

A NEEDED INQUIRY

THESE are days in which our political arrangements are becoming ever more horrifying in their effects on our lives. There can be, it seems, for a great many of us—probably most of us—no greater concern than the direction in which our political arrangements are obliging us to move. The kind of politics we affirm as good and declare we believe in is what we call "democratic," by means of which, it is said, humans can determine for themselves where and how they will go as a society, as an association for the common good. Yet this is precisely what we now seem unable to do. We are being dragged along by our leaders toward utterly catastrophic war. No one in his right mind will say that anything good or necessary can be accomplished by this means, so why do we allow it?

Lunacy seems too mild a word for the pattern of present-day political behavior, but coming to recognize this apparently takes time. Talented and committed writers are doing what they are able to make our situation clear—two of the best being E. P. Thompson and Jonathan Schell—but the momentum of our corporate political action seems almost impossible to interrupt. Yet there are those, a growing number, who do what they can.

Why is our situation so difficult to understand? Because, perhaps, our common social ideals, hopes, and securities have for more than a century been based on our political arrangements. Are those arrangements, or what they have become in practice, now actually *betraying* us? This is the appalling and haunting question that waits in the wings of every serious discussion of public affairs. The idea is almost unbearable, yet there it is, and it seems without alternatives, save by some unimaginable miracle.

Is it possible, one wonders, to make a constructive use of so terrible a dilemma? It may be, if we are able to accept the fact that we simply don't know what to do. A passage in Ortega's *Revolt of the Masses* seems to apply quite directly to the reality of our predicament. In a concluding chapter he wrote:

. . . life is at the start a chaos in which one is lost. The individual suspects this, but he is frightened at finding himself face to face with this terrible reality, and tries to cover it over with a curtain of fantasy, where everything is clear. It does not worry him that his "ideas" are not true, he uses them as trenches for the defense of his existence, as scarecrows to frighten away reality.

The man with the clear head is the man who frees himself from those fantastic "ideas" and looks life in the face realizes that everything in it is problematic, and feels himself lost. As this is the simple truth—that to live is to feel oneself lost—he who accepts it has already begun to find himself, to be on firm ground. Instinctively, as do the shipwrecked, he will look round for something to which to cling, and that tragic, ruthless glance, absolutely sincere, because it is a question of his salvation, will cause him to bring order into the chaos of his life. These are the only genuine ideas; the ideas of the shipwrecked. All the rest is rhetoric posturing, farce. He who does not really feel himself lost, is lost without remission; that is to say, he never finds himself, never comes up against his own reality. This is true in every order, even in science, in spite of science being of its nature escape from life. (The majority of men of science have given themselves to it through fear of facing life. They are not clear heads; hence their notorious ineptitude in the presence of any concrete situation.) Our scientific ideas are of value to the degree in which we have felt ourselves lost before a question, have seen its problematic nature, and have realized that we cannot find support in received notions, in prescriptions, proverbs, mere words. The man who discovers a new scientific truth has previously had to smash to atoms almost everything he had learnt, and arrives at the new truth with hands bloodstained from the slaughter of a thousand platitudes.

This seems a fair, if apparently harsh, diagnosis of our condition. But the harshness may lie in exposure of false assumptions about the nature of things—about the way the world works, about ourselves and the purpose or meaning of our lives. Clearly enough, our political arrangements have gone so awry that they now seem on the verge of collapse. Are we willing, then, to agree that we have been using false ideas "as scarecrows to frighten away reality"? Our political arrangements were established in the eighteenth century, presumably, as the Enlightenment philosophers maintained, on a foundation of Natural Law. But now they have turned into gross violations of nature's laws, and the penalties exacted seem almost unbearable. Are we ready, at last, to give thought to our assumptions about the Cosmic Arrangements, in order to understand why our political and social world has gone wrong? What further persuasion do we need of the importance of trying to understand the kind of world that is our host and home? Can we resist much longer the need to become philosophers?

For so large an undertaking we require the help of minds who have given such questions their full attention, those who look at human history with an eye to discovering both facts and first principles. One such thinker is W. Macneile Dixon, an Englishman of the first half of this century, who wrote in his epoch-making book *The Human Situation* (The Gifford Lectures, 1935-37):

I think ideas are the most mysterious things in a mysterious world. Not so long ago men were convinced that science would save us, or universal suffrage would save us, or education for everyone would save us. Now it is universal peace that will bring about the millennium. *O sancta simplicitas!* During the Middle Ages, the ages of the soul, men believed in God, in themselves as sinful and in need of salvation. They had no doctrine of progress, never supposed that by any human efforts could the world be saved. They put their trust in their Creator and a better world to come. Then arrived the Renaissance with a new and captivating bundle of ideas which exalted the European mind to an ecstasy of delight.

The previous ideas were amusingly crude and mistaken. Here at last was the final truth. Man was not by nature sinful and consequently not in need of salvation. God was an unnecessary hypothesis. No other world than the present existed, which could by the proper use of reason be transformed by human exertion into an earthly paradise.

How unforeseen and startling are the alterations in opinion, how strange these secular revolutions! What changes in heaven or earth, you ask, or in the conditions of human life brought about this remarkable revolution? You may well ask. No change of any kind in the natural world. . . .

We have natural histories of plants and animals, but the natural history of ideas remains to be written. It should be done. For they are living and powerful entities of some kind and as infective as fevers. Some, like flowers, are the creatures of an hour; others of a prodigious vitality, root themselves, like oaks, in the soil of human nature for a thousand years. . . .

Certain ideas go by the family name of concepts. What is a concept? It is an image or picture by which we endeavor to make things clearer to ourselves, or, as we say, to understand them. They are postulates, or lanterns, and have in science an instrumental value. But in regard to these postulates men of science have made the important discovery that you must not trust them too long or too completely. They are useful servants but bad masters. . . .

Dixon gives his own view:

A fixed idea has great advantages. Your mind is at rest, and you are under no necessity either to defend it or to consider further evidence on the matter. For myself I have no affection for fixed ideas. My distrust of them, as of all that appears certain and obvious, is profound. Had I been present at the birth of this planet I would probably not have believed on the word of an archangel that the blazing mass, the incandescent whirlpool there before our eyes at a temperature of fifty million- degrees, would presently set about the establishment of empires and civilizations, that it was on the way to produce Greek art and Italian paintings, would tolerate such things as music and mathematics, make room for optimists and pessimists, admit the arrival of Homers, Beethovens and Napoleons, or even the small fry of Gifford Lecturers. . . .

The universe does not deal in things that mortals expect and when a fixed idea makes its

appearance, as Nietzsche would say, a great ass makes its appearance. The only incredibility, as it seems to me, and the only impossibility is that the Cosmos contradicts itself. If by the use of reason we declare it unreasonable we are thrust back upon the question "How did this reason arrive in an unreasonable world?" Yet whatever our attachment to reason, and we cannot be too greatly attached to it, let us remember that the secret of the world's everlasting interest lies precisely here, that you cannot explain it, and never know what is going to happen next. This is the source of our unabating hope and never-dying expectation.

In these lectures which make his book Dixon examines the cosmic arrangements in order to give an account of the human situation, which is surely a part of the cosmos. The distinctive quality of his purview is that he includes human beings, their wisdom and their follies, their longings and their dreams, as a vital part of the cosmos. They, and we, are *real*, substantial elements of the real world, factors to be understood and dealt with. For modern man, this is in itself a revolution. Since Galileo's time, our theories of the world and the laws of nature have left human beings out of the world picture. If, now, we shall attempt to understand the cosmic arrangements, this seems the first essential—the assumption, stipulation, declaration—that we have a crucial part in making the human situation. Dixon, in short, would have us take ourselves and our lives seriously, and to try to discover what we should do as human beings—what we are here to learn—and to study the strange collaborations between the field of experience and our own intelligence in behalf of teaching order and balance, and obtaining a measure of fulfillment. We say a *measure* for the reason that complete fulfillment would probably mean the end of it all, so far as we are concerned, and no one can write books about that.

It is fair to propose that we are beings of some intelligence involved in a struggle of some sort. There is overwhelming evidence that the struggle is moral in character—that is, concerned with the triumph of good over evil. Whenever that happens—and when in mortal struggle good

survives—it doesn't seem to happen very often—our hearts swell at least a little, even when we had only a small part to do with it.

With the revolution accomplished by the "shipwreck" Ortega speaks of, we become free to ask ourselves, "What kind of beings are we—of time or of eternity?" Are we mortal or immortal, or are we both mortal and immortal? Surely there are things about us that ought not to last forever, that should be got rid of as much as we can. But then there is also that in us that is able to think of a reality beyond time, which only timeless intelligences are able to do. This, then, is one of the paradoxes of our existence, that we seem to be timeless beings who have been caught and naturalized by a segment of time and history, and find our situation difficult to make sense of. Yet there have been those—sages, philosophers, saviors—who discovered ways to make sense and great benefit to others out of their lives. We have this evidence, however difficult to rationalize in our own terms, to prove that it can actually happen, that sense can be made of the world.

Fortunately, by reason of the efforts of writers like Dixon, the thoughts of these sages are being given fresh currency at a time when imminent disaster is prying open our minds. From this resource Dixon gives an answer to the question of what sort of being we are.

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 communion 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 travellers, and sails forth in that vessel upon a new venture in the ocean of Becoming.

Many, no doubt, will be its ventures, many its voyages. For not until all the possibilities of Being have been manifested in Becoming, not until all the good, beauty and happiness of which existence allows have, by the wayfaring soul, been experienced, not until it has become all that it is capable of becoming—and who can tell to what heights of power and vision it may climb?—is it fitted to choose for itself the state and society which best meets its many requirements, as its natural or enduring habitation.

There is more that he takes from Plato, at the end of the book:

According to Plato's theory of reminiscence, our present knowledge is a recollection of what was learnt or known by the soul in a previous state. You will say, it has no knowledge of its previous lives. But what man remembers every day of his life? And lost memories, as the psychologists will tell you, are recoverable. For the memory appears to be a palimpsest, from which nothing is ever obliterated. If we have forgotten most days and incidents of our present lives it is natural that memories of previous lives should fail us. Yet from infancy every forgotten day and hour has added to our experiences, to our growth and capacity. All that a child was and did, though unremembered, is still a part of him and is knit up into his present nature. Every day and hour had its value and made its contribution to the mind and soul. So it may be with former lives, each of them but a day in our past history. The universe is wide, and life here or elsewhere might on this view be regarded as a self prescription, a venture willed by the soul for some end and through some prompting of its own, to enlarge its experience, learn more of the universe, recover lost friends, or resume a task begun but not fulfilled. The time has not come to close any of the avenues of thought into the mysteries surrounding us, and unless death finally triumph over life, it may never come. There may even be choices open to the souls in their external quest for the highest good. . . .

In all our speculations we have constantly to remind ourselves of the lock to which we do not possess the key, the true character of time and our relations to time, which have never been determined, and upon which all else hinges, the nature of time and change, of which we are wholly ignorant. . . . In respect of our true natures, of what in truth we are and are capable of becoming, to what heights in knowledge wisdom, power, the soul can climb, of all this science and philosophy have so far hardly

spoken. Nor can any boundary be set, any "Thus far and no farther" to the expansion of the mind.

Surely it is time to begin thinking about ourselves freely in such terms. We have gone in our theories about man from the weak, dependent sinner to the acquisitive exploiter and self-indulgent consumer, and the aggressively hostile naked ape. And we have made one mess after another of our lives, now seeming on the verge of either blowing ourselves up or tying up all our best faculties in a paralysis of fear. External nature has not brought this semi-destiny upon us; we have done it ourselves. The environment, save for the man-made part of it, has remained pretty much the same. The world that now is so threatening is a world designed and shaped by human thought.

There are other designs to consider, but we can hardly even think of them without starting out with the idea that we are *capable* of redesigning the patterns of our lives. And this begins—the sensing of our high capabilities—with the concept of humans as spiritual beings, as on occasion we feel ourselves to be.

For help in this we need the help of the high literature of myth and legend, all the celebrations of the heroic potentialities of humans that we can find, and to saturate ourselves with ennobling ideas. An obscure play on Thomas Cromwell by Shakespeare has these lines—

Why should my birth keep down my mounting spirit?
Are not all creatures subject unto time?
There's legions now of beggars on the earth,
That their original did spring from Kings,
And many monarchs, now, whose fathers were
The riff-raff of their age. . . .

Such were the accents in which Tom Paine spoke to his adopted countrymen in January, 1776, in *Common Sense*. It is time we began calling out the best in one another, instead of appealing to the ordinary, the trivial, and often the worst. Humans, it seems clear, are two-natured beings, if not even more complex. They have known the heights as well as the depths. The historical records tell of excellences seldom

reached in our own time, as well as horrors of which we cannot help but be ashamed. Let us now remind ourselves of the high achievements, give voice to the longings we feel, without either skepticism or embarrassment. We need a dozen Whitmans along with three or four Thoreaus, and we need to imagine what such men would say if they were among us.

There are a few who have already given us encouragement in this direction. In *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, A. H. Maslow put profound wisdom into the language of our time:

If I ask the question, "Of what are human beings capable?" I put the question to [a] small and selected superior group rather than to the whole of the population. . . . If we want to know how fast a human being can run, then it is no use to average out the speed of a "good sample" of the population; it is far better to collect Olympic gold medal winners and see how well they can do. If we want to know the possibilities for spiritual growth, then I maintain that we can learn most by studying our most moral, ethical, or saintly people.

On the whole I think it fair to say that human history is a record of the ways in which human nature has been sold short.

The present is a time, if there ever was one, when our greatest need is to generate faith in ourselves and in one another, and to behave in ways that justify that faith.

REVIEW

GANDHI'S SYNTHESIS

SINCE MANAS readers have shown an increasing interest in the writings of M.K. Gandhi, it is not amiss to draw attention to an article on the part played by Western thought in the development of his outlook and philosophy. In *Gandhi Marg* for July, 1983, Mrs. Rama Jha, a lecturer at Lakshmibai College, Delhi, writes on "Gandhi's Encounter with Western Thought," showing that he accomplished a synthesis of the best of both East and West, making him truly a man of all the world. From Western thought, which for him meant the ideas of Western humanists who were themselves critical of European and American civilization, he took the reasoned social application of moral ideas. This was never a mere borrowing for Gandhi. What he admired and believed, he absorbed and made entirely his own, while acknowledging the help he obtained from writers such as Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Thoreau. Speaking of Gandhi's early years, the writer says:

Like any other child in an orthodox Hindu family, Gandhi grew up in an environment of traditional beliefs and rituals and it was only after he went to England that Hinduism became a conscious concern for him. Endowed with an exceptionally inquiring mind, he would welcome ideas from anyone. Gandhi came to be influenced by Western ideas in three ways: by reading, by personal contact with like-minded people, and by experiences derived from the political protest movements he led in South Africa.

Contact with vegetarian groups in London, where he had come for his education, gave him reason for keeping the vow made to his mother to eat no meat. Curiously, he experienced the impact of his own religious heritage by study of the *Bhagavad-Gita* with two Theosophists, members of the Theosophical Society in London, who asked him to read the *Gita* in Sanskrit. "I felt ashamed," he said, "as I had read the divine poem neither in Sanskrit nor in Gujarati." Reading the *Gita* in Edward Arnold's translation gave him a

sense of having discovered Hindu philosophy. "Again," says Mrs. Jha, "it was a Westerner whose interpretation of the Indian religious scripture made intellectual sense to Gandhi and initiated him into a rational understanding of the tradition to which he belonged by birth." The writer continues:

Gandhi's friendship with those Western people who projected a "spiritual" image of India brought him in closer contact with the theosophists. He is known to have met Madame Blavatsky in London and read her *The Key to Theosophy* (1889). Gandhi properly acknowledged the nature of the impact the book made upon him. It is clear that Gandhi's mind at this stage was seeking corroboration of Hinduism from Western humanist thinkers. . . .

It is significant to note that it is in South Africa, particularly from the year 1903 onwards, that Gandhi assimilated the Western influences with the traditional Hindu ideas and evolved his own mode of thinking. He accomplished this assimilation by active and simultaneous contact with his Jain preceptor in India on the one hand and Western writers and thinkers on the other by corresponding with some and reading works by others.

These included books by Tolstoy, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Edward Carpenter, Aylmer Maude, Tolstoy's English biographer, said that "Gandhi exchanged his notes on Tolstoy's philosophy with Maude's and compared Tolstoy's concept of passive resistance with his own idea of Satyagraha," adding to Tolstoy's conception of non-resistance the social protest of non-violent resistance. The writer says:

Gandhi is different from Tolstoy in the sense that he put his religious and spiritual convictions to public purposes including India's "political liberation." . . . Tolstoy's influence on Gandhi extends beyond his search for the philosophical justification for social protest. Tolstoy's other books (besides *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*) which Gandhi lists in the bibliography of *Hind Swaraj* [1909] are *The First Step* (1892) and *The Slavery of Our Times* (1900). The anti-industrialism stand and the humanist's approach to the labor problem reflected in these two books endorsed Gandhi's own rejection of mechanization. Tolstoy's argument for personal simplicity and minimization of needs and his idea of planned programme for attaining moral

righteousness through self-control reinforced Gandhi's own view of life.

Other major Western influences were Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, which he translated into Gujarati, his native tongue, calling it *Sarvodaya* (The Good of All), and the writings of Thoreau. Gandhi read *Walden* in Johannesburg in 1906 and later published extracts from Thoreau's essay on Civil Disobedience. Mrs. Jha says:

It became clear to Gandhi from Thoreau's enunciation of the basic principle of Civil Disobedience that if one is forced by law to be the agent of injustice, then one must break the law. Let one's life be a counter-friction to stop the machine. Thoreau's own refusal to pay a head tax to Government of the United States was symbolic of his repudiation of the constitution that allowed and legitimized slavery. He felt equally repugnant towards the 1846-47 war with Mexico and refused allegiance to the State.

Mazzini and Emerson were other influences of importance. Gandhi's assimilation of Western ideas in which he found moral validity, joined with his ancestral Indian philosophy, is expressed in *Hind Swaraj*, the best book for consideration of Gandhi's thinking and lifelong struggle. (A good source for Gandhian literature is Greenleaf Books, Weare, New Hampshire 03281.) The *Gandhi Marg* writer concludes:

Although India has had religious and social reformers, yet no one before Gandhi had linked religious reform, social action, and movements for political freedom and individual conscience together. Here emerged a body of thought supported by concomitant action in which religious salvation was shown to be dependent not upon mere rituals or singing of songs but upon social and political action and working for suffering humanity. By a magnificent paradox, as Albert Schweitzer points out, "Gandhi brings the idea of activity and the idea of world and life negation into relationship in such a way that he can regard activity in the world as the highest form of renunciation of the world."

Through Gandhi, this world, the world of everyday life, of social activities, of political freedom, of economic realities and of human relationships for the first time gained, even if sometimes vaguely,

importance and prominence, in the minds of educated Indians.

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We have a book that should receive attention, even though it is on a subject of which we have virtually no knowledge except what common sense will supply. It is *The Feldenkrais Method—Teaching by Handling* (Harper & Row, 1983, \$16.95) by Yochanan Rywerant. This book has importance because it gives expression to a growing trend, quiet yet noticeable, toward increased self-reliance and learning how to take care of ourselves. Involved is learning to heal our own bodies through deliberate self-control. The name of this activity is Functional Integration, explained in the Preface by Thomas Hanna, also author of a book on Feldenkrais's work, of which he too is a teacher. He says:

The Feldenkrais system is a way of handling the body by communicating specific sensations to the central nervous system in order to improve the functions of the motor system. Functional Integration is unique in that it invokes changes in the human brain at a level heretofore thought unachievable by any known educational technique: muscular tonicity—even spasticity—is actually modified, the range of movement is enhanced, movement becomes more coordinated, and the overall efficiency and comfort of muscular functioning is increased.

A brief account of a case history seems the best way to suggest how the Feldenkrais method works. In March, 1978, Hanoch Tel-Oren, first flutist with the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, was shot by a terrorist in his right arm, an inch or so above the elbow, not touching the bone but disrupting the median nerve almost completely. Surgeons did what they could to join the ends of the torn nerve, but said he would never again play the flute. Seven weeks after being shot, Hanoch came to Rywerant, who undertook to show the musician that he could restore the harmed nerve and resume his musical career. Ten pages of detailed description tell how the author taught Hanoch to regenerate the function of his fingers. It was a step-by-step process of learning how to use various muscles whose function had been

weakened or distorted, and doing exercises which had a beneficial effect. Little by little each obstacle was overcome, so that a year after the "accident" the flutist gave a concert in Jerusalem, and the audience, knowing what had happened to him, welcomed him with a standing ovation. There may be those who have given up on getting well who will find hope in this book.

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A surprisingly interesting book is Arthur G. Wirth's *Productive Work—in Industry and Schools* (paperback, \$12.50), co-published late last year by University Press of America and the John Dewey Society. Briefly, this is a study of what can be done in large factories—the assembly line situation—to humanize work, with attention to some outstanding examples of what has already been accomplished through the cooperation of employers and labor leaders—Volvo, General Motors, and some other companies are involved. These employers have been pioneers in discovering that the management methods of Frederick Taylor, widely adopted by industry after publication of his book in 1911, are both wrong and bad for production. It is now evident that "efficiency" needs complete redefinition. As one writer has said: "It is no longer correct to label some procedure efficient if it exacts intolerable social costs, proves grossly wasteful of resources, or imposes its mechanistic rhythms on its operator."

Before getting into it we had some reservations about this book. What is the use of trying to improve conditions in big factories? This means "adjusting" to big factories when we ought instead to get rid of them and go back to small-scale production. That feeling was soon dissipated by the quality of the men quoted, and the evidence of what they are trying to do. For the general reader, the material assembled by Mr. Wirth helps to break up familiar stereotypes of capital and labor. They were able, in the instances described, to get together and work for the common good. The book deals with the nuts and

bolts of how this is being done on a considerable scale; the accounts are wholly believable and largely encouraging. Doing better with our present production facilities seems to enlist human qualities which will by no means stand in the way of further constructive changes, as time goes on. (The author teaches the philosophy of education at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri.)

COMMENTARY

THE EVIDENCE OF HISTORY

DECIDING on the differences—and the priorities—of individual and social responsibilities may be the most important issue of our time. Where does the solution for our problems lie—in power or in moral integrity? The common practice is to give lip service to the ideal of integrity, but to rely on power as the practical answer to what we think needs to be done.

To whom should we turn for guidance or counsel in this decision? Judging from history, the power-seekers are the ones who gain approval from the great majority. Without power, the argument goes, you can't accomplish any important changes.

But there are also those who look at history with a more penetrating eye. They incline to the view that the fundamental changes needed in human beings are moral, and they say that here power is plainly impotent. No human was ever made better, wiser, more considerate of others by either threats or punishment. They argue that no population has ever been improved in quality through the exercise of power. They also point out that the underlying decencies of human beings may seem to justify the uses of power, but that there is little if any relationship between the two.

This is of course a minority report. Yet how shall we regard the fact that the wise have always been *very* few? Is there here instruction in the realities of human evolution or development, and has the time come to take such men as Tolstoy and Gandhi seriously, such women as Simone Weil? What do they say? A brief expression by Joseph Weizenbaum, teacher at M.I.T., seems an apt summary of what they say:

For the present dilemma, the operative rule is that the salvation of the world—and that *is* what I am talking about—depends on converting others to sound ideas. That rule is false. The salvation of the world depends only on the individual whose world it is. At least, every individual must act as if the whole future of the world, of humanity itself, depends on him.

We leave this statement stark and unadorned by persuasion. Its validity lies in its consequences, which a fresh study of history may reveal.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves LOST DOORS

READING, recently, in the November/December (1983) *Resurgence* an article by Kathleen Raine, and enjoying it, we began to wonder how her material would go over with a present-generation teenager. We know and are fond of a few of them, but they seem almost entirely wrapped up in contemporary adolescent pursuits. But then, remembering the exceptional interest shown in a MANAS article on Leibniz by a girl barely out of her teens, we decided: You never can tell. And a MANAS contributor, asked what he thought about it, recalled that when he was five years old his mother and father, instead of trying to give him instruction in an available religion, helped him to memorize one of Blake's Songs of Innocence and taught him Wordsworth's "I wandered Lonely as a Cloud." All his life, he said, the imagery of those lines had stayed with him, like a caressing breeze on hot nights, and a vista of dancing daffodils on cloudy days. Why not, if you are doing something with poetry for the young, consider such possibilities?

So, in one place Kathleen Raine says:

Blake envisaged a civilization of the Imagination as a civilization of the arts. In pre-Industrial India—which I am thankful to have seen before it is swept away by Western influences and the machine age, a whole rural people is still engaged in making beautiful things, not as a pass-time, as here, but in the ordinary course of life; pottery, textiles all the things in daily use, are made by the men and women who need them, or their neighbors; every State, every district, has its own style of pottery, of embroidery, of woven design, of wood-carving. Everyone speaks of the material poverty of India; but I was impressed by a kind of daily contentment that seems to me the particular character of Indian life—not of course in the shanty-towns and where in the cities the immemorial Indian ways of life are breaking down. Nevertheless it is there; and it is a way of life in which spiritual and natural life are at one—little temples and offerings to the gods are everywhere, and the myths and legends and legendary

figures depicted on those common objects of daily life, the sacred tree painted on the walls of the houses, sacred symbols designed on the floors. "Everything that lives is holy" is in India a commonplace.

It wasn't so long ago that Westerners would only shrug at such accounts of village life, calling the beliefs "superstitious." In some sense they are, but in another sense they preserve the very idea of reverence, which may have a greater value than being scientifically up-to-date. One might recall here what Edmond Taylor said (in *Richer by Asia*) about the response of the people of India to our atom bomb tests at Bikini in the Pacific. If India, he said, had been able to "speak with authority,"

We would have learned that without quite committing a social crime, we were following in the pattern of crime, and were guilty of national blasphemy, not of a grave offense against Russia or even against peace, but against the dignity of man and the harmony of nature. . . . The Indians would have told us that our blasphemy, like the Nazi ones, arose from an idolatrous worship of the techniques of science divorced from any ethical goals, that the man-made cataclysm of Bikini was a black mass of physics as the German experiments were a black mass of medicine, that it was a mob-insurrection against the pantheist sense of citizenship in nature, which we share with the Hindus in our hearts, but consider a childish foible. . . .

It seems to me that this is a good example of the service which Asia can and will render us through the mechanism of cultural opposition. If we admit these services are valuable, then we must also admit that we owe them to Asiatic backwardness as well as Asiatic enlightenment. Only a culture which has despised technology and given highest place to soul-values can produce in its members the awareness of blasphemy needed to shock us into a realization of what is happening to us because of our failure to develop our soul-values as fast as we have developed our technology. Only a culture which has such a horror of taking life that its members will die in a diabetic coma rather than use the pancreas of slaughtered animals to save their own lives can develop the protests necessary to awaken us to the impiety of atomic warfare.

How can we develop in our people the revulsion toward the development of nuclear weapons that will make them rise up and demand

that it be stopped? (Lewis Mumford asked this question in 1946, in his classic *Saturday Review* article, "Gentlemen: You Are Mad!", recently restored to print by the Colvin Press, P.O. Box 1209, Ojai, Calif. 93023.) Kathleen Raine gives attention to the grain of existence in which such responses are natural:

We have lost that way of life, but many try to make in spare time what our ancestors made for use—pottery, printing, weaving and spinning and dyeing. Plato made no distinction between the applied and the fine arts, and in pre-industrial societies there really is no such distinction. Poetry too is an oral tradition; I heard the Ramayana recited by an old village woman squatting on the ground in her rags and finery, and narrating that epic for a village puppet-theatre, while splendid painted puppets of Rama and Sita and their sons were shown by the puppeteers. At one time such performances were common, but need I say that now it is only a few enthusiasts, followers of Gandhi, who are struggling to preserve them, as the television makes its inroads without any effort at all; so vulnerable is traditional life.

By the spontaneity of felt need, people in the West are making an effort to restore the crafts. But they work under difficulties. Spontaneity is often against the artificial grain of modern life. A poet, Kathleen Raine speaks of the making of poetry:

Often I am saddened at the poor quality of the poetry that comes through my letter-box, too often imitated from reductionist models and with little gleam of true imagination: what my father used to call "the poetry of life" is seldom to be found in the work of poets who are themselves formed by materialist ideologies. Yet it is surely from a genuine desire to find some inner spring of imagination that so many write; or paint, or practice music. It is true that children are naturally imaginative, from generation to generation. I am often saddened therefore to see the poems without vision, without a trace of the "poetry of life," given to children in their school textbooks, communicating so little that can teach them to unlock the "doors of perception." When I was at school we were made to memorize poems, and many I learned by heart then have stood me in good stead since.

Learning great lines by heart adds to the eternal library of the mind, as those who have done it know. To be able to call to mind Shelley's *Triumphal Chorus from Hellas*, or something unforgettable by Keats, is a form of riches. Kathleen Raine says truly:

The value of memorizing has been all but forgotten in our system of education; facts and information are stored in books or machines, where they exert no transforming influence on us whatsoever. Yet these and other dangers notwithstanding it is surely good that so many should make the attempt through the arts to discover their own inner worlds.

The arts, indeed, in individual practice, can be a way of rediscovering a more natural religion.

Blake saw the practice of the arts as a form of prayer; one particularly appropriate, so it seems, in our own time when so many are in search of the lost door to paradise. Blake's was a religion of art not in the sense of making a religion *of* art for its own sake, but in the sense of using the arts as a way of opening our own inner worlds, and of enabling us to experience the outer world also in its living glory.

The arts, W. Macneile Dixon said in *Civilization and the Arts*, "should be regarded as windows into the transcendental world, invisible to mortal sight, presenting wider prospects, a vision of beauty in closest correspondence with the aspirations and affections of mankind. They were, in William Blake's own charming phrase, 'three powers in man of conversing with paradise'."

FRONTIERS

Forms of Self-help

GOOD NEWS is not easy to find in these depressing days, but a group in Greensboro, North Carolina—Company of Friends, P.O. Box 5117, Greensboro, N.C. 27403—is helping to spread it, along with running a farm (on fifteen acres), teaching crafts and organic farming, and giving support to young people who want to become responsible and self-reliant. The following report in the monthly paper, *Company Network* (December, 1983), is by Duncan Khan, who is, we gather, the founder of the Company. He begins:

Our society is seeing a tremendous shift from institutional help to self-help. According to the National Self-Help Clearing House at City University of New York, at least fifteen million Americans now belong to some 500,000 self-help groups, and the figure is constantly growing. People are moving away and by-passing traditional assistance such as churches, social service agencies and the mental health establishment in favor of dealing with people like themselves who have conquered or are trying to solve the same problem.

There are self-help groups for almost every conceivable problem: retirement, widowhood, weight control, alcohol and drug abuse, mental illness, handicaps, divorce, child abuse, parents, and many more.

Self-help groups bring peers together for mutual assistance in satisfying a common need. The guiding principle with them is that by helping yourself you help others, and vice versa.

Within these groups individuals are given sustenance, love, and understanding that allows them to deal with their problems and difficulties more effectively and more immediately. This does not mean that experts are ignored, but rather that their *advice* is sought only when the particular group feels it is necessary. It is rather a process of gathering information instead of blindly accepting authority from above.

Self-help is based on horizontal, networking sharing, with different expertise, knowledge and wisdom, that focuses attention on specific issues. It is therefore very different from the vertical

arrangements of government and other institutions. People feel that they have more power over their own lives. They become empowered to action for themselves and their neighbors.

Mr. Kahn goes on, describing various self-help associations, starting with neighborhood watch and support groups. One we heard about recently, here in Los Angeles, has been organized by a Korean businessman, Hank Yim, in the growing Korean section of town. These storekeepers and others regularly band together and really clean the sidewalks, including the much traveled Olympic Boulevard. It is an old Korean self-help custom that has been preserved for centuries—you clean up your own neighborhood—and the Koreans who have settled here decided that they should not forget what they learned about self-help in Korean life. They move around in bands of a hundred or so, descending on cluttered streets with brooms and sacks, leaving the area spotless. The average age of the participants is about 60, Yim says.

An example of single-handed mutual help is the translation and printing by Ronald V. Sampson, teacher in Bristol University, England, of a letter written by Leo Tolstoy to Romain Rolland in 1887. Rolland (1868-1944) had as a youth written twice to Tolstoy asking for his views on art and physical labor. Tolstoy finally answered at some length (with about 3500 words), writing in French. The Russian novelist later published a Russian version which Sampson has translated and printed on a hand press himself after setting the type by hand. (He would probably part with copies for postage plus a reasonable pittance. His address is R. V. Sampson, Beechcroft, Hinton Charterhouse, Bath, U.K.) In his introduction, Sampson says:

The evils of inequality cut both ways. The intelligentsia cut off from Nature and from the lives of ordinary people engaged in meeting the elemental needs of life, suffer in their intellectual activities from a consequent distortion of value, of balance and perspective. The manual workers are oppressed in their work both by having to do more than their fair share and by being deprived of a large part of what

they produce, while at the same time they are offered when offered anything at all, the fruits of a debased intellectual culture. In consequence privilege and injustice become established as accepted norms of life.

True art and true science, says Tolstoy, can be recognized by their effect in clarifying our understanding and strengthening our love of goodness and beauty, which have the effect of strengthening the ties binding people together in solidarity. Instead, we have much so-called art appealing to perverted emotions by exploiting violence, superstition and sensual appetite in the quest for large and easy profit. Instead of true science we have sciences driven by commercial greed and criminal science devising ever more horrific means of destruction: nuclear energy with its threat to the environment and armaments with their threat to all that lives.

Tolstoy confidently demanded that we all should will against our own baser wills, and create a world where children may grow into adults not obsessed with private acquisition and national "security," but strong enough to give—to reduce suffering and to produce joy.

This is an outlook, rare enough, that is growing and finding expression in various unostentatious ways. Sampson is a Tolstoy enthusiast and has done much to draw attention to the great Russian pacifist's persuasive logic. He is the author of valuable books, *The Psychology of Power* (1966), on the urge to dominate and the subjection of women, and *The Discovery of Peace*, a study of the making of Tolstoy's mind. There is a lot of writing, these days, on the horrors of nuclear war. Tolstoy, who hated war as much as anyone, focused his talents on the things that make for peace. He rendered systematically neglected truths obvious, an activity given new life by Mr. Sampson in his books and in making available Tolstoy's letter to Romain Rolland. Something said in this letter will bear endless repetition:

Human wisdom does not consist of the knowledge of things. There is an infinite number of things which we can know. It is not in knowing as much as possible that wisdom consists. Human wisdom lies in knowing the order in which it is useful

to know things; it consists in the ability to assess knowledge according to the degree of its importance.