice, recognized the strength of Spencer's half-truths. So, interestingly enough, did Gandhi, who wrote in the *Modern Review* in 1935:

I look upon an increase in the power of the State with the greatest fear, because, although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which lies at the root of all progress.

The State represents violence in concentrated and organized form. The individual has a soul, but as the State is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence.

It is my firm conviction that if the State suppresses capitalism by violence, it will be caught in the coils of violence itself and fail to develop non-violence at any time.

What I would personally prefer, would be, not a centralization of power in the hands of the State but an extension of the sense of trusteeship; as in my opinion, the violence of private ownership is less injurious than the violence of the State. However, if that is unavoidable, I would support a minimum of State-ownership. What I disapprove of is an organization based on force, which a State is. Voluntary organization there must be.

Thus Gandhi, by advocating non-violence, made a larger truth out of Spencer's half-truth doctrine. The truth became whole, but lost its partisan efficacy.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves TAKING STOCK

[Last week's "Children" ended with a quotation from Grace Rotzel on the guiding principles of the School in Rose Valley (Moylan, Pa.), founded in 1929. Since Miss Rotzel set down these ideas in the early 30s—a long time ago!—it is natural to wonder how the School has fared, over the years. An answer to this question comes in the form of this report by Anne Rawson, the present principal, in the *Parents' Bulletin* for November-December 1977.]

IN our 48th year, The School in Rose Valley is looking fine, thanks to parents and old friends, functioning well, thanks to teachers, and, with the trend in its enrollment turned up this year we are anticipating our 50th year and the 50th anniversary in a mood for celebration.

As we assess the present and make plans for the future it seems natural to glance back at our beginnings to see whether the philosophy of the founding group of parents is still relevant a half century later.

The parents who started our school were inspired by the writings of John Dewey and Alfred North Whitehead. Grace Rotzel, who was the first principal of the school, had taught in Marietta Johnson's Organic School in Fairhope, Alabama, and was much influenced by her experience there. They all believed that it was possible to have a school where children's natural curiosity could be preserved and learning would be an active, uncoerced, joyous experience. They all stressed the importance of respecting the child's individuality and her/his rhythms of growth. They believed that in the well-conceived school it should be unnecessary to force or bribe children to learn; that sensitive teachers, with enthusiasm for learning, could structure an environment and day-to-day experiences which would lead children naturally to increased knowledge and understanding.

If one reads selections from John Dewey's writings, Whitehead's *The Aims of Education*, or Marietta Johnson's account of her school, their combined message is very compatible with the Statement of Goals and Philosophy most recently set down by The School in Rose Valley.

Yet however much one reads and studies, understands and believes in a given philosophy, the experience of each day must be lived, the needs of each child must be met, and the words of our mentors, even Grace Rotzel's, cannot answer each new question which arises. We teachers and children of the present day learn by our participation in a living experience to make this school work. The school has been and is now what its teachers and the participating families make it. The philosophical base is a real source of continuity and agreement, a compass to keep our enterprise on course, but not a detailed map.

In the 30's the problem of the child with a reading disability called for a solution other than patient waiting for a readiness and desire to develop; special, informed instruction was essential to allow those children to develop reading competence and to reach the levels of achievement of which they were capable.

In the 40's we briefly expanded two more grades when a teacher's interest in going beyond 6th grade coincided with families' interest in keeping their children at the school; several groups of children stayed through 8th grade.

In the 50's the staff carried out a long-term study of emotional maturity. The 50's were years of consolidation and reaping the rewards of the years of experimenting with new ideas. A number of the teachers had been at the school long enough to have tried many ideas and to have developed a strong, but flexible program.

In the 60's, predictably, as teachers retired and were replaced by younger teachers, the school was shaken from its comfortable curricular plateau and reminded that the essence of progressive education was its adaptation of the subject-matter

of education to the needs of the students and the community. The mood of the 60's seemed to the teachers to call for more choice, more freedom in the curriculum. It was the era of *Summerhill*, of the alternative schools, and The School in Rose Valley tried some interesting experiments—experiments which had value as much because they were undertaken out of the teachers' deep concern for the children as because of their educational interest.

In the 70's the adoption in the British Infant Schools of family grouping and open education has been the important event. These developments are so appropriate to our history and general attitude toward children that they have been very influential. Our physical layout and our staff and schedule for special subjects prevents total adoption of the model, but the literature, materials, and workshops from this movement have enriched our school.

We profit as well from the greater awareness of learning disabilities and the existence of resources to deal with them. But chiefly our strength at the moment lies in the teachers who have been here long enough to mesh comfortably with the school and to have had time to discover, each of them, the best way to relate to the children and to help them grow.

How well does our school meet the needs of its children in this contemporary, crazy, high-speed world? In the literature and in our staff discussions, as well as in classrooms, we deal often with the hazards surrounding childhood—the general level of public anxiety, the impact of television, not only its subject-matter, good and terrible, but its diminution of self-initiated, creative playtime, the possible relationship between chemicals in food, environmental pollution and children's behavior problems, the tensions of the separated family, the problems for the child with no unemployed parent at home all day. We have not ceased to value those things which we have always treasured—the natural world and our relationship to it, the satisfactions

of one's own handiwork, the importance of honest relationships, the need to understand oneself and one's place in the sweep of human existence. And we believe that if we are as concerned to recognize and help with children's personal feelings as with math and study problems, they will become creative citizens in the larger world, having learned here that their ideas and actions have an effect on the small world of this school.

This year we are studying our curriculum in math, reading, and social studies to make sure that these learning areas progress with continuity and in logical order through the school. For alternate staff meetings we have scheduled topics of general concern—TV, the open classroom, managing unhappy behavior, the gifted child. It requires constant attention and questioning to retain the genuineness, the reality, and unphoniness of the school experience. We don't always succeed, but we do try. We question ourselves and we profit by the questions of parents.

As we near the 50-year landmark, the school seems congenial to friends from all decades. We delight in their visits. I believe the involvement of parents continues to be a vital, irreplaceable source of strength and that we will survive to 50 and beyond.

[The report on the use of achievement tests in this school is also of interest. After a mature discussion of the pros and cons of testing, Anne Rawson tells why they decided to use them only above the second grade. She lets the third-grade teacher explain how it was done:]

"At my level, I am much less concerned with the results of the tests than I am with easing the kids into the test situation itself. The children are old and sure enough now to understand my taking a different sort of role (not being able to answer all their questions, not always being able to repeat or explain myself, and so on), but I do, nevertheless, feel compelled to make the same sort of adjustments to the needs of individuals or of the group in this situation as I would in any other. For instance, I had the kids register their answers

in the answer booklet itself rather than on separate answer sheets (which seem to be just another complicating factor). And I didn't have *all* the kids take *all* the tests; a child who is just beginning to read comfortably on his or her own, for example, might be badly frustrated or discouraged by having to try to read and answer questions about passages beyond his or her reading ability. We had lots of breaks and snacks and lots of talk about tests—why they can't be designed so that they're easy for everyone, why you can't talk freely during them, why they're timed. . . . And, in the end, the children as a whole did remarkably well on the tests. It was especially gratifying to see that many of the children scored an 8th-grade equivalent on the word study skills sections (thanks to Ruth, Janet, and Mrs. Spalding?), on listening comprehension (hours of hearing *Dickon Among the Indians* read aloud?), and on 'math applications' (word problems to us). They almost all scored quite high on vocabulary, reading comprehension, spelling, and math concepts. Lowest scores—practically across the board—occurred in computation, although most of the children still scored above grade level on this section. This suggests perhaps the need for some modification in our math curriculum."

## FRONTIERS

### Progress Report

A NEW culture is now in formation, its pioneering nucleus already formed. This culture has an expanding literature with several vigorous periodicals which keep its ideas circulating. Here we often quote from these periodicals—*Rain*, *Self-Reliance*, and *Resurgence* (published in England) are three good ones—and others are coming along. The new culture has been shaped by a number of seminal thinkers, among them E. F. Schumacher, Amory Lovins, Frances Moore Lappe, Howard Odum, Leopold Kohr, John Todd, and Wendell Berry—and again there are others coming along.

Evidence of the strength and extent of this pioneer culture is amply provided in a new book, *Stepping Stones* (Schocken, 1978, \$7.95), edited by Lane de Moll and Gigi Coe, one an editor of *Rain*, the other with the California Office of Appropriate Technology. *Stepping Stones* is an ideal book for introduction to the culture now getting born. It has for contributors all the persons named above and many others. There are also valuable contributions from an earlier generation of pioneers—Sir Albert Howard and Richard Gregg, for example. *Stepping Stones* is a fine book for laying in the mind the foundations for a better future for earth and man. Many readers will have no difficulty in seeing where their own talents and capacities—not to mention their sympathies—will fit in.

The book has three parts: "The Party's Over," "Appropriate Technology Definitions," and "Beyond Technology." These contents all deserve attention here, and particular contributions will be reviewed in *Frontiers* from time to time. There is a lot of talk—much of it useless or pointless—about "the future," these days. The material in *Stepping Stones* is the best general introduction to future possibilities that we know of. It is also an introduction to practical activity in behalf of a future that is already under way.

The editors say in their introduction:

The ideas of appropriate technology grew out of a shared gut level sense that something somehow was seriously wrong with our way of doing things. People were becoming increasingly disenchanted with a way of life that allowed the squandering of natural resources—and money—for questionable material gains. Outrage against a senseless war in a tiny country in Asia pushed many people into action seeking a less violent alternative future. Others reacted to the rapidly deteriorating quality of the physical, social and economic environment—polluted air and water, unfulfilling jobs and sprawling urbanization—by developing more meaningful and equitable lifestyles and communities.

Those who responded by going "back to the land" to explore the possibilities and value of self-sufficiency became an important source of innovations in alternative agriculture and the use of the sun, wind, water and biofuels for clean energy. Others honed their political and organizing skills for human rights and economic justice. Most recently people in small towns and neighborhoods have also begun reaching out for alternative solutions to their problems. These groups are now coming together to form a social and political force which has the potential to change the course of our society.

In the section, "Beyond Appropriate Technology," Gil Friend, one of the founders of the Washington, D.C., Institute for Local Self-Reliance, writes about "Responsible Agriculture" for the country as a whole. Preparatory to asking a basic question, he says:

Some have suggested that we look back on the 1970s as a period of transition for agriculture, a key point when, if the trends of modern agriculture were not changed, at least the trend began to shift. Agribusiness maintains its presence, family farms still fall to creditors and developers, and food prices continue to rise while food quality diminishes. Yet, these analysts maintain, the momentum is no longer with those phenomena, but with the growing movements of biological agriculture, natural foods, anti-corporate awareness, food cooperatives, community gardens and related efforts.

Then he asks:

How realistic is this vision? Will these years form the basis of real, lasting change in the way we grow food, or will they represent one more hopeful,

but temporary, ripple on the face of a more depressing history? For there have been hopeful ripples before—co-op movements in earlier depressions, farmers' strikes in other periods of cost/price squeeze. (Indeed, financial instability seems to be more the rule than the exception for the American farmer—a meager lot for the producers and stewards of a society's most basic wealth.) Yet, these movements have always evaporated with improving conditions, only to reappear with the next downturn. Or they have failed to consolidate their gains into a durable political power able to affect the root conditions of their troubles. Have we learned enough from these earlier efforts to do a better job of making our gains and keeping them?

The most promising sign Gil Friend finds in agricultural reform. A strong if small minority of farmers are seeing the light, and organic agriculture will probably do nothing but grow in the years to come. But for this writer a question remains:

As important as these new signs are, however, they are in themselves small islands in a big stream. The poor state of the U.S. food system has never been the result of a dearth of examples of another way the Amish, for example, have been quietly with us for many years—but rather of the economic and political conditions under which it has developed. As exciting as recent alternative efforts have been, they are struggling to take hold in the midst of the same conditions that have plagued farmers and consumers for decades. Organic farmers may be slightly better off than their "conventional" neighbors, by virtue of lower input costs, but they are still vulnerable to the mad oscillations of the commodity markets. . . . the vision of a sustainable agriculture will not take hold if its proponents work only on the ecological and technical issues that may initially have attracted their attention. We must also understand and change economic and political factors that ultimately affect everything else we attempt.

This article concludes with a review of the substantial gains in the practice of organic agriculture, but with attention, also, to present weaknesses, such as marketing lack of the right sort of machinery, problems of transport, and scarcity of affordable land. The ultimate goal is "an educated and organized citizenry that can work together to create the different social,

economic and political patterns needed to sustain [a] better and more equitable life."

One factor making for enduring change which Gil Friend seems to neglect is a definite change of *taste*, difficult to measure, running all through our society, most manifest in the intelligent young but also affecting the older generation. This is a lubricant which helps to explain the tenacity of some of the changes which have already taken place.