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THE NEGLECTED QUESTION

ONE is inevitably impressed by the ease with which critics of and prescribers for our society tell what needs to be done—how we must think and act together as an intelligent unit to accomplish desirable goals. One would suppose that these writers somehow knew the secret of how to cut the tether of self-interest and urgent personal need, permitting people to unite and recognize the course of community interest and begin to think and act together for the common good. But isn't it altogether evident that we do not have this habit at all? That, as John Schaar put it years ago, that in the combinations of interest we form: "Membership is instrumental: the association is an efficient means for the achievement of individual goals, not an expression of a way of life valued in and for itself."

It is not, in short, "natural" for us to think in terms of community ends. From centuries of practice, the radius of self has been limited to personal wants, allowing only partisan alliances, and such collaborations, once they are institutionalized, became absolutely blind to the consequences of the driving activities which grow powerful through the combination of energy with calculating intelligence. But now the results of this blindness are before us, while our habits are so well established that we do not know what to do about them or how even to take them into account. Again, as Schaar has put it:

> We have finally made the engine that can smash all engines, the power that can destroy all power. Security today, bought at the price of billions, means that We shall have fifteen minutes' warning that They intend to annihilate us, during which time we can also annihilate them. The most powerful state today cannot provide security, but only revenge. There is not a person among us who has not imagined the destruction of all things by nuclear holocaust. Not since civilization began has man been so totally reduced to the status of temporary occupant of his home the earth. The dream of total security through total power has ended in the reality of total vulnerability.
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> The case with abundance comes out the same way. Inexcusable injustices of distribution still prevail in the modern states, but the "battle of production" is nearing total victory. Societies have always been, in part, organizations for the production of the nutrients of life, but modern civilizations are dominated as no others have ever been by the law of production. More than a century ago Walt Whitman observed that America had already overdeveloped its economic sector of life and should turn now to other efforts. Modern production is dedicated almost entirely to consumption; and since consumption is limitless, so too is production. But to produce something means to destroy something else; hence, destruction keeps pace with production. There is the deepest law of modern production: it must continue as long as there is anything to destroy. That is not metaphor but the precise dynamic of modern economies.
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> Modern production obscures the sun, pollutes the air and chews up great forests. It drinks whole lakes and rivers or transmutes them into abominations: there is a river in Ohio so polluted by flammable industrial wastes that it has been declared a fire hazard. Modern production has already consumed many species of creatures, and it is making ready to consume the oceans. Its factories once devoured children and more recently they have been fed slaves. The civilization of production periodically destroys men by heaps and piles in war, and it daily mangles the spirits of others in meaningless labor. The only aim of this civilization is to grow, and to grow it must consume. Jacques Ellul has shown, unanswerably I think, that the process must run until it consumes those who think they run it—until man is absorbed into technique and process. That will be the total victory in the battle of production; and as always with total victories, no atonement will avail. (*New American Review*, No. 8.)

Obviously, there are those who think in the way that societies ought to think; just as there are those who, as Aldo Leopold said, "think like a mountain." But they are few and they are not in charge. And they will not try to *take* charge,

either on principle or because they have learned from history that taking charge is the defeat of the processes of self-government and the start of the enslavement of people. But they do speak their minds, although knowing what they say must compete with the dinning of the mass media whose only purpose is to increase consumption. The question, then, is: How can what they say be made more audible? How can it be made more persuasive without degrading it into a series of slogans which soon destroy the meanings they intend? These are the questions to which the prescribers should give attention. Or, in other words, how is the character of a whole human being formed?

This question is the most difficult one that we could ask, since the answer does not depend upon the cleverness of the questioner, but upon the effort of those in whom the character is to be formed. If inward development could be accomplished by teachers—or programmers—we would not be human beings at all, but creatures who would need no Socrateses or Arthur Morgans, but only—what?—animal trainers, perhaps.

Obviously, we need to know more about ourselves. If we did, we would waste less time calling angrily or patiently for things that will never work.

In *Human Nature and the Human Condition* (1959) Joseph Wood Krutch gives attention to some of the consequences of the things we make to please ourselves. He picks the automobile as an example.

> Suppose the price we pay got higher and higher until it reached a point where it no longer seemed worth paying. Suppose, for example, the suspicion that gasoline fumes are a major cause of lung cancer should be confirmed and suppose that the incidence of cancer should rise so tremendously that we could no longer shrug it off. What could we do? Restrict the use of automobiles to the essential services and forbid their use except for that transportation of the goods without which whole populations would starve?
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> That would be not only difficult but catastrophic if done. Our economic system is dependent upon the industry which manufactures these instruments of pleasure, necessity, and death. If that industry were seriously curtailed, so much unemployment would be created and so much of that "purchasing power" upon which we depend would disappear, that other industries would grind almost to a halt and we should be faced with a depression by comparison with which that following the crash of 1929 would seem like boom time.
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> Once we lived without the automobile and without a thousand other things. But we could not live without them now. One by one we acquired them only to become dependent upon them. We think we own them, but they own us. Economists and sociologists take it more and more for granted that industry rules us. What we do, how we live, and even what we think we want, all depend upon industry's needs rather than upon ours.
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> Obviously, then, there is not much use talking about a return to the horse-and buggy age. Conceivably, civilization might take a slow turn and gradually simplify itself. Much more probably, it might be so drastically simplified by some overwhelming catastrophe like an all-out world war that the few survivors might, willy-nilly, resume a pastoral or even a hunting economy capable of supporting the very small remaining population. But technological advance is a process which is not likely to prove reversible as the result of any deliberate intention on our part. None of the power we have acquired will be voluntarily surrendered in the near future. Even nations and races far less enthusiastic than we are about "progress" find themselves carried along in the current. France is dragged protesting into twentieth-century civilization. Even the Navajos, one of the most conservative of all peoples, have turned into hunters of uranium.

What have we here? We have the reasoned reflections of a man able to think in behalf of human community. He doesn't extend much hope. How could he, considering the accuracy of his analysis? The only conclusion that we can see to draw from what he says turns on what seems the remote possibility that "civilization might take a slow turn and gradually simplify itself." Already there are those "out there" on the land who are devoting the skills and sophistications of modern research to simplifications of agriculture, and

occasionally industry. These pioneers exist and are setting an example. MANAS often writes about them. But they are, of course, too few, and they need appreciative recognition and support, and most of all recruits to expand their efforts. What would help people to more awareness of the work of these individuals who think in terms of community, whose idea of the good is the good of all? How is the radius of the conscious self to be extended? Where do you begin in such an "educational" enterprise?

Ecologists are scientists who have one answer to this question. The bioregionalists have a similar answer. The great naturalists, men and women like John Muir, John Burroughs, and Rachel Carson have shown the way.

Perhaps, indeed, that is the right place to start—with the naturalists. We should begin by the schooling of our children in the fraternity of life. Youngsters who grow up appreciative of the simplicities and wonders of nature will think naturally of the community of life and feel themselves a part of it and it a part of themselves. They will have a more inclusive feeling of the self. This would be the beginning of the habit we need—the habit of thinking of others as parts of ourselves. And nature, after all, is now announcing in no uncertain terms its claim upon our ways. They are not right. And how can people ignorant of nature ever set them right? We should not try to get this knowledge at second hand. All knowledge which comes to us from specialists is loaded with bias. All that even the greatest of naturalists can give us is encouragement to find out for ourselves. How does one set about doing this?

Almost certainly, the best teacher of learning about and from nature is Henry David Thoreau. And the best place to look him up—or the first place—is in his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers,* the story of a rowboat excursion of seven days with his brother John. This was in 1839 when he was twenty-two years old. He wrote about it after he took up residence at Walden Pond in 1845. He had made copious notes.

It took a week for them to build the boat—"fifteen feet long by three and a half in breadth at the widest part, painted green below, with a border of blue, with reference to the two elements in which it was to spend its existence." It had storage space for food, two sets of oars, two places for masts, one of which became a tent-pole at night. How did they design the boat? Thoreau explains:

> If rightly made, a boat would be a sort of amphibious animal, a creature of two elements, related by one half its structure to some swift and shapely fish, and by the other to some strongwinged and graceful bird. The fish shows where there should be the greatest breadth of beam and depth in the hold; its fins direct where to set the oars, and the tail gives some hint for the form and the position of the rudder. The bird shows how to rig and trim the sails, and what form to give to the prow that it may balance thc boat and divide the air and water best. These hints we had but partially obeyed. But the eyes, though they are no sailors, will never be satisfied with any model however fashionable, which does not answer all the requisitions of art. However, as art is all of a ship but the wood, and yet the wood alone will rudely serve the purpose of a ship, so our boat being of wood gladly availed itself of the old law that the heavier shall float the lighter, and though a dull water fowl, proved a sufficient buoy for our purpose.

What sort of man writes like that, has such a library of images?

> The bright blue flowers of the soap-wort gentian were sprinkled here and there in the adjacent meadows, like flowers which Proserpine had dropped, and still further in the fields, or higher on the bank, were seen the Virginian rhexia, and drooping neottia or ladies'-tresses; while from the more distant waysides, which we occasionally passed, and banks where the sun had lodged, was reflected a dull yellow beam from the ranks of tansy, now in its prime. In short, nature seemed to have adorned herself for our departure with a profusion of fringes and curls, mingled with the bright tints of flowers, reflected in the water.

Thoreau begins his account of the fish to be recognized in the Concord by saying: "It enhances

our sense of the grand security and serenity of nature to observe the still undisturbed economy and content of the fishes of this century, their happiness a regular fruit of the summer." He found joy in the contentment and happiness of fishes! Industry was already becoming a problem for fishermen and nature lovers:

> Salmon, shad, and Alewives were formerly abundant here, and taken in weirs by the Indians, who taught this method to the whites, by whom they were used as food and as manure, until the dam, and afterward the canal at Billerica, and the factories at Lowell, put an end to their migrations hitherward; though it is thought that a few more enterprising shad may still occasionally be seen in this part of the river. It is said to account for the destruction of the fishery, that those who at that time represented the interests of the fishermen and the fishes, remembering between what dates they were accustomed to take the grown shad, stipulated that the dams should be left open for that season only, and the fry, which go down a month later, were consequently stopped and destroyed by myriads. Others say that the fish-ways were not properly constructed. Perchance after a few thousands of years, if the fishes will be patient, and pass their summers elsewhere, meanwhile, nature will have levelled the Billerica dam, and the Lowell factories and the Grassground River run clear again, to be explored by new migratory shoals, even as far as the Hopkinton pond and Westborough swamp.

Thoreau was patient, too. In this report he was not constructing a brief for Sierra Club lobbyists. He does not foam at the desecration of the river, but waits for geology to set things right. Yet a population of Thoreaus would have hesitated long before building the dam. His sympathies are with the shad.

> Shad are still taken in the basin of Concord River at Lowell, where they are said to be a month earlier than the Merrimac shad, on account of the warmth of the water. Still patiently, almost pathetically, with instinct not to be discouraged, not to be *reasoned* with, revisiting their old haunts, as if their stern fates would relent, and still met by the Corporation with its dam. Poor shad! where is thy redress? When Nature gave thee instinct, gave she thee the heart to bear thy fate? Still wandering the sea in thy scaly armor to inquire humbly at the mouths of rivers if man has perchance left them free for thee to enter. By countless shoals loitering uncertain meanwhile, merely stemming the tide there, in danger from sea foes in spite of thy bright armor, awaiting new instructions, until the sands, until the water itself, tell thee if it be so or not. Thus by whole migrating nations, full of instinct, which is thy faith, in this backward spring, turned adrift, and perchance knowest not where men do *not* dwell, where there are *not* factories in these days.

Then follows a ringing passage to give heart to the humble shad, at the end of which he says:

> Away with the superficial and selfish philanthropy of men,—who knows what admirable virtue of fishes may be below low-water mark, bearing up against a hard destiny, not admired by that fellow creature who alone can appreciate it! Who hears the fishes when they cry? It will not be forgotten by some memories that we were contemporaries. Thou shalt ere long have thy way up the rivers, up all the rivers of the globe, if I am not mistaken. Yea, even thy dull watery dream shall be more than realized. If it were not so, but thou wert to be overlooked at first and at last, then I would not take their heaven. Yes, I say so, who think I know better than thou canst. Keep a stiff fin then, and stem all the tides thou mayst meet.

A man who can so fantasize—and it is not all fantasy—is a full member of the community of life. Nature can be entrusted to the caretaking of such humans, and a world with such a population would surely find means of nourishment, of housing and garb that would not turn the planet into a buzzing maelstrom of randomly placed machines. Our children may not yet, taken for walks on a Saturday or Sunday, turn into budding Thoreaus, but if they are never taken for walks, how will we know what inclinations are hidden within them?

As an afterthought he adds:

> At length it would seem that the interests, not of the fishes only, but of the men of Wayland, of Sudbury, of Concord, demand the levelling of that dam. Innumerable acres of meadow are waiting to be made dry land, wild native grass to give place to English. The farmers stand with scythes whet, waiting the subsiding of the waters, by gravitation, by evaporation or otherwise, but sometimes their eyes do

> not rest, their wheels do not roll, on the quaking meadow ground during the haying season at all.

Thoreau had a feeling for the being of the world. So do we all, but it is largely suppressed, ridiculed, laughed at. This we must recover if we would live at all. But we cannot recover it in a hurry. The caring attitude is a tender plant, nourished by strange and unpredictable food, which must be found almost by accident, not didactic planning. It grows by awakening sympathy, not anxious instruction. Our hope of the future will grow only by invitation, not by dread warnings and shrill cries of fear. It will grow under the tender nurture of men and women who *have time* to trust in the qualities the world has need of, that they will find expression and grow to a maturity of strength in coming generations, but only if the children are not surrounded by ways, customs, activities and even livelihoods which move in the opposite direction. The world needs then, oases of friendly fellowship, small areas where the spontaneous affections, the natural alliances, the bonds of inclusive care and fraternity have place before the brittle relationships of the marketplace. We live at a time when each one must learn to make his own clearing for this place.

REVIEW
INNER DISCOVERY?

DESPITE numerous external signs to the contrary, something good is going on in the world—a kind of inner change of feeling and a revision in the ideas of goals of human life, of which the frothy declarations of a "new age" are but superficial populist symptoms. Once again, if somewhat shyly, questions which have not been asked since the sweeping materialist optimism of the Enlightenment saturated a majority of the people, are gradually being raised, however privately at first. The reason for this change does not seem simple or single. One possibility is the dramatic alteration in our circumstances during the past hundred years. Those able to remember the temper of common folk during the early years of this century are very much aware of the change. Human affairs, especially in the United States, were pervaded by an upward and onward spirit. The West had been settled and a vast economic development was on the way. The railroads had been thrown across the continent, the Panama Canal was completed in 1914, and great fortunes were being made. America was the El Dorado of both freedom and prosperity for emigrants from all over the world, and even the disaster of the first world war Americans were able to take in their stride, secure in their belief that they had indeed done their part in making the world "safe for democracy."

But after World War II the mood began to change. While after the Civil War the people for a long time felt that they were more engaged with solutions than with problems, today the situation is reversed: history no longer seems "on our side." Our optimism, As Robert Heilbroner noted in *The Future as History* and in later books, now has little or no support from the course of events. He said:

> Less and less are we able to locate our lives meaningfully in the pageant of history. . . . it is a crushing spiritual blow to lose one's sense of participation in mankind's journey and to see only a huge milling-around, a collective living-out of lives with no larger purpose than the days which each accumulates. When we estrange ourselves from history we do not enlarge, we diminish ourselves, even as individuals. We subtract from our lives one meaning which they do in fact possess, whether we recognize it or not.

In conclusion, the historian says musingly:

> The probabilities, in other words, are that "history" will go against us for a long time, and that the trend of events both at home and abroad, will persist in directions which we find inimical and uncongenial. It would be foolish to pretend to a degree of prescience about the future which no amount of analysis can provide, or to be doctrinaire about the evolution of events. Yet surely, to hope for the best in a situation where every indication leads us to expect a worsening, is hardly the way to fortify ourselves against the future. Optimism as a philosophy of historic expectations can no longer be considered a national virtue. It has become a dangerous national delusion.

When a theory of progress no longer works, it is natural to look at its foundation assumptions. This inspection of what we have thought about ourselves and the world is precisely what is going on now, in every civilized country. Things are far from working out as we expected them to. Even the "success" of a few in the terms of the past way of thinking has lost its savor. The pursuit of happiness, we find, when happiness is defined as a riot of getting and spending, brings more ills than pleasures. Children are alienated from their parents, then find themselves unable to chart a path which fulfills their enthusiasm for another kind of life. So the question arises: What have we done wrong? Is there something we have left out? Can it be that conquest of the material world is not our salvation, after all?

So, naturally enough, there is a ransacking of neglected sources of light on the human situation. Is there, one wonders, a legitimate optimism in the conviction that there *must* be a better way? Dependent on this possibility is another explanation for the renaissance of philosophical—even metaphysical—thinking. What if there is an inner course of evolution going on in human

beings—a development contrapuntal to our growing dissatisfaction with material achievement? Is there perhaps a profound truth in the parable of the return of the Prodigal Son? Are we sick from the neglect of our inner lives? Is an awakening to this occurring?

We have for review a book which may be read as addressed to such questions—*Reincarnation: A New Horizon in Science, Religions, and Society* (Julian Press, $16.95), by Sylvia Cranston and Carey Williams. (Sylvia Cranston is co-author of several editions of a well-compiled and popular anthology, *Reincarnation: The Phoenix Fire Mystery*, written with Joseph Head.) The new volume, while replete with quotations from all parts of the world in both ancient and modern times, makes for easier reading. While the authors are manifestly themselves reincarnationists, they let the record present the arguments, being content to allow the common sense of the reader to be the judge.

There are many qualities to recommend this book, but what becomes fascinating is the number of individuals noted for achievement in the arts and literature for whom reincarnation was an article of personal faith. Who would have thought, for example, that Paul Gauguin, distinguished French painter and friend of Van Gogh, was a convinced reincarnationist who argued in a privately printed book: "The materialists smile when one speaks to them of an embodied or a disembodied soul, saying that no one has ever been able to see one of them with a magnifying glass or the naked eye, forgetting that no one has ever been able to see an atom of air or of matter, however much it may be volatilized."

And even careful readers of the works of Leo Tolstoy may not have come across his declaration in a letter that the experiences "of our present life are the environment in which we work out the impressions, thoughts, feelings of a former life," adding that "our present life is only one of many thousands of such lives." Dozens of similar cases are brought to light in the current book. Also of interest, as noted in the Preface, is that in 1981 a "Gallup poll on religion reveals that 38 million Americans—almost one quarter of the adult population—now admit to being reincarnationists."

It is fairly well known that the most famous of the Transcendentalists, Emerson and Thoreau, found reincarnation to be a natural part of their philosophy, but not so many realize that Louisa May Alcott, author of *Little Women,* gave expression to the idea in a letter to a friend:

> I think immortality is the passing of a soul through many lives or experiences, and such as are truly lived, used, and learned help on to the next, each growing richer, happier and higher, carrying with it only the real memories of what has gone before . . . I seem to remember former states and feel that in them I learned some of the lessons that have never since been mine here and in my next step I hope to leave behind many of the trials I have struggled to bear here and begin to feel lightened as I go on. This accounts for the genius and great virtue some show here.

Yet for all the numerous expressions of belief in reincarnation in modern times, given with accompanying explanations or justifications—and the elaboration of the process of rebirth quoted from the founder of the present-day Theosophical Movement, H. P. Blavatsky—*Reincarnation* really presents a contrast between ancient philosophy concerned with the destiny of the human soul and modern skeptical systems of thought. All the past systems of religious philosophy are shown to have had reincarnation as a core teaching; it forms the central beliefs of the primitive races of whom we have information, whether in Australia, Africa, Asia, or Europe. The islanders of the Pacific believed in the idea, also the Indians of the Americas. Eskimo culture was based on it, according to Margaret Mead. In the Orient reincarnation almost invariably appears as a twin doctrine of Karma, the law of moral cause and effect.

Carl Jung declared the teaching "an affirmation that must be counted among the

primordial affirmations of the human race," and Margaret Murray remarks that while Pythagoras is usually credited with having invented the theory of reincarnation, it was known and taught in Egypt long before his time. The principal religions originating in India, Hinduism and Buddhism, teach reincarnation as the means of human evolution, the law applying to rich and poor, wise and foolish, as the path of individual progress to spiritual perfection. The authors also say:

> As to the Chinese sage, Lao-tzu, Taoist traditions relate that he practiced Tao in previous incarnations: as Kwang Chang Tze in the era of Hwang-Ti (the Yellow Emperor) and also as Po-Chang in the time of Yao. The stone tablets of Hsieh Tao-Hang add that "from the time of Fu-Hsi down to that of the Chou dynasty, in uninterrupted succession, his person appeared, but with changed names."
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> However, it is in Mahayana Buddhism, which is the Buddhism of China, Japan, Tibet, and North Korea, that the rebirth of perfected souls is prominently featured. These beings have renounced Nirvana in order to effectively help the human race, either by incarnation at critical cycles or as powerful, invisible presences.
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> According to the Dalai Lama, spiritual head of the Tibetans, there are various levels of higher development: Arahats, Bodhisattvas, and Buddhas. "They are reincarnated," he says, "in order to help other beings to rise toward Nirvana, and by doing so the Bodhisattvas are themselves helped to rise to Buddhahood, and the Arahats also reach Buddhahood finally. Buddhas are reincarnated solely to help others, since they themselves have already achieved the highest of all levels" attainable on this earth.

But of all the teachers, saviors, philosophers who have taught reincarnation, the most appealing to a modern human is perhaps W. Macneile Dixon, who said toward the end of his remarkable book, *The Human Situation:*

> It is Plato's doctrine, and none more defensible, that the soul before it entered the realm of becoming existed in the universe of Being. Released from the region of time and space, it returns to its former abode, "the Sabbath, or rest of souls," into communication with itself. After, a season of quiet "alone with the Alone," of assimilation of its earthly experiences and memories, refreshed and invigorated, it is seized again by the desire for further trials of its strength, further knowledge of the universe, the companionship of former friends, by the desire to keep in step and on the march with the moving world. There it seeks out and once more animates a body, the medium of communication with its fellow travelers, and sails forth in that vessel upon a new venture in the ocean of Becoming.

COMMENTARY
WHAT IS REALLY WRONG

THE text at the head of the introductory chapter of a new book we began reading—*In the Name of Progress,* by Patricia Adams and Lawrence Solomon (Doubleday, $12.95)—became a major interruption. It was the question asked at a Washington, D.C., conference by representatives of indigenous peoples around the world: "Is the meaning of 'progress' for native peoples inevitably genocide?" The book, subtitled "The Underside of Foreign Aid," indicates that often or usually the answer is "Yes."

We'll go back to the book and read it carefully for later review, but meanwhile we want to consider the associations that text called up.

In the first place, not only "native peoples" are victims of the supposed progress spoken of, although they are extreme cases. And, of course, it isn't "progress" at all, but only a mechanistic imitation of what is called progress in the West. The offense begins with the delegation of responsibility. What you want done well and right you should do yourself. The Buddhists have a rule that applies here: "Never let the hand of another come between you and the object of your charity." But for us, charity nearly always means support of charitable institutions. That means hiring professional do-gooders to do your charity for you.

Well, what about famine relief? How could one person do much of anything about an emergency involving hundreds of thousands or millions of sufferers? Granted, he or she couldn't do much of anything, but if all charity or help that *can* be fulfilled by individuals was so carried out, we could be confident that emergency services requiring organization would be effective because many people would know how to do it and *want* to do it.

What we are really talking about is the manifest defects of institutions. All the things wrong with the modern world come into visibility through the failures, follies, and stupidities of institutions. It is true, we can't abolish institutions, but we can at least make them lean, responsive, and accountable, although mostly we should replace their function with individual effort, wherever possible. The government is an institution, and the government of the richest and most powerful nation in the world has the biggest deficit, which is simply ridiculous. The schools are institutions, and are said to be in an almost hopeless mess. Educators say this. The trouble begins with delegation of responsibility. We may not know how to eliminate this, but we seldom even try.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
WORKING WITH THE YOUNG

A $5.95 paperback, *Sharing Nature with Children* (issued by Ananda Publications), is consciously and deliberately "educational," yet might prove of real value to parents and teachers who have opportunity to go with children on "nature walks" or similar expeditions, and feel at a loss concerning how to begin. The author is Joseph Bharat Cornell, who has worked a great deal with children's groups and seems to know what works well. By using the device of simple games he introduces an element of drama that engages the attention of youngsters. And he has a style of talking that children naturally enjoy. He says, for example:

> I try my best to make learning fun and exciting for children. One way I do this is to point out characteristics that animals and plants have in common with man. Before taking children to a pond, for instance, I'll talk with them a while about aquatic insects:
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> "What things do humans use to help them move and breathe in water?"
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> "Fins. Wet suits. Air tanks. Oars. Nets. Diving masks."
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> "Did you know that aquatic insects have the same needs and use the same equipment, as man does? For example, there are diving beetles that use scuba tanks: they trap a silvery bubble of air under a thick layer of hair, then use it to breathe underwater. Some diving beetles even carry an air-bubble 'tank' along behind them. A beetle's breathing system is more efficient than our scuba tanks, though because beetles don't need compressed air, and they can fill their tanks with oxygen from the surrounding water. With his diving tank, a beetle can stay underwater for as long as thirty-six hours! Diving beetles also have waxy hairs that make them float—just like a wet suit. If they aren't swimming or holding onto something, they bob right up to the surface. . . . Children are captivated by bizarre tales of these underwater creatures. They're always excited by the chance to comb through aquatic vegetation for bugs with kitchen strainers. I find myself bounding from one shriek of delight to another as they call me to come and see their findings.
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> A class of sixth-graders had just finished hunting for insects, when a water truck drove up to the tiny pond and lowered its hose into the water. When the driver started his pump, the children immediately realized that the insects would later be spread out on the road, and die. So several of them went up to the driver and pleaded with him to put a fine screen wire over the hose. The man was friendly; touched by the children's concern, he said he would be happy to install the screen. Afterwards the children introduced him to their aquatic friends.

Without their hunt for insects, would any of those children care about the fate of a "bunch of bugs"? They needed to know about them, get familiar with them, in order to care about them. From such small beginnings the awareness of the life around us may grow to be a power in the land, as in the writings of Henry David Thoreau, or in Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac*. Parents have an *obligation* to see that their children have experiences of this sort. A book like this one by Joseph Cornell might be a way to get going, but thoughtful teachers eventually work out their own programs—maybe no more than a sharing of their own interests. How, one wonders, did Aldo Leopold talk to his own children about "nature"? He, we are sure, found better ways than any "book" could have told him. But this is not to sneer at "nature books." To turn communities into little *Paideias* in which teaching is natural and spontaneous, not really planned, is the goal; but meanwhile, putting on a little show may be a good thing to do, for a start.

Cornell proposes what he calls a "Survival Outing" as a sort of game. This section begins:

> *"If I got lost out here, how would I stay alive?"* Everyone who has hiked in wild places has imagined himself lost and alone, without gear or food. What would your chances of survival be, if it was just you and the wilderness? To answer this question, take stock of how well you actually know the outdoors. Surviving in the wild is primarily a matter of familiarity with nature, and of taking care of ourselves by making intelligent use of what nature provides. The American Indian was able to live close to nature for countless centuries because he *knew* nature. He never dreaded being alone with the elements, but positively enjoyed the experience.

The discussion proceeds by giving the suggestion that children learn how to build a shelter out of natural materials.

Another game stretches the imagination:

> Give each child an imaginary deed to one square mile of land. On this virgin plot he will be free to create his own dream-forest, complete with as many trees, animals, mountains and rivers as he desires. Let their imaginations run wild. . . . you can give the children some suggestions:
>
> "To make your forests beautiful and radiant, you might want to add things like waterfalls and windstorms, or rainbows. . . ."
>
> Have them list the ingredients of their forest, then have them draw a picture of it. End by discussing with them whether their individual forests are able to maintain themselves year after year. For instance, see if they have chosen representatives of the food cycle: plant eaters, plants, and decomposers (example: ants, mushrooms, bacteria). Don't let them forget subtle factors like soil and climate.

This book is filled with what seem good ideas. It is available from Ananda Publications, 14618 Tyler Foote Road, Nevada City, Calif. 95959.

There are other ways of serving the young, less inviting perhaps, but very much needed in the light of the statistics on juvenile crime. The Betterway, with headquarters in Elyria, Ohio, is a non-profit social service organization founded more than ten years ago by Tom Peters. It provides an environment for personal reorientation and reconstruction for young people who have gotten into trouble with the law. These juvenile offenders are taken in, given a place to live in a "halfway house"; some go to the city schools, others are helped to find jobs, and all are encouraged to shape the attitudes and habits which make for a useful life. As a recent issue of *Betterway,* a quarterly issued by the organization, says:

> Homeless or troubled young people come to Betterway from any of the eighty-eight counties in Ohio through courts or Child Welfare Departments, or the Ohio Department of Youth Services. Or from any other state. Boys and girls come, ages twelve and up. . . . Staff who like to work with teenagers are employed at Betterway, and fulltime volunteers also live and work in the program. Room and board are given in exchange for volunteer work. College interns may also work at Betterway, receiving room and board.
>
> Betterway operates a delicatessen restaurant in downtown Elyria and a gift shop, The Search. They also have a hundred and fifty acre wooded property with a large house.

In an editorial in the Winter 1984 issue of *Betterway* Tom Peters gives a current report on the activities:

> With the addition of another group home (The Search for girls) we now have almost three hundred boys and girls here a year. The average stay is four months, but a few stay only a day or two, others for years.
>
> The new home means eleven more mouths to feed eleven more girls to buy gifts for, and eleven to buy gifts for their friends and relatives. [This was the Christmas season.]. . . .
>
> The week before Thanksgiving twelve young people came to live at Betterway in a matter of three days. We never had so many before. This included a sixteen-year-old girl and her two babies, three boys from one institution, and a set of brothers from Oberlin, near here. Some went to our group homes, others to foster homes.
>
> A number of new people have asked to become foster families, so we can expand in that direction when our group homes are filled.
>
> In addition to visiting boys and girls in detention homes and institutions to interview them to come here, I have been getting into some prisons and jails to see former Betterway people. Failure is a part of the work we do. . . . We failed to change them enough to prevent their crimes and that is discouraging. But it also tells me that we are working with the right people. We are working with some of the most troubled, with the most potential for failure. If all the people here were successful, I would wonder who is trying to help those likely to fail.

This suggests the spirit of the work with the young at Betterway. A reading of their newspaper, *Betterway,* helps one to understand why, despite the odds against success, this way of helping the young does so much good that public agencies are eager to cooperate. The address is Betterway, 700 Middle Ave., Elyria, Ohio 44035. Subscription is now $2.50.

FRONTIERS

The Long Road Home

THERE are a few people, today, who, when asked basic questions, gravitate to what are sometimes called "fundamentals." This is the natural focus of their thinking. Usually most of their hearers suppose that the speaker has "changed the subject" because they are not ready to go back to fundamentals and regard what he says as a departure from the practical matters of life, in which they are interested. An example is the discussion of "seed stock" by Wendell Berry, in Salina, Kansas, attended by students of the Land Institute. One of these students reported what Berry said in the Fall 1984 *Land Report*, issued by the Institute. (Thoreau is another example of one who always thought in terms of fundamentals, as is slowly being recognized by his present-day readers. See *Walden* and *Life Without Principle* for illustration.)

The session with Berry began with the questions: "How does essential knowledge get handed down?" and "How does one learn stewardship and care?"

Berry replied: "The vessel that contains it is community." Someone then asked: "How do we begin to develop a community, in a mobile society?" Or: "How can the seed stock, weakened, be restored?"

Berry's answer:

> "Stay put and pay attention. . . . Pay attention to news that's underfoot, not from elsewhere." . . . He spoke of an alertness to place. He impressed upon us the importance of listening to the grasses and birds and people around us. He made it clear that if we begin to pay attention, our attitudes, our feelings, our words will begin to reflect our place.
>
> Regrettably, language today is being shaped by contact with the media rather than by community. Berry said that those in his home area whose language was formed apart from television are almost gone. Our language is not rooted in the past; we have no sense of how it developed from other languages. "Where continuity is not broken, you try to keep it from breaking," said Berry. "Where it's broken, start all over."
>
> He gave another example of alertness to place: attitudes toward the weather. So many of us are removed from the effect of weather, of contact with it, so we see it only as a nuisance. Disc jockeys' reports are negative whenever weekend weather is anything but sunny and glorious.
>
> "There's a certain attitude that makes you able to live with the weather," said Berry, "and not be surprised and outraged when it rains on your hay. You can't teach somebody to feel right about the weather."

He spoke of continuity as essential to good community life—an almost nonverbal transmission of feelings about value in relation to all the practical questions in a given place that need answering—a transmission which gives form to the latent sense of value in all human beings, but especially in the young. This is perhaps imperfectly illustrated in what the Scottish grandmother said to the boy in her care: "Ian McGregor, never forget that you are a McGregor!" Continuity repeats the injunction. Never forget that you are a human being, is perhaps a version both more and less useful: more useful because that, finally, is what all such injunctions mean, when reduced to essence; less useful because it doesn't call up familiar associations such as clan character and history, or the lot and opportunity of being a Kentucky farmer.

> "It's dangerous to leave the dead too far behind," said Berry. "It's dangerous to have no history but a written one."

To make something useful out of written history, you need the character-forming sense of continuity that is part of community life. This is something responsible parents need to think about, and plan for as well as they can. Responsibility includes concern for the flow of consciousness which links generations.

> Consistently, Berry says that the size of a farm should be determined by what one can pay attention to. "I listen to innovative farmers and cranky old farmers," he told us. . . . it was one of the latter who told him that twenty cows is the limit. "You can see

them all," the old farmer said. "With more you may touch them but not see them."

The discussion turned to "independence and interdependence."

"You have an obligation to be as independent as you can, without damaging someone else. Your bodily energy can make you independent," he continued. "But in this technological age, the body is obsolete. You have nothing to do with it so you jog. Next we'll have to jog our minds." . . .

Today interdependence is even more necessary, according to Berry. "The age of the individual on the farm is over," he said.

Along with interdependent rural communities comes appropriate technology. Berry gave examples of the latest inappropriate technology. He told of Holstein cows bred to be the size of elephants—"a boon to the building industry"—and of futurists hoping to splice microchips into brains so one person knows everything. He called it "obsolete science" based on cheap fossil fuel. "We need," he said "to resurrect the issues of scale, and quit technological thrill-seeking."

Berry finds much good sense among the Amish farmers, saying—

The Amish don't educate kids to leave home. Some become sophisticated mechanical engineers if necessary, but basically, exceptional minds are at work on the same things everyone else is working on. He read part of an eloquent letter from a young Amish dairy farmer, a man who's also a biologist, naturalist theologian and father—a brilliant man. "The best minds aren't running off to where they'll get credit for it," said Berry.

"Those who grow up on the farm need encouragement to stay. They're the seed stock after all." He believes that newcomers, in order to make it, must be exceptional individuals, willing to learn from others, often those perceived to be *not* exceptional. He added that we need communities where non-accredited teachers are teaching.

One of the values of good seed stock is stability. "Selection takes time."

Change takes time, too, according to Berry. He explained that Kentucky's notable products are tobacco, whiskey, coal and race horses. . . . "Most people who are thoughtful wish we weren't dependent on tobacco," he said, but he doesn't believe that tobacco farming should be halted abruptly. "What you have to start is a tendency. I wouldn't want to stop anything all of a sudden. You pull a switch and see collisions. What you have to hope for are catastrophes that will be instructive but not devastating," he said.

Berry, you could say, is a "gradualist" because people seldom learn to make far-reaching changes in their lives in any other way. But he is a very *determined* gradualist. The only excuse for compromise, he might say, is in the service of the weak and the slow. That may be one of the things one learns from nature by "staying put and paying attention."

The address of the Land Institute is Route 3, Salina, Kansas 67401.