

THE LOST AND THE SAVED

THE onset of despair—beginning, perhaps, with a cycle of depression—sometimes seems wholly without explanation. Is it a sickness of mind, as a psychiatrist might say, or has the victim somehow been able to see too much of the reality of the human situation? This is a question that needs answering.

There are plenty of reasons for the grim pessimism which pervades many of the thoughtful people of our time. The fields of engagement for positive achievement of a familiar sort have diminished almost to nothing, or so it seems. The formulas of a past generation for living an enriching and useful life are no longer convincing.

Optimism, Robert Heilbroner said twenty-four years ago (in *The Future as History*), is "an historic attitude toward the future—an attitude based on the tacit premise that the future will accommodate the striving that we bring to it." It assumes that the environment, as it comes into being, "will prove to be benign and congenial—or at least neutral to our private efforts." He saw little ground for optimism at the end of the 1950s:

A critic who assesses the American scene in terms of its alertness to the underlying challenges of our times can scarcely fail to be struck by the general poverty of the prevailing outlook: the men of wealth and power, mentally locked within their corporate privileges; the middle classes, more Bourbon than the Bourbons; the working classes, unable to formulate any social program or purpose beyond "getting theirs"; the academicians, blind to the irrationalities of the society they seek to rationalize.

Fifteen years later, in *The Human Prospect*, Heilbroner identified much darker tendencies, moving toward a future of "runaway population, obliterative war, and potential environmental collapse," with virtually no hope of control through existing social mechanisms. He made this comment:

Unlike the threats posed by population growth or war, there is an ultimate certitude about the problem of environmental deterioration that places it in a different category from the dangers we have previously examined. Nuclear attacks may be indefinitely avoided, population growth may be stabilized; but ultimately there is an absolute limit to the ability of the earth to support or tolerate the process of industrial activity, and there is reason to believe that we are now moving toward that limit very rapidly.

Today, in America, the resulting pessimism is publicly fended off by Dutch courage fed by the intoxicants of political propaganda, but the expectations of sagacious observers, in industry and elsewhere, are quietly gloomy. The computer-guided rationalism of the time permits no other response.

We may recall that, at another level, the outbreak of the second world war submerged many distinguished Europeans in a sense of doom, sometimes leading to suicide. The horrors which followed in Germany increased the feeling of all-pervading disaster, giving evidence of unimagined capacity for evil and degradation in human nature. Widespread depression among persons with a concern for the moral quality of human life was a natural result of learning of such enormities, which seemed to go on after the war, although on a much smaller scale. Albert Camus wrote in 1947:

The most striking feature of the world we live in is that most of its inhabitants—with the exception of pietists of various kinds—are not off from the future. Life has no validity unless it can project itself toward the future, can ripen and progress. . . . What with the general fear of a war now being prepared by all nations and the specific fear of murderous ideologies, who can deny that we live in a state of terror? . . . To come to terms, one must understand what fear means: what it implies and what it rejects. It implies and rejects the same fact: a world where murder is legitimate, and where human life is considered trifling.

Then, during the Algerian war, when it became evident that the French, who only a short time before had been tortured by the Nazis, were now torturing Algerians, Jean-Paul Sartre said in a review of a book by an Algerian victim:

. . . the French have uncovered a terrible fact. If nothing protects a nation against itself, neither its past, its integrity, nor its laws—if fifteen years are enough to change victims into executioners it means that the occasion alone will decide. According to circumstances, anyone, anytime, will become either the victim or the executioner.

It seems apparent that recent events, affecting both practical affairs and political hopes and expectations, are quite sufficient to explain the pessimism so widespread in the present. Reasoning on the basis of the anticipations of the nineteenth century, who could remain without qualms? Our modern, always-more economy has used up the natural capital belonging to future generations, while the waste of war and the moral erosions of the warmaking spirit have everywhere eaten at the character of human beings. The age is filled with misgivings. In their national and corporate undertakings, people are continually shocking themselves by what they do or feel that they must do.

So far, in this inquiry, we are on firm rational ground. Our loss of confidence and our depression are amply accounted for either by what we have done and attempted or by what has happened to us. The best minds among us are anxiously seeking remedies and proposing changes in direction.

But there is another kind of depression—a sense of emptiness rather than despair, although often leading to despair—that overtakes some individuals apparently without external cause. Dread and horror are accompaniments of this experience. Meaninglessness, the subtraction of purpose from life, is its most haunting quality. It has the intensity of a peak experience, yet in terms of its opposite. There are a number of accounts of this condition, and we take two from *The Savage*

and *Beautiful Country* (1967), by the English psychiatrist, Alan McGlashan:

Two cases in twenty-five years suggests a high degree of rarity, but as with the illuminative experience I believe it is something of which the subject is very reluctant to speak.

One of these cases was a Surrey cowman, an illiterate farmhand, who came to me many years ago, hesitantly, and said—"It isn't that I'm *ill*, doctor, but I get the queerest, damndest feeling sometimes, for no cause at all. Last time was the middle of Guildford Cattle Market. Suddenly the notion came over me that all this—the animals, the farmers and their dogs, the smells, the noise, the sunshine—was just silly, empty, made no sense. My life, and everyone's life, somehow went blank. There wasn't no point in going on. . . . It didn't seem hardly right, doctor, to feel that way, . . . Mind you, it doesn't last long—in a few minutes I'm meself again. . . . I suppose it's nothing, really."

The other case was of a woman in her forties, a widow who had married for security, which her new husband knew and accepted. The doctor noticed a cool line of detachment in her makeup and by questioning found that she suffered periodic attacks of "gloom." It seemed to her that from an hour or two to half a day her life seemed void and meaningless, making the whole world and all living things seem "like a great lump of putrefying meat, crawling with maggots, fit only for some cosmic dustbin." She told the doctor: "My whole life is an attempt to escape from this recurrent horror. When it is in the ascendant my only wish is to die."

"Recurrent Depression," Dr. McGlashan says, is the psychiatric diagnosis of such conditions, but what, he asks, if this handy label shuts the door on wider implications?

. . . can we be so sure that there is nothing beyond the pathological in these chilling and nihilistic visions? By the principle of "honoring the opposites" we may regard them as valid glimpses of one aspect of Reality, not merely distortions of a sick mind.

What would follow from this? Could it be that the state of illumination, momentarily experienced by many lived in by the mystic, *is not an ultimate*—as it

so convincingly appears to be—but one pole only of a total experience? An ultimate experience of this kind, unimaginable at our present level of awareness, would include and transcend both the state of illumination with its brilliant immediacy and overflowing significance and the annihilating abyss of the Void. Such an experience demands nothing less than an increase in the range of human consciousness.

Dr. McGlashan wonders if what happens in such cases is a partial escape of consciousness from the illusions of time—"an intersection of Time and the Timeless"—accomplished, in the cases described, without the balance of seeing both aspects of the time-bound world.

Another such report, this one by a medical student who experienced the frightening release himself, is provided by a recently published book, *Of Being and of Meaning* (Philosophical Library), by Hans C. Syz, a Swiss-born psychiatrist. In 1916 the writer was a twenty-one-year-old doing preclinical work in Zurich. He awakened one night "with a feeling of terror combined with a certain train of thought." (Quotation is taken from notes written down by Syz at the time.) His at first obsessive musings continued for more than two weeks, although they changed in quality, from terror to serenity, and even approached ecstasy toward the end. In the first entry in his psychological journal he says:

The content of the arising series of thoughts can be described as the sudden insight into the total relativity of all existence, especially of all forms emanating from man. As this applies also to our forms of thought, thinking as it were dissolves itself—which may in part explain my feeling of terror. This, of course, describes only one side of my inner experience. One could also say that suddenly I sensed deeply the question of the meaning of life in its entirety. Or, the question arose: what is the essential nature of man, of consciousness, of personality? For I have always been occupied with these problems; I simply could not live life as it came. I had to give account to myself for what I did; I sought to discover my real self in order to guide my actions according to my true nature.

His greatest anxiety stemmed from a sense of the transient and dissolving nature of personality. It seemed to him that he lived in a dream, under tension or pressure that came close to bursting. A day later, however, the tension eased, although he still felt the strength of the invading current:

It was as though my being could not give itself undivided and wholly to the thoughts that arose, but was in some of it feeling governed by another central complex. . . . I felt I had penetrated as deeply as man can, that the end-point of all my striving had been reached not by discovering some final fundamental thought but by having arrived at the nature of thought itself beyond which all thinking ceases. . . . My experience concerns not only the nature of reason and its functions, but encompasses life in general—all of existence. In a sense it contains all of reality, and in whatever way I may express myself, it sets the limits for man's possible knowledge regarding thought, consciousness, life, personality, soul, and the meaning of life.

Reflection on meaning led to a conclusion about ethics:

Not outside us, but within us lies the meaning of life. In life itself lies its meaning. In the instincts, feelings, drives, intents lies the purpose. From them can be derived an order of values accessible to thought which may take the forms of ethics. . . . If we look beyond the irreducible premises of ethics for motives to which these premises may be traced we shall not find [an] ultimate purpose in an even further removed, all-embracing final goal, but only in ourselves, in our internal conditions, in the interplay of our powers. Thus every moment in itself gains meaning. . . .

In case we should not rest content with ethics evolved from our predisposition and circumstances, but seek to deduce it from a conceptual foundation, this foundation must be rooted in a profound (of course one-sided) formulation of life, as we see in life the attainment of purpose. From such a formulation, guidelines can then be drawn for the different areas and facets of life. This does not mean that an abstract, logically consistent ethics should be erected on a particular idea, overturning all other value judgments. Ethics after all exist prior to being conceptually formulated.

Toward the end there is this observation:

Creativity traces back to the same motivating principle that finally also is the basis of religion, the intuition or experience of the *formal* character of all that enters into our consciousness. If we regard this as the ultimate source of religion, then a shift takes place in the otherwise fundamental distinction between the religious and the irreligious person. A principal distinction would then rather have to be made between people who are geared entirely to the absolute value of what appears real to us, and others who somehow (not at all just in forms of thought) show a deeper understanding. But here transitions and gradual differences appear on every hand and distinctions really based on principle are hard to draw.

The terror of the subjective experiences, in such cases, seems to bring with it a wonderful antidote, yet the balance attained may be quite different from what was desperately longed for during the ordeal. A state of mind may be reached where acceptance of all becomes possible—even death loses its threat—during essentially timeless interludes. Loss of what belongs to time is indeed devastating—so much of our being is made in and bound by time—yet we do not cease to be. Gained is a timeless perspective; but who can speak of this?

The point of gathering such testimony is that the depression, as the subsequent release from depression, comes from within. Perhaps the most notable case of all is that of Leo Tolstoy, who fell into utter despair at the height of his career as a novelist in Russia. No external circumstances oppressed him. He had achieved what nearly every other writer wanted most of all—fame, success, wealth and universal admiration. Yet toward the end of the 1870s, he tells in his *Confessions* "I was overcome by minutes at first of perplexity and then of an arrest of life, as though I did not know how to live or what to do, and I lost myself and was dejected."

The feeling went away, but then recurred with greater intensity:

The truth was that life was meaningless. It was as though I had just been living and walking along, and had come to an abyss where I saw clearly that

there was nothing ahead but perdition. And it was impossible to stop and go back, and impossible to shut my eyes, in order that I might not see that there was nothing ahead but suffering and imminent death,—complete annihilation.

Tolstoy describes his investigation of learning, his persistent search for meaning in the sciences, meeting only frustrations that brought him to the brink of suicide:

I should be telling an untruth if I said that I arrived through reason at what I did arrive, and did not kill myself. Reason was at work, but there was also something else at work, which I cannot call otherwise than the consciousness of life. . . . This force made me observe that I, with a hundred people like me, did not constitute all humanity and that I did not yet know the life of humanity. . . .

What happened with me was that the life of our circle,—of the rich and the learned,—not only disgusted me, but even lost all its meaning. All our acts, reflections, sciences, arts,—all that appeared to me in a new light. I saw that all that was a mere pampering of the appetites, and that no meaning could be found in it; but the life of all the working masses, of all humanity, which created life, presented itself to me in its real significance. I saw that that was life itself and that the meaning given to this life was truth, and I accepted it.

Tolstoy had felt that life was meaningless and shallow, but then saw that the fault lay not in his reasoning, but in his own stance. Life in general was neither meaningless nor evil. As he said, "I had erred not so much because I had reasoned incorrectly as because I had lived badly;" So, in the years thereafter, he set about changing his life. Archetypal forms of this both terrifying and redeeming experience are found in great scriptures. In the eleventh discourse of the *Bhagavad-Gita* Krishna reveals to Arjuna his "divine form," and the young prince falls to the ground in abject terror. Blazoned before him are all the processes of life and death, focused on the single screen of his vision. He sees the universal destruction, the endless devouring, the impersonal horror of material existence, yet knows he is still in the presence of a wise and compassionate man, his teacher. He begs Krishna to take the terrible

spectacle away. This is done, but Arjuna remains ever after a changed human being. All good and evil have become part of his experience. He is able to return to the world of time and find meaning in a life lived from moment to moment.

Is there any instruction in all this for men of the modern world? Are impending disasters, even if self-made, part of a transcendental curriculum? Could any society ever accomplish, from the shock of overpowering experience, what individuals now and then—a wonderful few—are able to do? This, omitting the horror, was the Platonic dream, the Utopian vision of Thomas Moore, the educational enterprise of Arthur Morgan. And as for means to such an end, Simone Weil has said, "Every order which transcends another can only be introduced into the older order in the form of something infinitely small." This qualification, at least, seems present in the reports of rare individuals.

Simply from observation and reflection on history, Ortega reached a similar conclusion, saying (in *Revolt of the Masses*):

The man with the clear head is the man who . . . 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 around 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.

The man who discovers truth, Ortega declares, must smash all that he has learned and arrive at his discovery "with hands bloodstained from the slaughter of a thousand platitudes." This may be the reason why beginnings are always "infinitely small," the innovators so few.

REVIEW IN EASTERN LANDS

IN addition to one's normal fondness for William O. Douglas, there are several good reasons for picking up and reading in an old book of his. One is his skill in getting to know, understand, and appreciate the people of other lands. Apart from the pleasure obtained from these musing reports—which are often amusing as well—as, say, vicarious travel, they provide vaccination against the superficial abstractions of journalism. We get our images of distant peoples mainly from press accounts of disturbing political events and of behavior provoked by the extreme situations of war. That they are human beings very much like ourselves hardly ever comes through.

Douglas was one of our most distinguished jurists. From his work it becomes evident that his chief public concerns were with justice, freedom, and order. To these he added the warmth of a spontaneous humanity and a friendly interest in the people of far-off places. He enjoyed travel and his books are filled with intimate portraits of individuals in every country he visited, against the background of objective accounts of socio-political structure and strains. His point of view regarding the processes of government combines recognition of the many practical difficulties of maintaining order with an uncompromising belief in democratic freedom.

In *North from Malaya* (Doubleday, 1952), Douglas tells about the struggle and unrest in several countries of the Far East. The account of Vietnam does much to explain later events, showing simply from the background of history the folly of any attempt to "pacify" the Vietnamese people by means of armed force, to say nothing of the ruthless inhumanity later involved. Justice Douglas's travels to Vietnam and other countries established the attitude pervading his writing; he came to see, as he put it, "the warm heart, the sensitive mind, the high character of Southeast Asia."

The French captured Saigon in 1859 and by 1893 had subdued the entire country. This was an episode of the military imperialism practiced by Europeans. Douglas examines the cultural result:

France did not encourage perpetuation of the ancient culture of the Vietnamese. Rather, it adopted the policy of reducing the Vietnamese to colonial people and giving them a second-class citizenship. Vietnam had a distinct educational system. Each province and each district had a school of advanced learning with public examinations for degree. They were abolished by the French. The French established libraries, research centers, technical schools, and in 1930 founded a university at Hanoi. These institutions disseminated French culture . . . but for the Vietnamese the French created an inferior educational program which suppressed the humanities.

The French made very little contribution to elementary education. In fact, they made it available for only 2 percent of the people. They created no secondary schools for Vietnamese until 1919, and then they made them available for less than 1 percent. Though the French romanized the complicated Sino-Vietnamese language and made it easier for everyone, they kept over 60 per cent of the people illiterate.

The French brought extensive industrial expansion to Vietnam—investing a total of two billion dollars during the eighty years of their occupation—but the people had only the crumbs from the resulting feast. Douglas gives a profile of what this "progress" meant for the people:

Prior to the French occupation the indigenous economy was based primarily on small farms and artisan activities. There were villages of weavers, of distillers, of carpenters, of blacksmiths and the like. These artisan industries were largely wiped out by the French by means of protective tariffs and other devices.

In agriculture—

The rice paddies tell the story. About 95 per cent of all owners own about 29 per cent of the rice paddies. (The rest is communal land.) The 95 per cent own on the average 1.73 acres per proprietor, while 60 per cent own less than 1 acre. These people for years have not made enough to satisfy their hunger. . . . In South Vietnam particularly, the French favored the establishment of a landed class in

control of 80 per cent of the rice fields. There 200,000 landless families work as sharecroppers.

There were other deprivations which shaped the future of Vietnam:

The French suppressed all Vietnam organizations. As a result the present generation has not learned how to unite its efforts. The people forgot how to organize an opposition and make their influence felt. That by-product of French policy is now working against the French. The Vietnamese now more easily succumb to the highly organized Communist movement.

The French built almost three times as many prisons in Indo-China as they built hospitals. The chronicles are filled with cruel and inhuman punishments of the accused. The vengeance of the French ran to communities as well as to individuals. Before Hitler conceived the infamous episode at Lidice the French in Indo-China wiped out whole villages in retaliation for the misdeeds of "rebels."

Talk of the contributions of France to world culture and civilization could excite only "a scornful, bitter laugh in Vietnam." The republican ideas of the French Revolution never took hold in there; the people listened instead to the Chinese and the Japanese. (One recalls, here, the letter written by Ho Chi Minh to President Wilson at the time of the Paris Peace Conference, appealing for justice in behalf of the Vietnamese people. The letter was ignored, and a little later Ho accepted an invitation to go to Moscow.)

Douglas was indeed a distinguished jurist, but he may have been a greater educator. If, in all the schools, books like his had been used as sources of current history, the policies of this nation might have reflected at least a little grasp of both political morality and common sense.

There is major irony in the fact that the rural village culture systematically destroyed by the French in Vietnam—and by other colonizing powers around the world, including, today, the invasions of American multinational operators—is in many ways the culture that the new reformers of our time are struggling to restore. We have, for example, a book published recently by the

Sarvodaya Research Institute of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka—*Rural Industrialization in Sri Lanka*, by Ton de Wilde. (This book may be purchased postpaid for \$10 from the Institute at 41 Lumbini Ave., Ratmalana, Sri Lanka.) The author begins with a critical comparison of the assumptions and thinking of now prevailing economic doctrines and practice with the fundamentally Gandhian outlook of the reformers. De Wilde says in his Introduction:

Two hundred years after Adam Smith wrote his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, seen as the beginning of Economic Theory, the nations of the world are faced with at least four major crises all more or less interrelated: the unequal distribution of food, major ecological disasters in various parts of the world, an ever-increasing world population, especially in those areas where food is scarce, and an energy crisis.

Development theorists fall into two broad groups. The dominant school advocates more of what has been done in the past, despite its now manifest failures, arguing for "rapid industrialization and international trade." The other school proposes the slower but lasting process of self-reliance, largely embodied in Gandhi's economic philosophy, as expressed by J. C. Kumarappa: "First produce for the village; if all needs are satisfied in the village, then produce for the region, then for the nation."

De Wilde explains that he was led to study rural development and technology by coming into contact with A. T. Ariyaratne, leader of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka, in 1974. This experience broadened his intentions:

For me it was no longer enough to study and promote the development of technologies for use in rural areas in poor countries. I wanted to understand the total process in which the development and more particularly use of appropriate technologies take place by the people themselves.

In general, he found that present-day government efforts in this direction were inferior to the ancient practice of the country's Buddhist

kings, and that, today, "within the multi-party society of Sri Lanka, the interference of politicians was more harmful than beneficial when establishing rural industries." He writes to show the advantages of basing "industrial units at the village level on community participation, rather than to allow politicians to use rural industries as sources of patronage." De Wilde gives attention to the cultural background of Sri Lanka under the influence of Buddhism. For one thing, the caste system of pre-Buddhist times lost its rigidity:

For instance, among the Kshatriyas [the caste of leaders, warriors, and administrators] there were Kings who performed their royal functions and at the same time practiced medicine, were farmers, and did ivory carving. . . . Buddhism provided the basis of the value system and the ethos of the society. The economy was essentially a subsistence agrarian economy with the ancillary crafts and occupations supporting the primary occupation of producing food for the community. Within this system, the socialization of the individual member, his training in a given skill and introduction to an occupation and craft, the education into the value system of the society, and the acceptance of the normative patterns of behavior in the society were all integrated elements of one single learning system. The various institutions in that society—the monastery school which was the formal educational institution attached to the temple, the temple itself, the work place, whether it was the family farm or the workshop of the family, were all combined and integrated to provide the individual member the education he needed to exist as a useful member in his community.

Such material helps to clarify the meaning of "civilization" and calls for redefinition of both "progress" and "development."

COMMENTARY
A MATTER OF REPRESENTATION

WHEN, in 1931, Gandhi spoke as representative of the Indian National Congress at the Round Table Conference in London, called to consider a constitution for India, someone asked, "By what right do you speak for the people of India?"

He replied, "By right of service."

The claim was just. From that frigid day in 1893, when Gandhi had been put off a train at Maritzburg, because of his race, and shivered in an unheated waiting room throughout the South African winter night, his life had been dedicated to the cause of justice to his people. "My active non-violence," he said, "began from that date."

The right of spokespersonship is earned by identification. Gandhi's voice rang with the feeling of the millions whose cause he served. "Little do town-dwellers know," he said in 1922, "how the semi-starved masses of India are slowly sinking to lifelessness. . . . No sophistry, no jugglery in figures can explain away the evidence that the skeletons in many villages present to the naked eye."

Camus spoke with the same sort of authority in 1947 when he asked:

What with the general fear of war now being prepared by all nations and the specific fear of murderous ideologies, who can deny that we live in a state of terror? . . . one must understand what fear means: what it implies and what it rejects. It implies and rejects the same fact: a world where murder is legitimate, and where human life is considered trifling.

Then, last month, in the *Progressive* for February, the editor, Erwin Knoll, pointed out that governments are the terrorists of our time. "Who," he asked, "but true terrorists could conceive of building and stockpiling such weapons?"

We live in troubled times. Many voices are raised in objection to the exorbitant prices inflicted on the poor and the middle class by

inflation. All but the rich are feeling the pinch, and on this and numerous other grounds there are cries of indignation. The complaints are doubtless justified; times will grow harder and harder; but what range of identification do the spokesmen represent?

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

SPEAKING AND READING

THE complexities behind the argument about bilingual education are set forth in an article in the Fall 1981 *Contemporary Education*, by Marilyn Peterson (who teaches Elementary Education at Iowa State University). She begins with an account of her teaching experience with seventh-graders:

In this agricultural southwest area, my classes were filled with predominantly Mexican-American children. These children, I discovered, spoke English well. They reacted to what I said to them intelligently. Their dark eyes would light up with understanding when I engaged them in conversation. I expected these children to be top students. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that almost three fourths of these Mexican-American children were seriously retarded in reading; i.e., they read two or more years below their grade level in school. They had not learned to read well in spite of six long years already spent in the American classroom. What a tragedy, I thought, that these children with their zest for living and endearing ways had been shortchanged in this vital academic area!

After trying "everything" to improve their reading ability, she decided to find out why it was so difficult. There were a number of reasons, she learned, all bearing in different ways on the lives of these children.

I discovered that a number of hypotheses have been advanced to account for the failure of the Mexican-American student to learn to read well. Perhaps the one most often cited has to do with linguistic deprivation. Children who come from homes where little or no English is spoken are faced with a double burden when they arrive at school. Nila Banton Smith describes this dual learning task as "learning to decode and interpret reading symbols" in addition to "learning a new language." Because the procedures for teaching beginning reading are commonly based on the premise that each child has already learned to speak and understand the school language, the Mexican-American child may experience alienation from both school learning and his peers from the very beginning of his education.

One writer states that the Spanish-speaking child brings to school "a language which will be ignored for the purpose of learning to read." . . . The bewilderment of Mexican-American children is compounded when they realize that—

". . . the five or six years they have so far spent in acquiring competence in their home language seem wasted when they find their teacher, their school books, or their fellow pupils using a different language. For them, there is a language barrier established by the school itself, that blocks their learning, discourages their efforts, and reduces their chances of success in the educational system." (Spolsky, 1972.)

One researcher declared that this language barrier holds concept development at a standstill, and another pointed out that feelings of inferiority may result in the children, leading to reduced expectation of themselves. A psycho-social analyst said:

Coming to school, the child encounters a period of bewilderment: his language is not right; his diet is not right; the values he has learned from his parents often are not right. From the stage of bewilderment, he frequently enters a stage of rejection: he finds that what he has learned in his home often stands in the way of his success in the school environment; he may be embarrassed by the contrasts; sometimes he decides that "his whole culture is despicable because it makes him different."

Stages of maladaptation follow, crippling to human beings. Commenting, Marilyn Peterson says:

In examining these stages, one can see that the steps which would tend to interfere most with learning to read would be the early stages of bewilderment and rejection. Beset with confusion and feelings of guilt, many Mexican-American children are unable to give their concentrated attention to the tasks of English language competency and learning to read. There are too many other things to worry about. Is it any wonder that these children have difficulties learning to read?

Obviously, human development must precede "Americanization"! And Americanization ought never to mean dehumanization. Fortunately, there are teachers who understand this and are doing what they can.

Another approach to reading—and something more—is described in an article in *Gandhi Vigyan* for last July. The writer, Manmohan Choudari, tells about how he and a few others began working with the children of his neighborhood in Cuttack, a city in Bengal, India. It began, he says, as a measure of self-defense. He and his family had given their front-yard garden first aid, after years of neglect, and it was filled with blooms.

Children of the neighborhood began raiding it for flowers. In the process flowering plants were damaged and some were uprooted and taken away. Our first reaction was to shout indignantly when their heads bobbed up over the compound wall. Next we hurled lessons in virtue at them. They wanted the flowers for the daily ritual puja of household deities and we tried to convince them that God preferred to see flowers blooming in a garden rather than plucked and placed at his feet. But the setting was not exactly conducive to such moral lessons, with children popping on and off the wall and we shouting and flailing from the house. Besides, it was not possible to mount around-the-clock watch.

Then we reasoned that we had either to keep an Alsatian dog or evolve a mode of coexistence with the children. The latter was more along Gandhian lines. We had been talking of changing the hearts of empires, and couldn't we tackle eleven-year-olds non-violently? We decided to try. We began one day by telling some children who were climbing over the wall that we had decided to give them flowers, so they should come in through the gate. They were suspicious at first, but decided to try. Gradually word got round that flowers could be had for the asking and scores of urchins converged on our place in the morning. The first lesson in social etiquette that we had to teach them was not to pluck flowers themselves but wait in a queue. It took weeks for even this simple lesson to soak through. We also learned lessons in non-violence and patience. . . . Once or twice I threw an urchin out and asked him not to come next morning as he would not get any flowers. But it made me feel sick the whole day and I felt positively relieved when the urchin turned up, pranks and all, the next morning.

Of course I had known all along everything about "unfreezing" one's behavior patterns and getting rid of reflexive modes of thinking and acting to be able to behave creatively. But it was painful to do so in practice and the process has not ended.

In the meantime we were thinking of ways of making the contacts with the children more enduring and hit upon the idea of starting a library. One day I casually asked the children if they might like to read some story books.

Some of the children responded, so Choudari dug up about twenty from around the house, one over fifty years old; and a friendly book seller donated twenty more.

It was a revelation to see the avidity with which some of the children consumed the books. New children who were not "flower-seekers" began using the library. A simple rope swing attached to a beam of our verandah provided an added attraction and a score or more of children from six to thirteen or fourteen began coming regularly in the afternoons. . . . It was a pity to see how few games the children knew. My wife and daughter-in-law taught them some new games which they enjoyed. Some parlor games with simple materials were also devised. Our three-year-old grandson had a flair for acting out stories that were told to him. . . . With a little help and encouragement, older children began acting out fairy tales with great enjoyment.

Choudari and his family helped to get going a Children's Association, naming it after a nearby river. Interestingly, there was more success in other neighborhoods, but the work goes on and is slowly spreading. The writer concludes:

The relationships on which the present system is built are instilled into the minds of our children almost from their mothers' milk, and perhaps the building up of a nonviolent society and the training of a people in Satyagraha will have to start from right there. One thing has become clear to us. The bringing up of a new, virile, creative and revolutionary generation could not be possible by any centralized means of agencies. It can happen only in homes. It can happen only in neighborhoods where adults with maturity and concern and love for children come into contact with them. Today we are four tiny groups struggling to survive in an out-of-the-way corner of the world. But we dream of a hundred thousand of such tiny shoots springing up all over India, to bring about a silent revolution.

FRONTIERS The Uses of History

CREEPING into the serious journals of the time is a new way of thinking about history, and, with good luck, in about fifty years or so this approach might be taught in the schools. The relations of humans with the land and the modes of food production, over hundreds and thousands of years, are far more important than political events. Political principles may need to be understood, with comparisons of social systems provided, but if care of the land is neglected such matters become almost irrelevant. Civilizations always go down and out when the land is abused.

In *Frontiers* for last Nov. 18, we quoted Franz Schurmann (in the Summer 1981 *Cry California*) on how China survived disaster after disaster over thousands of years, by "the active commitment of local communities" to their water delivery systems. In *Landscape* (Vol. 25, No. 3, 1981), Christopher Salter, who teaches geography at the University of California in Los Angeles, describes another facet of China's millennial care of the land. He begins:

China is often described as the world's most humanized landscape. Images that range from the Great Wall to sky-hugging terraces to ubiquitous dooryard gardens all are based on the fact that the Chinese have long needed to be extraordinarily productive with their land. This need has come not only from the peculiar conditions of China's demography, but from the urban demand for reliable surpluses to support court and citizen alike.

In pursuit of surpluses, the Chinese have appropriated raw land and have terraced, irrigated, levelled, banded, fertilized, and patterned it toward unique agricultural and visual expression. If the land was level, people irrigated it. If mountain flanks were unproductive, farmers terraced them. If soil was too sandy, it was enriched by plantings and field dressing. For nearly four thousand years of recorded history, the writ of humankind has been charted in bold form on the Chinese earth. . . . Our Western image of the farmer ever moving toward less settled land is a scenario that most of agrarian China has not known for more than two thousand years.

Cooperation in efforts to make the land productive has been the norm since before the Chinese became part of China in the third century B.C.

China, this writer notes, houses "one-fifth of the world's population in an arable setting with less than half the area of contemporary America's farmland." As long ago as the third century B.C., Mencius counseled the people to be moderate in disturbing the natural topography, warning the farmers not to graze too many cattle and goats on the mountains of North China. Mao, in our own century, selected one mountain village, Dazhai, as an example to the half million other villages in China. The peasants of Dazhai obtained maximum production from their arid mountain fields and terraces, through their own bootstraps efforts, and, under Mao, "learn from Dazhai" was the cry. Today, China's leaders have widened application of this principle, saying:

Learn from Dazhai, but design your farmlands in close accord with your local environmental setting. A single model will never do for a nation as geographically diverse as China." . . .

Just as landscape once served to unify China under one banner and one model, it is now the major feature in promoting regional consciousness.

One ruler of China, however, made a terrible mistake. Some four thousand years ago, Emperor Shun, of the Hsia dynasty, saw the healthy forest trees which bordered the Yellow River—a river not unlike the American Mississippi—and decided that the fertile soil beneath those trees, extending for 2500 miles, would grow abundant crops (accumulating wealth he could tax), and he ordered the forest to be cleared by burning. The story is told by Michael Weiner in *Plant a Tree* (1975):

For a while there was rejoicing over the land plowed and seeded. For the land, rich in humus, grew crops plentiful beyond all expectation. . . . But this happy state of affairs did not last. The topsoil of the cleared land, in rapidly melting snows and heavy rains, began to slide down into the Yellow River. Erosion crept across the farms. Hot winds of summer dried the fine soil; more hot winds that followed carried the rich topsoil away in forms of dust. The

streams emptying into the rivers swelled with silt. Higher and higher rose the Yellow River. It broke through the barrier of banks and dikes. Water flooded the land.

The people thought that this watery invasion of their land and homes was temporary, and when the river subsided they returned to their farms. They were wrong. The damage had been done. The floods grew more frequent, the land became poor, and the people suffered misery.

Two thousand years later, another emperor, Chin, realized what had happened and ordered the river-bank forests restored. But the people couldn't do it—they no longer owned the land, which now belonged to the feudal lords. These lords and the governors of their provinces decided that the emperor had no right to tell them what to do with their land, so the trees were not planted. "In the four thousand years following Emperor Shun's decree, the Yellow River has destroyed millions of lives and caused untold misery." It overflowed again last year, and widespread food shortages are expected.

This passage in Weiner's book is reprinted in Ecology Action's booklet No. 8 of the Self-Teaching Mini-Series (2225 E1 Camino Real, Palo Alto, Calif. 94306).

There is more of useful history in this booklet, detailing another great mistake:

The English-speaking world's word "cereal" comes from the Roman god of wheat, Ceres. The Romans were able to get grain from all over the Mediterranean and, with the control of this crop, expanded their empire considerably. However, because they could import wheat at vastly cheaper prices than their own farmers could grow it themselves, more and more people left the land to move to the city of Rome where it was given away for nothing to many in the population—and next to nothing to the rest of the people.

It is interesting to examine the Roman Empire of that time. Changes were taking place which took away many of the powers of local and/or municipal independence and concentrated them more and more into a centralized Roman Empire bureaucracy. There was desertion of relatively local farmland by those

who could no longer make a living due to increased taxation and competition from abroad. General economic disintegration increased the burdens of the central government and the loss of local interest and pride contributed to the final end of the Roman Empire. During this period, the abandonment of the countryside increased the size of the city of Rome to over one million people—an unheard of population for a city at that time. . . . After the fall of the Roman Empire, the city of Rome shrank to about 30,000 people.

Another article in the issue of *Landscape* quoted above reports that "Eighteen million acres of cleared farm land [in the American South], fifteen per cent of the regional total, and an area half the size of the state of Iowa, were abandoned by farmers in eleven southern states between 1940 and 1970." The writer, John Fraser Hart, calls this redistribution of population "Migration to the Blacktop." It might also be named "Going to Rome."