

## REVIVING QUESTIONS

THE disasters which are currently overtaking the world perform an incidental service which is far from negligible. They cast doubts on all our familiar beliefs, and even drive us to question the basic assumptions by which we believe—some of them far from conscious assumptions. The reflexes of behavior grow out of these assumptions, and since, among those who think, the conclusion from the present course of history is that our behavior must change, inquiry into the nature of the one who behaves seems a sensible thing to pursue. And we are no longer prevented from asking such questions as "What am I?" and "What am I doing here?"—questions to which neither inherited religion nor Darwinism any longer give satisfying answers—by the orthodoxies of the time. The orthodoxies are rapidly being reduced to mere residues of past belief by both maturing thought and the impacts of experience.

Disaster, then, brings freedom of mind, at least for some. So let us look at these questions, without at first giving responsive attention to the conventional replies that used to be made, beginning with the words, "Of course . . ."

What, then, am I? One answer would be, "I am a unit of consciousness, of awareness." I may be equipped with a body, whose needs and demands impose both necessities and appetites upon my behavior, but I am first of all a conscious being whose reality is mind. Mind seems to have two poles, or to be of two sorts. There is mind in the service of knowing which the ancient philosophers of Greece called *Nous*, and there is mind devoted to doing—to the implementation of desire, sometimes spoken of as "rationalization," as by Erich Kahler and others. The mind in short, deals with the deliveries of the senses, and it deals with realities which are beyond the senses, including abstract structures, such as those made

possible by mathematics, and what are called moral ideas, such as right and wrong and good and evil. The mind is also the theater or laboratory of the creative act as well as the place where imitation is conceived. It is peopled by hopes and fears, unsolved problems, and firm and half-formed intentions which result from thought. It has a library of memories to draw on, used in making projections about the future, and in some there is a well-developed sense of fitness, enabling us to dispose of numerous events and situations with a dissolving laugh.

We can say this much about who we are, and what we are capable of, but it is difficult to go much further. Words are tools of the mind, and tools are not much good in giving an account of their user. The same, perhaps, could be said of the mind, as a tool of the self, since we, as we say, change our minds, which suggests that the self, apart from its various instruments and embodiments, is far from accessible. Here, accessibility means definability, and we have a feeling of almost complete inadequacy in attempts to define the self. Yet the self is real—as real as our feeling that we *are*, from which flow all the lesser affirmations about ourselves and the things around us. We know, then, that we are, without being able to speak of ourselves as objects, which would be to give them definitions.

We may add, however, that our sense of self has continuity. It stretches throughout our past and we expect it to continue, day by day and year by year. Yet the sense of self has interruptions. We are aware of these by reason of memory, for which the interruptions—such as the night's sleep—exist, although the continuity may continue in an aspect of our being beyond the memory which the brain makes possible. We may suspect, by reason of remembered dreams, such continuity, but we don't know about this in the same way that

we know about the events experienced while we are awake. Yet we awaken in the morning the same self that we were when we went to sleep.

Is birth, one may wonder, the end of some larger kind of interruption? This is the same as asking if there can be beinghood for the self without the physical body. The question is legitimate, according to what we have stipulated thus far, since we spoke of the self as a unit of consciousness, not itself a body, although equipped with a body. The self, quite possibly, has other, subtler forms of equipment, as things so common as dreaming might suggest. In sleep we have many colorful experiences, yet all our organs of physical perception are somnolent with the body in sleep. So, conceivably, before birth we were living in some subtler form, waiting for a further engagement on earth, where, for some sixth of our lifetime (childhood) we will engage in maturing the equipment we shall need for whatever we have to do on earth.

This, after all, is no foreign or alien idea. It was the teaching of Plato, the vision of Maeterlinck, and is often an intuition of children, who can't imagine themselves as not having existed before. Bertrand Russell related in one of his books on education: "I find my boy still hardly able to grasp that there was a time when he did not exist; if I talk to him about the building of the pyramids or some such topic, he always wants to know what he was doing then, and is merely puzzled when he is told that he did not exist."

What if the child, who is father to the man, is wiser than the man in some respects, especially when he reflects, before feeling the pressures of contemporary belief or prejudice? We know, a modern philosopher has said, more than we can tell. It is, after all, only a belief that the self or soul becomes extinct with the body—is no more, in itself, than an efflorescence of the body. If thought, as in telepathy, can pass without a physical medium of transmission, why cannot the thinker do the same? It is of interest that not just philosophers, but entire cultures were in the past

wholly convinced that the breaks and discontinuities which modern man takes to be decisive and final were trivial and unimportant. As Ernst Cassirer wrote in the work completed before he died in 1945, *An Essay on Man*:

To mythical and religious feeling nature becomes one great society, the *society of life*. Man is not endowed with outstanding rank in this society. He is a part of it but he is in no respect higher than any other member. Life possesses the same religious dignity in its humblest and its highest forms. . . . we find the same principle—that of the solidarity and unbroken unity of life—if we pass from space to time. It holds not only in the order of simultaneity but also in the order of succession. The generations of men form a unique and uninterrupted chain. The former stages of life are preserved by reincarnation. . . .

Many mythic tales are concerned with the origin of death. The conception that man is mortal, by his nature and essence seems to be entirely alien to mythical and primitive religious thought. In this regard there is a striking difference between the mythical belief in immortality and all the later forms of a pure philosophical belief. If we read Plato's *Phaedo* we feel the whole effort of philosophical thought to give clear and irrefutable proof of the immortality of the soul. In mythical thought, the case is quite different. Here the burden of proof always lies on the opposite side. If anything is in need of proof it is not the fact of immortality but the fact of death. And myth and primitive religion never admit these proofs. They emphatically deny the possibility of death. By virtue of this conviction of the unknown unity of life, myth has to clear away this phenomenon. Primitive religion is perhaps the strongest and most energetic affirmation of life that we find in human culture.

Considerations of this sort lead to a tentative answer to the second question raised at the outset: "What am I doing here?" If death is but an incident in a long series of births, we gain a clue to the reason for the distinction of the influential if small number of thinkers who are the makers of the civilizations in which we have a lesser part. A real civilization, after all, is not something that just comes naturally: it is an heroic achievement by disciplined and imaginative men and women. The rest of us fit ourselves into the patterns they originate, but often corrupting them and inverting

their intended uses. The souls that made these patterns were more experienced and wiser souls. It is difficult if not impossible to explain Periclean Athens, the Florence of the de Medicis, the England of Elizabethan times, and the epoch of the Founding Fathers of the United States by any other theory. Let us add figures like Leibniz and Newton, Emerson and Thoreau, and in our own time Einstein and Gandhi. Only a transcendental metaphysics can supply a rational context for the emergence of such individuals. Heredity and environment are not sufficient to explain them; a third thing—a *tertium quid*, as one social scientist put it—is required. This is the soul which, in their case, was no offspring of its times but the maker of times.

Let us look at one of them, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, whose thought is still accomplishing a liberating effect. In *The Human Situation* (The Gifford Lectures, 1935-37), W. Macneile Dixon has long passages about Leibniz:

All knowledge was, like Aristotle's, his province, and though born in 1646, nearly three centuries ago, the scientific acumen and prescience of Leibniz enabled him to foresee, and even in a measure anticipate, many conclusions arrived at by the most recent science. He arrived, for example by his own acute and original route, at the modern theory of "the unconscious," "changes in the soul," as he called them, *petites* and imperceptible, so slight as not to attract our attention, which, nevertheless, in combination—as many slight and hardly heard sounds may together make a great noise—exercise a profound influence upon our waking lives. In his denial that between conscious and unconscious states a hard and fast line could anywhere be drawn; in his declaration, supported by modern physics, that matter or substance is but another name for energy, since all substances are for ever in activity, and action is their characteristic quality; in his view that empty space is a fiction, and that space and time, however distinct, are inseparable—in these, as in his approach to philosophical problems by the mathematical route, in his idea resembling the modern cell theory of the organism as composed of lesser organisms, Leibniz appears as a bright prophetic star, forerunner and foreteller of new ways of thought.

Well, if he was right, or now seems to have been right in so many ways, what else did Leibniz think? Dixon goes

In his view, in the view of this most suggestive and remarkable thinker, just as a nation is composed of persons so the universe may best be understood as consisting of an infinite variety of living and active beings, monads, as he called them, each a separate and distinct center of energy monads of many grades and levels, the whole forming a *scala naturae*, a staircase of living creatures. "The world," said Leibniz, "is not a machine. Everything in it is force, life thought, desire." The monads reflect the universe, each from its own angle, each in its own degree. Each has its own energy and appetite, and each seeks, as men and animals seek, the fulfillment of its own peculiar needs. This great community extends both upwards and downwards from man through the whole creation. The world, in brief—a noble thought, and at least worthy of belief—is a living society.

All are monads. We are monads. All are centers of awareness, of action and reaction. We are monads who now work at the level of self-consciousness—which constitutes the moral universe, for only self-conscious beings can be spoken of as responsible, who can see, if they will, the effects on others of what they do. We have the instrument of mind which makes this possible. This is at once a distinction and a curse—for us the blessed innocence of being guided by instinct alone does not exist. Mind makes of us all potential Prometheans, and that, we may think, defines our calling, the work we have to do. The neglect of that work seems sufficient explanation of the mess we have made of our common life. The doing of that work by a few has given us a roster of heroes and saviours, those whom we remember in reverence and respect—the rare beings we used to tell our children about, but have largely; forgotten today save for ritual gestures.

Let us look at more of what Dixon says:

Accept for a moment the point of view. Suppose, with Leibniz, the world to be a congregation of separate entities, extending from the dust beneath our feet to the stars above us. A surprising fancy, you think, but let us give it rein. Suppose each individual

particle within the Universe bent in its own mode and measure upon the expression and expansion of its separate being, all in a degree sentient, some below, some above what we call consciousness, "less sunk in matter," as Leibniz expressed it, than others. Suppose the world's existing patterns the outcome of these striving selves. Suppose further—a crucial step—the division we habitually make between the animate and inanimate a needless dichotomy, and the minutest of existing things, the very constituents of the atoms themselves, charged with vital energy, each living and spiritual in its essential nature. We know, indeed, that life proceeds only from previous life, but who has drawn the line for us, as in the case of the viruses, the dividing line? So pervasive and ubiquitous is the will to live that we may well stretch the line of imagination, and suppose it to inform not only ourselves and all organic nature, but even what to us appears inanimate nature itself. Does science forbid the suggestion? On the contrary, it now inclines to support it. The wheel has come full circle. Whereas until yesterday physics dictated its concepts to biology, biological concepts are now invading the realm of chemistry and physics. The modern physiological view, we hear from Dr. Charles Myers, maintains "that consciousness, however primitive, fulfilling however feebly the function of orderly direction and purpose, is primary, and that it has grown by distillation, differentiation and restriction to narrower, more dominating, higher levels within the organism," in a word, that throughout the Cosmos mind controls matter, and not matter mind. . . .

"Mind," as Professor Stout wrote, "is not produced at all, but is in some way involved as a primary factor in the creation of the universe." Look round over the landscape of nature and observe its continuity, the almost insensible series of its gradations, and you know not where to insert your dividing knife or draw your line. Overnight and in secret ways the minerals take counsel together and glide into plants, plants into animals and animals into men. Observe the organizations on land and water, in air and sky, federations in which the higher and more advanced among the monads make use of the lower, the growing things of the elements and minerals, the moving creatures of the growing things. Crude or mindless matter is not capable of organizing a world. What hinders that we should accept the analogy offered by human society and human history? There, in that Scene of action, as in what seems the inanimate creation, the striving individuals have formed tribes and federations, adapted themselves to surrounding circumstances, fallen into fixed customs,

and ordered, as the creatures on the lower steps of nature's staircase have ordered, their ways of life.

At the end of these developments of the Leibnizian vision, Dixon says:

When we have a choice a spacious view is to be preferred, as best in keeping with a Cosmos we know to be spacious. I put to you a question. Are our thoughts too noble, too magnificent for the reality to compass? Are our cheques too large for the bank of the universe to honour? Can the mind, even in imagination, outrun or outrange the whole from which it sprang? For my part, I think not. "The sun," said Anaxagoras, "is larger than the Peloponnesus," and people wondered at his saying. For my part I think the universe is wider and larger than the wisest even of philosophers have ever conceived. Let us then think imperially, for the more magnificent our thoughts the nearer the truth.

The owl of Minerva, Hegel declared, does not rise until the sun of empire has set. We live in a time of setting; the empires of the present are all in decline, with little evidence, anywhere, of the possibility of revival. Why should this be a time for the rebirth of wisdom? One answer would be, because when the dreams of corporate enterprise fade, when collectivist ambitions can no longer be fulfilled, humans are free to think, once again, for themselves, and as the age declines they are pressed to do it. The death of states and their ways does not mean the end of mankind but, in a sense, their liberation. To think "imperial" thoughts, in Dixon's prescription, means to recognize and take part in the empire of mind and soul. Humans have done this before, and now they are encouraged to do it again.

Writing about ancient and primitive man in *The Primitive World and its Transformations* (1953), Robert Redfield said:

Primitive man is, as I have said, at once in nature and yet acting on it, getting his living, taking from it food, and shelter. But as that nature is part of the same moral system in which man and the affairs between men also find themselves, man's actions with regard to nature are limited by notions of inherent, not expedient, rightness. . . . "All economic activities, such as hunting, gathering fuel, cultivating the land, storing food, assume a relatedness to the

encompassing universe. And the relatedness is moral or religious.

The primitive and ancient view, Redfield says, was that the universe was seen as morally significant, while among civilized Western peoples, "that significance is doubted or not conceived at all." For us, "Man comes out from the unity of the universe within which he is oriented now as something separate from nature and comes to confront nature as something with physical qualities only, upon which he may work his will." By us, in short, the universe is not seen as having a moral character. We look upon nature as no more than material. The ecologists, who are the only accountants worth listening to, are kept continuously busy adding up the debits which result.

But gradually, in our time, the hungers of the heart are turning into hungers of the mind and, using our minds, we are becoming fatefully aware that the modern world, as we conceive and use it, will before long be widely overtaken by hungers of the body.

The lesson of all this is that, by submitting to the reductionist formulas of modern materialism with its scientific assertions and claims, we have been turning the world against ourselves. We have become laggard participants in the great fraternity of life, even denying that the bonds which unite us with our habitat are moral as well as physical.

But, as units of consciousness, as monads and souls, we are capable of learning. If we begin to think of ourselves in this way, what becomes of habitual notions of security and well-being? Surely it is time to begin considering the unifying moral philosophy adopted by the philosophers and teachers of the past.

## *REVIEW*

### ON CREATING A NON-POISONOUS WORLD

*NONTOXIC & NATURAL*, a book published late last year (by Tarcher, in Los Angeles, \$9.95) makes frightening reading, yet is not to be ignored. The subtitle is "How to Avoid Dangerous Everyday Products and Buy or Make Safe Ones," and the best way for us to convey a notion of the contents is to quote from the Preface by the author, Debra Lynn Dadd. She begins:

Four years ago I didn't know a toxic chemical from a natural substance. I took aspirins for headaches, and I thought that pollution was something caused by industries the government was controlling.

That all changed in January of 1980, when I finally discovered that the swollen eyes, sore throats, skin problems, headaches, insomnia, fatigue, depression, lack of self-confidence and motivation, and compulsive eating I had been suffering from for a good part of my twenty-four years were all being caused by certain toxic chemicals I was exposed to in my everyday environment.

To find relief from my almost constant symptoms, I began to look for common products I could use that did not contain these chemicals. As I experimented with countless different alternatives, I made many mistakes because I knew nothing of labeling laws. I didn't know that chemicals could be hidden in products or that they could take on different names. As I found and incorporated nontoxic and natural products into my life, I began shedding my physical and psychological problems, as well as forty pounds of excess weight. For the first time, I experienced what it was like to feel good. Today I lead a creative, energetic life, am virtually symptom free, and am in control of my wellness instead of being a helpless victim.

Before I began my research I thought I was alone in reacting to so many things that seemed to be safe for everyone else—things such as tap water, gas heat, acrylic sweaters, perfume. But then I found they weren't so safe for everyone else either, because they contained substances that have been scientifically studied and tested and are known to cause cancer, birth defects, and changes in genetic structure, as well as a multitude of common symptoms and diseases

that can range from irritation to disability. Once I knew what to look for, I saw that many other people around me were also being affected, even if they hadn't yet made the connection. Even though many prevalent man-made substances currently appear to be harmless, scientists are concerned about the unknown long-range effects of our low-dose exposure.

These realizations launched Debra Dadd on a new career—finding products which didn't make her sick, and then listing them in a manual for use by people subject to chemical sensitivities. The manual turned out to be popular, and so she wrote this book, giving the brand names of some 1200 products which she has found to be comparatively free of toxic ingredients. She also rates products either A, B, or C for nontoxicity and naturalness, based on her own experience and evaluation. She seems to have included virtually the entire range of personal and household needs. While the book is organized for systematic use, all through it are common sense suggestions such as:

If you cannot avoid plastics altogether, use only items made from hard plastics, as they are less volatile. To test plastic, try to bend it; use only those kinds you cannot bend or that would break if you applied enough pressure. If a plastic substance is at all pliable, don't use it.

The book includes a long list of mail-order sources the author has found reliable for non-toxic products, and a list of harmful or toxic substances to be avoided. Each category of product begins with a note on the harmful substances likely to be encountered, then names alternative products that do not contain them. Numerous food products, textiles, and other items are listed. The book is meant to be, and is, a practical shopping guide. It has 289 pages. It also provides hundreds of do-it-yourself formulas for people who want to make their own shampoos and similar household items.

The reader of this book will be likely to make mental notes about dozens of things and to incorporate many of its suggestions into one's shopping habits. That is its usefulness. But there is also its provocation. As one reads long thoughts may intrude and interrupt. *Why* does our civilization impose so many dangers on the

ordinary consumer—dangers known and unknown? Debra Dadd is probably right—a lot more people than we realize are likely to be especially sensitive to chemical toxins in even small quantities and to react as she did to uncritical use of what the supermarkets and specialty shops provide. One may simply be living at a lower level of health, not ever "feeling good," or be developing low-grade allergies which are at first ignored: Who wants to think he or she is going around *sick* all the time? But meanwhile these books come out, on allergies, on toxins in food and clothing, and especially in cosmetics, over which the Food and Drug Administration has only nominal control.

So the long thoughts continue: What kind of "progress" is it that has so many undesirable side-effects? Are we actually getting a kick-back from nature because of the way we live, think, and act? Our grandparents certainly didn't have all these things wrong with them. Is there a mood in the acquisitive, technological society which is beginning to *attract* the negative aspect of the natural world, through unnatural uses of its products? We don't well understand and cannot control the onset of degenerative diseases; there are ecologists who know what we are doing wrong in the fields of modern agriculture, but more "production" puts an end to all warnings and arguments. The best *conventional* minds of our time have concluded that a peaceful world is simply not going to be possible, so that, whatever else we do, we had better to be ever-ready to make war and try to come out on top, even though common sense shows that surviving a nuclear war is probably less desirable than getting killed suddenly.

A side-effect of reading Debra Dadd's book may be deciding that there are no *institutional* solutions for the problems which provide her subject-matter; only individual solutions exist, and they aren't by any means perfect, but a lot better than doing nothing.

How sick must a society get, one wonders, before making up its mind to change its ways? The question, of course, is not rational. A "society" doesn't make up its mind; it doesn't have much mind, being mostly a mass of half-baked and usually conflicting opinions. Only individuals make up their minds, and only individuals, when there are enough of them, can be effective in altering the social patterns to good effect. Books like *Nontoxic and Natural* can help them to see a little more clearly and to start thinking in constructive ways. What the book says in effect is that there is very little that we can take for granted as good for us to eat, wear, and use.

It is an irony of the time—a time when more and more people are looking for ways to simplify their lives—that now they find, from all the books by specialists that make particular warnings, that no one has enough time to check on so many things, so many dark possibilities. And we can't emigrate to a new world and make a fresh start: we seem to have used all the fresh worlds up. Pollution, meanwhile, is everywhere in the world we have. For example, under Cleaning Products Debra Dadd says:

Household cleaning products are among the most toxic substances encountered in one's everyday environment, causing health problems ranging from rashes to death. A study of Oregon housewives over a fifteen-year period showed that women who stayed in their homes all day had a 54-per cent higher death rate from cancer than did the women who had jobs away from the home during the day. The study suggested that this higher death rate might be attributed to chemicals in household products. . . .

The safety of most household products is determined by its effects if *the product is swallowed*. Since most cleaning products are clearly labeled as hazardous if swallowed and are still considered safe enough to be on the market, it is obvious that no consideration is given to the toxic effects of the fumes inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

The author suggests:

Make your own cleaning products at home, as this book suggests in the Do-It-Yourself sections. . . . Not only are homemade products safe to use, they are

much less expensive, since you do not have to pay for labeling, advertising, or aerosol spray cans.

There is another side to this subject which should have at least passing notice. A generation or so ago a lot of young men studied chemistry because it was a way to make a good living if you were at all inventive. Nobody told these boys that they might become the prisoners of tomorrow's world. Just as nobody told Henry Ford that his great contribution to low-cost transport for all Americans would some day make Los Angeles a bad place to live if you have the habit of breathing deeply. No one found a reason to tell the teachers at West Point or Annapolis that it would be a good idea to explain to the cadets and ensigns that modern war might exceed the limit of a rational undertaking and become the means of not merely destroying the enemy, but the whole world.

Today, all these peoples, after living what they have thought to be productive and conscientious lives, are, one way or the other, having to consider such propositions. When, one wonders, will they join the rest of us who are now asking: What have we been doing wrong?

In short, Establishment America is slowly moving toward the position of defendant in the trial of experience. Read, for example, *Silent Spring*, and then read a book written eight years later, *Since Silent Spring*, by Frank Graham, to see the general character of the debate that is becoming angry and heated. The "defendants" need a lot of help. They have been spokesmen for years of what we have called "the American Way," and now aroused critics are calling them bad names. Seeing the light is very difficult for them, as it probably is for the rest of us, in other directions. Yet the truths of the sort that are found in *Silent Spring* have to be told. Also the truths found in *Chemical Feast*, James Turner's study of the Food and Drug Administration, showing how little can be expected of this and similar regulatory agencies. These are some of the long thoughts to which *Nontoxic and Natural* leads.



**COMMENTARY**  
**THE WISDOM OF THE WISE**

WHY, one may wonder, are the questions with which this week's lead article opens so seldom seriously asked? Is it because we suppose these queries have all been settled by experts long ago? Have we given attention to the part individual reason ought to play in such reflections? Or to the matter of who has competence to deal with questions as ultimate as human identity? Shouldn't we rely most on the judgments of the most distinguished thinkers for considering such decisions—in our case the skeptics?

A certain modesty is indeed in order in such matters. The ancient peoples of the world felt this modesty, and ordinary persons, when they expressed themselves on questions which transcend our first-hand experience—such as the reality of the soul, independent of the body, although able to live in a body in order to gain experience—prefaced what they said with a reference to those from whom they had learned it, saying "Thus have I heard." They said this about what they found reasonable to believe, but had not learned how to demonstrate.

After all, how *do* you prove the immortality of the soul? What sort of evidence would be acceptable to others? A man may say, "I know that I have lived before and will live again, because I remember some of my past incarnations, and I have every reason to think I will be born again after this life is over." We may think he is a man worthy of belief, but even so, his evidence, as evidence, is only hearsay. Such ideas have only self-validation, which is hardly the same to others as their own experience.

Yet the question of the truth of these ideas obviously has great importance, so that in time people come to believe in a great variety of teachings concerning life after death. But the question is in no sense to be settled democratically, by vote. That kind of decision-making leads only to orthodoxy, and the more we

examine the orthodoxies which have become current in the world, the more we are likely to believe that they are all filled with errors.

So we are left with our own thoughts and the borrowed wisdom of the wise, since today the orthodoxies seem to be all breaking up. But who are the wise, if we want help? Answering that question is the one project that deserves great and persistent attention. Meanwhile, our other task is to begin thinking for ourselves in the search for answers. How else could the wise have become wise?

# CHILDREN

## . . . and Ourselves

### A COMMUNITY OF PARENTS

EVERY two months our copy of *Growing Without Schooling* comes in and we usually take it home, along with a red pencil for marking things to quote. It is, in its way, a very reassuring paper. There are all those people out there around the country who have taken their children out of school and are teaching them at home, with enough good results to satisfy quite anxious parents. John Holt, founder-editor, and Donna Richoux, co-editor, have generated a field in which a community of parents has come into being—resourceful, determined people who know that children, whether wonderful or not so wonderful, are *different*, and need the flexible environment for learning which only parents can provide. The paper is filled with letters from mothers and fathers, telling what they do with their youngsters and how it works. There are also letters reciting what happens in confrontations with the school authorities, some of whom turn out to be quite cooperative, others stubborn and authoritarian. This community of parents is slowly restoring a basic freedom to the American people—the right to bring up their children as they think best.

For example, a mother in Florida writes to tell about a meeting with educationists in which the subject of home schooling came up. Two of the speakers, Dr. Patterson Lamb and Ralph Turlington, both officials in state education, are quoted.

Dr. Lamb said that there was an astronomical number of parents teaching their kids at home who were calling themselves private schools. She said that this summer the Department of Education in Florida had checked several states to see what they did in this type of situation. Lamb said that since California had the nearest type of laws to Florida's, she called there and asked what they did. California said that they just called home situations private schools and got on with their more important

business. Lamb said that due to numerous suits against the state of Florida concerning this and due to misunderstandings in every county concerning what constitutes a private school, they had decided to remedy the situation by—guess what? Loosening the law to allow parents to teach their children at home and requiring them to have the kids tested once a year (by a licensed psychologist) to make sure they're keeping up.

The truant officers were outraged. Some said, "Don't loosen the law, tighten it!"

Then Mr. Turlington came on and I must say I was impressed. . . . He said that the state could not continue to say to parents that they had to be certified to teach, when teachers in private schools do not. "It just won't wash, folks," he said. "How do we know parents can't teach better? Let them prove it!"

Proposed legislation will be presented this spring. . .

Later Donna Richoux offers this counsel:

We have long recommended that home-schoolers get sample copies of standardized tests for use in their homes. For those who worry about the tests their children are required to take, for those who worry how their unschooled children would do if some day they *were* tested, for those who feel (or whose relatives feel) that learning to take tests is a necessary modern skill—and judging from the mail and phone calls, many parents are in one or more of these categories—having tests in the house to try out, experiment with, play with, can be most useful and reassuring.

Some tests can even be *fun*, especially when you are not under any pressure of time limits or anxiety about results. . . . To repeat the address of a free catalog which offers single copies of many standardized tests: Bureau of Educational Measurements, Emporia State University, Emporia, Kans. 66801.

A pleasant feature of *Growing Without Schooling* is the department, John Holt's Book and Music Store. Unlike most of such lists in other publications, it gives as many old titles as new ones—fine old books that Holt likes and thinks it would be good for parents to use with their children. There are also books for adults, again, Holt's favorites. Among these is the *Penguin Stephen Leacock*, a Canadian university

professor who was as funny a writer as Mark Twain. How nice it is to come across even a mention of Leacock in a contemporary magazine! This is sort of the atmosphere of this part of Holt's paper, about the things, old and new, that he likes and recommends, regardless of what "the market" is doing now or any other time. A recent book he gives attention to in review is Freeman Dyson's *Weapons and Hope*. During the war Holt was a submariner for the Navy, an experience which intensifies his interest in the movement to "bring nuclear weapons under control and to establish world peace." He thinks this book is as important as Edmond Taylor's *Richer by Asia*, a classic of about forty years ago. Of Dyson's book, he says:

. . . one point, obvious when we think about it, but one that has not been made by any other writer I know of, is that no proposal for the control or elimination of nuclear weapons has *any* chance of political success unless it has the full support of a considerable part of the military establishment. . . . There is no sense in talking as if these people were not there, or as if their objections could be ignored, or as if they were all malevolent or crazy. What Dyson shows us is that there are very good grounds for believing that we could in fact win the support of military leaders for a proposal to abolish or severely limit nuclear weapons on pragmatic grounds that they make sensible conduct of war impossible. I note in passing that *Giving Up the Gun* [Noel Perrin] shows that such a thing did in fact already happen once in history.

One other book with an intriguing title, *How To Raise a Healthy Child . . . in Spite of your Doctor*, by Robert S. Mendelsohn, M.D., is reviewed by Mary Van Doren, who says:

Some of the specific areas Dr. Mendelsohn covers are: How doctors make healthy kids sick; Prenatal care; Nutrition; Fevers; Headaches; Abdominal pain; Earaches; Colds and flu; Sore throats; Vision; Skin problems; Orthopedics; Hyperactivity; Allergies (also treated throughout the book as causes of many problems); Accidents (medical treatment at its best); Hospitals; immunization; Selecting a doctor.

This book has changed my husband's and my attitude toward the medical profession. We don't trust doctors any less than we did, but we feel more confident about not allowing medical intervention.

We bought it primarily to help us settle the immunization question, but have found it to be essential for any problems. As Mendelsohn says in his introduction, this book differs greatly from other books on children's medicine because the bottom line is *not* "See your doctor." As with homeschooling and GWS, it's very helpful and comforting to have written, clear, useful support for taking responsibility for something that so many people have been framed to think can only be handled by "experts."

A self-taught mother in Colorado tells in her letter what having a family did for her:

. . . My husband, Kenny, is not convinced that homeschooling is good . . . He finally agreed to try it with Eli (5)—mainly because it's so important to me. . . .

One of the reasons that Kenny is apprehensive about me being the kids' "teacher" is that I was a total failure in public school—I lost interest very early—probably in first or second grade—and struggled miserably through school up until I was 16. . . . When I married Ken I could hardly read or write and couldn't even do simple arithmetic. (I wasn't failing high school—only very unhappily "just passing.")

So I think my husband's apprehension is understandable. But I've come such a long way on the learning path since I've become a mother. My first real desire to learn came with my first pregnancy when I read everything I could get my hands on about labor, birth, babies' nutrition, and parenting. This extensive study ended in a beautiful home birth and a very enlightened attitude toward life and learning. From learning nutrition I developed a love for organic gardening and many, many different ideas of self-sufficiency. I began to teach myself piano at age 25 and now, two years later, am still practicing daily and love it—I've made real progress and am able to play tunes on other instruments: flute, clarinet, guitar, and kalimba. I've been teaching myself wood-working we have recently gotten chickens, I'm learning to ride a motorcycle—all things I've always wanted to do.

What I'm getting at is that I finally feel that I'm a very active learner and I include the kids in everything I do that they're interested in. I'm sure it helps the kids to see me so thrilled about learning things I want to know about.

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## *FRONTIERS*

### A New Homestead Program

IN the *Catholic Worker* for August of last year, Bill Dean reviews what sounds like a remarkably good book, *A Need To Testify*, by Iris Origo, who grew up in Italy. She tells the stories of four heroic leaders in the struggle against Fascism, among them Ignazio Silone, author of *Fontamara*, *Bread and Wine*, and *Seed Beneath the Snow*, an extraordinary trilogy on the human struggle against poverty and oppression. Silone was born in 1900 in a town in the Abruzzi, a mountainous region of south central Italy, and was inspired for the rest of his life by the nobility of the people, despite their extreme poverty. The reason for speaking of this book and the account it gives of Silone is a story it repeats of something that happened to him early in life. Dean writes:

The town left an indelible impression on Silone. . . . His father, a small landowner, and his mother, a weaver, must have been remarkable human beings. In his autobiography, *Emergency Exit*, Silone describes how one day, as a boy, he saw a handcuffed man limping down the road, between two guards. "How funny he looks!" the boy cried. But his father took him by the ear and dragged him indoors, to be shut up in his own room.

"What have I done wrong?" he asked, and received the reply: "You must never laugh at a convict."

"Why not?"

"Because he can't defend himself. And then because perhaps he's innocent. And in any case, he's an unhappy man."

Such experiences must have had something to do with the quality of Silone's prose. Once read, he cannot be forgotten.

Donald Worster, author of the often-quoted *Nature's Economy* (Sierra Club), had a valuable contribution in the *Friends of the Earth* monthly, *Not Man Apart* for last November. The subject is water. In one place he says:

What is needed is a new "homestead program," equivalent to the one devised in the mid-nineteenth century, that will encourage many western farmers to

relocate in the humid areas and learn the best practice for those places. For most of our national history we have assumed that to go forward was to go west. Now a sustainable agriculture requires a redirection of progress: Go east, young man or woman, and grow up with the country.

The West is now overpopulated, grossly exceeding its natural river capacity, and a new sense of water limits should stimulate the region's city residents as well as farmers to resettle eastward where they can be supported more easily. Those who remain, who constitute a permanent population in equilibrium with the environment, must have new water technologies that will enable them to survive, enjoy a modest prosperity, and grow some of their food close at hand. Unfortunately, almost no official thought has been devoted to alternative technologies that can provide for the population, although we know that at some point the great reservoirs will be filled with silt. It is time, perhaps past time, to begin the process of reinventing the West. The farsighted desert or plains farmer will start now to work out his own salvation, not wait for planners, although he can use the advice of hydrologists, geneticists, and engineers. He will study the art of adaptive dry farming. He will demand some new crop varieties that can survive in places of little rain, and perhaps he will convince legislators to grant some aid to ease that changeover, much as they have subsidized home solar-energy conversions. With his neighbors, he will devise ways of diverting floodwaters without appropriating the entire river, ways of guaranteeing a minimum flow in the channel to support its ecology while making use of the river for crops.

Mr. Worster's discussion of the conservation and uses of water is titled "Thinking Like a River," and some day we shall all have to learn to think in this way and to make it natural to do so. If we do it in flight, grumbling all the way, we won't do it very well, perhaps not well enough. Cooperation with nature needs to be good natured. Will we ever, one wonders, have the kind of government that welcomes vision and an understanding of natural processes? Now we have only governments that copy the thinking of the wrong people. Real pain may be the only remedy for this bad habit. Worster goes on:

By now it should be evident that no market will ever pay farmers for accommodating themselves to their watershed. To be sure, the marketplace will

reward long-range calculation more handsomely than many farmers are aware. But finally the marketplace is an institution that teaches self-advancement, private acquisition, and the domination of nature. . . . Ecological harmony is a nonmarket value that takes a collective will to achieve. It requires that farmers living along a stream cooperate to preserve it and to pass a fertile world down to another generation. It requires that urban consumers be willing to pay farmers to use good conservation techniques as well as to produce food. Without a public willingness to bid against market pressures, there will not be a radical reconstruction of farming methods or a rapprochement between agriculture and nature.

Fortunately, we have some exemplars of this sort of thinking, and for reasons hard to list are so placed that their circumstances permit applying what they believe despite the grain of the times. These are the people we should put in charge of the education of the coming generations, for those generations will reap either a harvest of punishments for their destiny, or the happiness which grows out of living in understanding of the laws of life.

Mr. Worster puts it well:

Almost forty years ago, Aldo Leopold wrote that we will never get along well with nature until we learn to regard it morally. We must develop, he maintained, a sense of belonging to the larger community of nature, a community that has many interests and claims besides our own. We must cultivate a moral sensitivity to that community's integrity and beauty. He spoke of the need for a "land ethic," including in it a moral responsiveness to all parts of the ecological whole. But given the centrality of water in our lives, it also makes sense to talk about a "water ethic." Water, after all, covers most of this planet's surface. Even more than land, water is the essence and the context of life, the sphere of our being and that of other creatures. It has a value that extends beyond the economic use we make of it on our farms. Preserving that value of water through a new American agriculture is an extension of ethics as well as of wisdom.

Hardly anything needs to be added to this.