

## VIETNAM: VIEWS OF THE FUTURE

[The American reader of the mass media published in the United States seldom has opportunity to find out what intelligent Vietnamese think about the war which is tearing their country apart. An exception to this rule is the *Christian Science Monitor*, which frequently publishes material not commonly found in papers of similar influence. We reprint here, by permission, a series of four articles by Mario Rossi, the *Monitor's* Paris correspondent, which appeared starting Aug. 26. Copyright for these articles is held by the Christian Science Publishing Company, 1966, with all rights reserved.

Since the Vietnamese election occurred after these articles appeared, there is point in noting that a *New York Times* correspondent in Saigon (Aug. 15) referred to the impending election as "more a diplomatic exercise than a political event," because it could not reflect Vietnamese opinion on any important issues. A large turnout, he said, would have little meaning, since "citizens whose voting cards had not been punched at the polls would be denied certain principles, possibly including the right to government rice doles." "Few Vietnamese," he added, "would fail to cast their ballot under that threat."

In another *Monitor* article (Sept. 7, 1966), a Vietnamese journalist, Tran Van Dinh, pointed out that the Electoral Law banned not only Communists, but also "neutralists," from standing for election, and that the Government's Military Security Agency has sole power to decide who is either a "neutralist" or a Communist.]

### I

EACH of the numerous military coups in South Vietnam has brought to Paris a number of military men from the losing camp. The high-ranking officers among them (colonels and generals) have maintained close links with Saigon, including the military from the junta which now rules the country.

A colonel, who acts as spokesman for the exiled group, opened our discussion with the question, "After Ky, who?"

He made it quite clear that in his own and his group's opinion the present strong man will not last. "It is a question of weeks, perhaps of months, but the present regime is not going to last and we have to concern ourselves with the alternatives."

He went on: "My assumption is that the next government will also be formed by military men, both in active service and retired. Officially, of course, the government will be labeled civilian, but in fact it will be primarily military and might include officers now in exile.

"There are two possibilities: the new government will be even more rightist than Ky is or more open to moderation. Let us not consider the first alternative, not because I exclude it but because there is no more to say but that the consequences would be catastrophic.

"What the country needs today is for those forces which are alive and politically conscious to emerge, meet, and find points of accord. It makes little difference whether this result is being achieved through elections or other means. Remember that we have never had nationwide free elections, we have never known fully what democracy means, we must start from scratch."

I interrupted to ask whether he knew of military men capable of heading such a government. "Sure," he said, "there is Duon Van Minh who has lived in Bangkok ever since Ky took over a year ago. There is also General Tran Van Don who still lives in Saigon. Minh has many friends, but he is not very solid as a statesman. Tran Van Don is more solid, but has fewer friends, and is not as popular."

How do the military envisage a long-term solution?

There are three main forces today in South Vietnam outside of the Viet Cong: the military, the Buddhists, the Roman Catholics. These three should form a transition government, under military auspices, in order to negotiate with the Front of National Liberation. These negotiations, however, must be made in the open and not in secret.

"Furthermore, it must be a South Vietnamese government that negotiates with the Communists and not the various factions that negotiate among themselves the formation of a government. You will remember that the 1962 Geneva Conference on Laos was preceded by a tripartite conference in Zurich with the participation of the rightists, the neutralists, and the leftists (Pathet Lao). In our case there would be two parties not three.

"Of course, there are certain preconditions to all this: first of all there must be a South Vietnamese government willing and ready to initiate a dialogue with the Front of National Liberation and North Vietnam; second, we need the agreement of the United States."

The officer broke into a broad smile. "I think the plan is good," he went on, "because it could bring peace back to Vietnam without sacrificing basic principles. But we military men are obviously dependent upon the United States. So the problem boils down to this: of the two alternatives I mentioned before, which will the United States support? The ultra or the moderate? This is the crux of the problem. If Washington adopted solution number two, I do not think it would take long to convince the Army and to silence those who are for a war to the finish.

"At the same time politicians must remember that nothing can be done in South Vietnam today without or against the Army. Furthermore, only we can be neutral between the Roman Catholics and the Buddhists. Do not underestimate the importance of the future relationship between the two religions."

"Well," said the officer as he got up, "Pretty soon the United States will have to make up its mind. At that time we will know where we stand."

## II

"To you Americans whatever is not black is white and whatever is not white is black. When will you ever learn that the world is full of grays—that gray, as a matter of fact, is the dominant color in practically every continent, politically speaking, of course.

"Do you want me to sum up my position? I am one of the grays, and in my country that means being a neutralist."

The man who spoke these words is a Vietnamese with a wide political experience. He had been a minister several times—even when Ho Chi Minh formed the first Vietnamese government. He had gone to Paris, having been expelled by the French. When his country became independent in 1954, he refused to consider the North because of the Communist regime and the South because of the Diem dictatorship.

Here are his words:

"In 1929 the French managed to smash the nationalist movement which up to then had been non-Communist. After that fateful year the flag of independence was seized by the Communists. The consequences, as you well imagine, were fateful. The first rebellions of 1931 were organized by the Communists. As a result the non-Communist parties lost their hold over the masses and in order to operate had to seek the support of foreigners: the Chinese at the time of Kuo-Min-tang, the Japanese during the war, the French after the war, and now the United States.

"Today, everything that was preached in the past by the non-Communist parties belongs to the program of the Front of National Liberation. Besides, the front does as it preaches. When the non-Communists say they are for independence they arrive too late. And so do they when they

say they are for land reform or other programs for the betterment of the masses. What remains? The ideological issue. But this must be understood from a Vietnamese not a Western point of view. What I mean is the search for a different religious and political basis where the competition with the Communists will make sense. This is what makes the actions of the Buddhists so important. The problem, very broadly speaking, is similar to the relations between the Polish Catholics and the Polish State.

"Let me explain this further. The Vietnamese has never known democracy or freedom. That is why he does not miss them. That is also why when you Americans say you are fighting for freedom and democracy you make no sense to most Vietnamese. This is not what they are asking of a government, Communist or not.

"The Vietnamese resents the Communists only when the latter touch upon certain things that belong to his traditions. He is sensitive to what touches upon the family, his friends, certain human feelings rather than political principles as understood in the West. The Communists aroused hostility with their land reform in the North not because they undertook it and had to impose severe sacrifices. What the Vietnamese resented was the hatred among men that this often generated, the lack of sensitivity for certain traditions. This is what the Vietnamese will not accept.

"Do you understand now what I mean by ideological contest in Vietnamese terms? And do you understand why I am a neutralist?

"I wish you did and that all Americans did. The objective of the United States is to ensure that South Vietnam will not be Communist. But this depends upon the South Vietnamese themselves. A regime which must count on foreigners to stay in power is not viable. It is time that we Vietnamese who dream of a free country, modern but also devoted to the traditions of its ancestors, become free of foreign tutelage. Unfortunately, as I mentioned at the beginning of

our conversation, this has not been so in the past and is not so now. Our position will never be valid so long as Uncle Sam breathes down our necks, if you will excuse this American expression."

### III

I had met in Paris a devout Vietnamese Catholic. He had rather startled me by saying: "You know who my worst enemy is? The Pope of Rome. Why? Because he is for peace while I am for war."

This Vietnamese Catholic represented a small minority but his remark dramatized a problem which greatly concerns not only the Vatican but quite a few capitals. Hundreds of thousands of Roman Catholics fled the north for the south after Vietnam was partitioned at the 1954 Geneva Conference. What would be their fate if the Communists won in a fair election, a possibility which the experts are far from excluding for a not-too-distant future?

This problem points to another one concerning quite a number of prominent Vietnamese exiles in Paris: in the conditions now prevailing in the south would an election be a wise thing? Some doubt it, even though they feel that a popular consultation would have its importance.

A distinguished Vietnamese doctor with wide political experience pointed out that if the Front of National Liberation, which controls most of the countryside and has deeply penetrated the cities, has not formed a government of its own and invited the south to rally round it, there must be a reason. And the reason, according to him, was the realization on the part of the Front that political conditions unacceptable to the United States would be unrealistic and useless. This interpretation was confirmed by an unofficial representative of the FLN.

"Elections," this prominent Vietnamese said, "are a wonderful thing if they fulfill the purpose for which they are intended. If ever the elections proved dishonest, that would be the end for the

Western ideal of democracy. The United States will have lost the very reason why it intervened in Vietnam. We have not forgotten the so-called elections held under French auspices or when Diem was in power. They were not elections but a farce. And how could elections be representative when the Viet Cong, despite its recognized numerical importance, will be absent?

"We have to start thinking in terms of long-range objectives and this we can do only through a referendum. According to the program of an important Vietnamese group, the referendum should ask the people to select one of the following three alternatives: Do you want an immediate reunification with North Vietnam? Do you want the separation between north and south to be final? Do you accept the principle of reunification with the understanding that it will take place gradually over a number of years?"

My informant felt that a majority of Vietnamese would opt for the third alternative and the Viet Cong might decide to go along. Probably the Chinese have the same feeling. Not too long ago Chou En-Lai declared to the Pakistan daily, *Dawn*, that even if all parties in South Vietnam came to an agreement that would not mean a return to peaceful conditions in the country.

"In my country," the Vietnamese went on, "there are two possibilities: either the great powers come to an understanding to impose a solution or the parties agree among themselves and the agreement is recognized by the great powers. The first alternative is being blocked by China; the second by the United States.

"Be that as it may, the most important problem now is to establish the long-range relationship with the north, and only after that has been established to see what can be done politically in the south. To reverse the process would be a mistake. The two Vietnams complement one another economically and are meant to return to being a united country.

"There are no end of problems to be solved first, but that is why we should know well in advance how much time is at our disposal. Today, fathers write their children here in Paris not to go back, so bad is the situation. But ours is not a poor country if it were exploited properly; and if only the students and a number of exiles returned there would be enough men for an efficient administration."

Then he added: "The trouble is there are quite a few of my people who think like that Roman Catholic who hates the Pope because Paul VI is for peace in Vietnam. These people are sowing wind; they will reap a tempest."

#### IV

We had met at the Café de Flore, the "expert" and I; and unconsciously we had felt that the young men there with long hair and the young women with too much mascara on their eyes were seekers after some truth applicable to this new era, that would show the way—somewhere.

"Here you have in essence the drama of today's world," the expert said. "Too many people sure they have the one and only answer, and the young men with the long hair saying in effect that those answers are not meaningful to them." He sipped his tea.

"You see, it is the same with us. If you had a dollar for every solution that has been proposed to our problems, you would be a wealthy man. We discuss among ourselves till the wee hours of morning. The differences are too many. But there are also points we have in common. I believe there are some 5,000 of us in Paris of whom 3,000 are students. Well, one thing I can tell you with a fair degree of certitude—that 80 per cent of them, if not more, admire Ho Chi Minh."

My expert was a Vietnamese from the south, an aged man with a quick mind who had closely followed the problems of his country for a long time. He had been nicknamed "the expert" because there was no prominent Vietnamese in

Paris he did not know. "I mention this fact," he went on, "not only because it is vital in itself, but also for the light it throws on one of the main drawbacks of you Americans, and that is your scarce capacity to understand other peoples. To you Ho Chi Minh is primarily, perhaps exclusively, the Communist leader, the promoter of a doctrine you abhor. I abhor communism too, but that does not change the fact that you may include me in the number of his admirers.

"The reason? Very simple. He spent over forty years fighting for the independence of his country. He is a patriot, a great patriot, and to that extent he has all my admiration and love. And his patriotism, believe me, is far more important to me than his communism. Name another person, please do, who has done as much for the independence of Vietnam.

"Let me tell you something more," my Vietnamese friend went on. "He is nobody's puppet. He is in the Communist camp but he does not take his instructions from anyone. This is something also we admire in him.

"Now, let us take your General Ky, if you please. He was about 10 years old when Vietnam became independent. He has known nothing about colonialism and its humiliations. Besides, he is a puppet. You will find very few Vietnamese here to dispute that point. And remember that we are talking for the most part of young students whose parents must have some money to be in a position to send them all the way to Paris and keep them in this very expensive city.

"Why do I mention all this? For the simple reason that, fundamentally, the problem is not such as you Americans see it. You see it in ideological terms; we in terms of nationalism. You are fighting; you are bombing our country mercilessly; but in the end you will lose because your perspective is false. What I resent most in this affair is that I cannot be on your side, much as I would like to, because communism and the Buddhism I profess just do not mix together."

The Vietnamese got up slowly and began walking towards Rue Bonaparte and the Seine. "This," he said before going, "is the wrong kind of war and that is why we will get the wrong kind of peace. That is not the way to deal with our problems. They must be understood first, and you just seem unable to understand them."

MARIO ROSSI

Paris

## *REVIEW*

### THE POWER OF A MIND

IN our review (MANAS, Oct. 12) of *Black on White* (Grossman) by David Littlejohn, we took note of the author's longing for "a Negro writer who can turn his sympathies outward . . . know by sympathy the sufferings of others, [who is] possessed . . . of a unique and world-wide sympathy for suffering, for the inner frustrations of all manner of men." Such a Negro writer, Mr. Littlejohn thinks, is still "unborn."

At the time of quoting this passage we had not yet read Ralph Ellison's volume of essays, *Shadow and Act* (Random House and Signet), or we might have found reason to contest the idea that no such Negro writer exists. The more you read Mr. Ellison, the more you are embarrassed by the expedient need to call him a *Negro* writer. Actually, when Mr. Ellison frees you of any important reason for thinking of him as a Negro writer, this is an incidental service, a by-product of only momentary pertinence, resulting from the excellence of what he does as a human being. However, Mr. Ellison is not opposed to performing such incidental services, and this one happens to be one of his purposes in life. That is, as an artist, he knows that his achievements in literature are essentially without color and without race; yet he recognizes that as an accident of history, the works of art he creates will show this to be true—at a time when it needs to be understood.

In one of the essays in this volume, Ralph Ellison turns his talents to making this point. In the Autumn 1963 *Dissent*, Irving Howe had compared the tough, protest content of Richard Wright's *Native Son* to work by Baldwin and Ellison, implying that a Negro writer ought not to write anything *but* protest literature. Ellison objects:

The real questions seem to be: How does the Negro writer participate *as a writer* in the struggle for human freedom? To whom does he address his work? What values emerging from Negro experience does he affirm?

I started with the primary assumption that men with black skins, having retained their humanity before all the conscious efforts to dehumanize them, especially following the Reconstruction, are

unquestionably human. Thus they have the obligation of freeing themselves—whoever their allies might be—by depending upon the validity of their own experience for an accurate picture of the reality which they seek to change, and for a gauge of the values they would see made manifest. Crucial to this view is the belief that their resistance to provocation, their coolness under pressure, their sense of timing and their tenacious hold on the ideal of their ultimate freedom are indispensable values in the struggle, and are at least as characteristic of American Negroes as the hatred, fear and vindictiveness which Wright chose to emphasize.

. . . Bigger Thomas was presented as a near-sub-human indictment of white oppression. He was designed to shock whites out of their apathy and end the circumstances out of which Wright insisted Bigger emerged. Here environment is all—and interestingly enough, environment conceived solely in terms of the physical, the non-conscious. Well, cut off my legs and call me Shorty! Kill my parents and throw me on the mercy of the court as orphan! Wright could imagine Bigger but Bigger could not possibly imagine Richard Wright. Wright saw to that.

But without arguing Wright's right to his personal vision, I would say that he was himself a better argument for my approach than Bigger was for his.

A little later Ellison says:

Howe is impressed by Wright's pioneering and by the ". . . enormous courage, the discipline of self-conquest required to conceive Bigger Thomas. . . ." . . .

Which brings me to the most distressing aspect of Howe's thinking: his Northern white liberal version of the white Southern myth of absolute separation of the races. He implies that Negroes can only aspire to contest other Negroes (this at a time when Baldwin has been taking on just about everyone, including Hemingway, Faulkner and the United States Attorney General!), and must wait for the appearance of a Black Hope before they have the courage to move. Howe is so committed to a sociological vision of society that he apparently cannot see (perhaps because he is dealing with Negroes—although not because he would suppress us socially or politically for in fact he is anxious to end such suppression) that whatever the efficiency of segregation as a socio-political arrangement, it has been far from absolute

on the level of *culture*. Southern whites cannot walk, talk, sing, conceive of laws or justice, think of sex, love, the family or freedom without responding to the presence of Negroes.

Similarly, no matter how strictly Negroes are segregated socially and politically, on the level of the imagination their ability to achieve freedom is limited only by their individual aspiration, insight, energy and will. Wright was able to free himself in Mississippi because he had the imagination and the will to do so. He was as much a product of his reading as of his painful experiences, and he made himself a writer by subjecting himself to the writer's discipline—as he understood it. The same is true of James Baldwin, who is not the product of Negro storefront church but of the library, and the same is true of me.

Ellison's point is lucid and elementary. He is saying: I am a man, and my color is basically irrelevant because, whatever my color, you people have not been able to suppress my humanity, and this is what proves you *wrong*; and I don't want any help from those who claim that my sufferings are unique, sort of superhuman-inhuman, and that they give me special privileges; being human is really *enough*.

As he says in another place:

I use folklore in my work not because I am Negro, but because writers like Eliot and Joyce made me conscious of the literary value of my folk inheritance. My cultural background, like that of most Americans, is dual (my middle name, sadly enough, is Waldo).

Again—

Some twelve years ago, a friend argued with me for hours that I could not possibly write a novel because my experience as a Negro had been too excruciating to allow me to achieve that psychological and emotional distance necessary to artistic creation. Since he "knew" Negro experience better than I, I could not convince him that he might be wrong. Evidently Howe feels that unrelieved suffering is the only "real" Negro experience, and that the true Negro writer must be ferocious.

But there is also an American Negro tradition which teaches one to deflect racial provocation and to master and contain pain. It is a tradition which abhors as obscene any trading on one's own anguish for gain or sympathy; which springs not from a desire to deny the harshness of existence but from a will to

deal with it as men at their best have always done. It takes fortitude to be a man and no less to be an artist. Perhaps it takes even more if the black man would be an artist. If so, there are no exemptions. It would seem to me, therefore, that the question of how the "sociology of his existence" presses upon a Negro writer's work depends upon how much of his life the individual writer is able to transform into art. What moves a writer to eloquence is less meaningful than what he makes of it. How much, by the way, do we know of Sophocles' wounds?

No one has said it any better; not even Epictetus.

Well, in order to press an argument, we have distorted our review of Ralph Ellison's book. Yet the diverse material in it—including a valuable essay on Stephen Crane—must be experienced for itself: a "review" cannot run this gamut. But what we ought to say in conclusion is that Mr. Ellison is by no means unaware of the "sociological" dimension of Negro history. In a discussion appreciative of Richard Wright he shows how the ruthless suppression and confinement of Negro life in the South tended to give Negro self-awareness a strongly "group" quality—since all black men were continually being identified by what was done *to* them. Ellison quotes the Negro critic, Edward Bland, on the fact that white treatment of Negroes has seldom been a relationship with individuals. Rather, the Negro "is singled out not as a person but as a specimen of an ostracized group." This individual knows from experience "that he never exists in his own right but only to the extent that others hope to make the race suffer vicariously through him." Ellison writes brilliantly on the special difficulties of achieving individuality under such circumstances, and he sees in Wright's work "a groping for *individual* values, in a black community whose values were . . . 'pre-individual'."

In the light of the various perspectives of this book, including such insights as the foregoing, one is able to see how, in issues of political justice, the idea of "black power," as considered in the SNCC position paper, has a great deal of meaning and application, while in relation to the free life of the artist and works of the imagination, it makes no sense at all.

## *COMMENTARY*

### A LIFE WORTH LIVING

THIS week's MANAS seems to be largely a study of the problems of identification. In *Frontiers*, Virginia Naeve illustrates the awareness required for identification with people suffering unrelieved poverty. She shows that temporary privation, endured as a calculated risk, is almost a "lark" in comparison to the grinding subjections experienced by people with little hope of bettering themselves.

Then, in the interviews conducted by Mario Rossi, one begins to sense the despair of Vietnamese who find little reason to expect that they will some day be understood by the people of the United States. What is really the trouble, here?

Broadly speaking, there are two levels of identification. First, there is the level of immediate identification—man to man, adult to child, parent to parent, workman to workman. In this identification, you feel in the other person the same human struggle, the same daily longings, strivings and disappointments as your own. This kind of identification is the ground of trust among human beings, the basis of practical brotherhood. You begin to recognize others as a part of yourself, knowing that their pain is inseparable from your own life. Then come acts of unexpecting generosity, and a flooding tide of sympathy and understanding.

This immediate identification, however, is difficult without close human contact. So, instead, the *theories* of identification elaborated in ideologized ethics replace immediate identification. A kind of systems analysis classifies other people according to ideological standards and distinguishes between those with whom we can identify (not directly, of course, but through certain institutional means provided by authority and controlled by political power), and those whom we must shun as alien and dangerous to our welfare.

This conflict between spontaneous identification and officially directed identification is a basic psychological problem in our time. And since identification is at the root of all ethical meaning and value, our once settled ideas about good and evil are subject to painful questioning. All the systematic methods of resolving moral questions begin to be doubted.

In consequence, a feeling of terrible *risk* is in the air. The first step toward solution is probably finding the courage to admit that the problem is of this description. At issue is the willingness to live what Socrates called an examined life.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

### BEYOND FINITE SIGNIFICANCE

NOT everybody can have a place in the country for bringing up his children, and not everybody, it must be admitted, wants one. It comes down to this: there are certain values—incommensurable at their core—which living in the country may make it easier to get at, and a child who grows up in the city, or in the slightly attenuated city atmosphere of suburban life—may never become aware of the rhythms and wonders of the natural world unless some definite effort is made by his elders to open up these experiences for him.

More than simple "exposure" is involved. More than "Nature" moralizing is needed. Too often the content of the word Nature is left as a fuzzy, inchoate mass of sentimental longings, as lacking in specific meaning as the word "love," and used as mechanistically as the word "culture." These are defects and pretenses of our times, against which we all have to contend. While some people are able to get by these barriers with surprising ease, others find it necessary to make a deliberate effort. And if parents are to help their children in such undertakings, the effort must usually begin with the parents themselves.

Reading often makes a start. For those who wonder what to do first, Ross Parmenter's *The Plant in My Window* (Crowell, 1949) would be an ideal primer. Mr. Parmenter, a music critic on a metropolitan newspaper—and a city-dweller with no more feeling for the green things growing than a poet has for the printed computer circuits—found himself the inheritor of a sickly philodendron wilting fast in its window box in a New York flat. Experiencing "Nature," even from so small a sample, Mr. Parmenter makes plain, is filled with avenues reaching far afield, and this can be discovered by anyone willing to exercise his imagination. For the parent who sets out to be some kind of a "teacher," this thrill of personal discovery seems indispensable.

Two other books might also serve. Henry Beston's *The Outermost House* and Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* are vestibules to many overlapping universes of meaning.

But what, really, are these somewhat pretentious abstractions ("universes of meaning") intended to suggest? Well, it might be something like what Paul Valéry wanted to suggest when he wrote about the difference between poetry and prose (*The Art of Poetry*, Bollingen, 1958). As he puts it:

Poetry is an art of language. But language is a practical creation. It may be observed that in all communication between men, certainty comes only from practical acts and from the verification which practical acts give us. *I ask you for a light, You give me a light: you have understood me.*

But in asking me for a light, you were able to speak those few unimportant words with a certain intonation, a certain tone of voice, a certain inflection, a certain languor or briskness perceptible to me. I have understood your words, since without even thinking I handed you what you asked for—a light. But the matter does not end there. The strange thing: the sound and as it were the features of your little sentence come back to me, echo within me, as though they were pleased to be there; I, too, like to hear myself repeat that little phrase, which has almost lost its meaning, which has stopped being of use, and which can yet go on living, though with quite another life. It has acquired a value, and has acquired it *at the expense of its finite significance*. It has created the need to be heard again. . . . Here we are on the threshold of the poetic state. This tiny experience will help us to the discovery of more than one truth.

So with Nature. We learn from nature in an enduring way *at the expense of its finite significance*. "Nature," as a noun filled with vaguely honorific endowments, means simply the world as an end in itself, emancipated from the status of a human utility—as lighting up itself, not giving *us a light*. Nature is doing its work, having its joy, expressing its rages and resting in its content, with a wonderful obliviousness to our small, practical intentions. It is filled with endless parallels to the *being* aspect of human life. The experience of nature tells of a secret kinship.

Nature is a secular moralist, it declares the positive pantheism of universal life. One might say that Nature is a specialist in being, save for the fact that, unlike ourselves, it seems to have no choice in the matter. It does what it does because it *is* what it does—while we, who don't really know what we are, are continually doing things which most probably we are not. Nature is thus filled with the therapy of simple being—of being its own end.

So the child, when seized by the delight of some aspect of nature, is lifted out of himself. The delight has no "explanation," needs none. There is a kind of self-forgetfulness filled to the brim with self-knowledge, whose realizations come in act, feeling, and stance, and which are only confused by words, unless they be those high and majestic abstractions which require a life lived to the utmost for understanding them.

A life pursued in the presence of Nature is life in the realm of ends. But what are "ends"? For us, and in the only suitable language, that of the mystic, they are the means of experiencing endlessness. This is a contradiction. But such contradictions are the stuff of our lives. The resolution of contradiction is the very business of our lives. We may be glad that this is so, for if it were not, then the makers of stern systems and the compilers of moral codes would be right in their claims, instead of being the fools and tyrants of history.

The resolution of contradiction seems to be a forever unfinished task, a perfection achieved only from moment to moment—this side of Nirvana—which helps to explain why the good life is always an individual achievement, a wonderful reproach to the programmers of excellence and the codifiers of sin.

Which brings us to a very simple Nature book (Ace paperback, 50 cents), the combined production of a retired school teacher and a girl of ten. The girl (who grew up and then did the writing) is Rowena Farre, who in *Seal Morning* tells the story of her life with her Aunt Miriam on

a lonely croft (a small farm) in a remote part of Scotland (the county of Sutherland).

The croft possessed no conveniences, ancient or modern. Lighting was by paraffin lamps. Water had to be carried in buckets from a stream. There was, of course, no telephone. To get medical aid entailed a journey on foot or by trap to the nearest *clachan*, or village, some twelve miles away, to put through a call to a township, for no doctor or nurse lived in the *clachan*. A path, a little better than a sheep-track, wound from our door over the moors. . . . During winter stretches of this road would be covered in deep snowdrifts making travel along it impossible for weeks at a time. In late autumn we would get in a good supply of stores to tide us over the bad patches when we were snowbound.

What is *Seal Morning* about? Well, Rowena Farre and her aunt were animal-lovers. The pitifully ordinary content of this description is sufficient reason for getting a better meaning for it from the book. The author began making her own living at seventeen, as a fruit-picker, and now, according to the blurb, she is a typist in the winter while in summer she wanders around Great Britain with tinkers and gypsies. The riches of this career are manifest in her book. It may spark the imagination of the young who are wondering what to do with their lives, and are determined not to grow up absurd. There is a great dearth of employment opportunities which allow for simple acts of being.

## *FRONTIERS*

### The Problem of Identifying

EVERY so often one hears about research being done into "social problems." If there are sufficient funds, then elaborate arrangements may be made to permit close study of local conditions. Some brave souls sometimes go so far as to visit an existing troubled area and live with the people. However, as much as they may observe, seldom are they able to identify directly with the situation and the people. Father Damien went into a socially undesirable area, lived with the people—the lepers on Molokai—the rest of his life and came to identify with them. Few of us will go that far.

This last summer our family did a little private research, not in the least planned, but which turned out to make identification with rural poor a little easier. When I say research I mean living in similar conditions to those endured by the rural poor.

We are not poor. We have been poor, but that was many years ago and not pertinent to what I have to speak about.

Toward the end of the summer our family decided that the only way to really get the new house we are building (ourselves) finished by winter would be to get out of the lodgings a friend had provided for us when we arrived in Canada almost a year ago. We thought we'd move into our barn as it was plenty big. But on close observation we found that if we ate in the same place that we slept, we would have an unsolvable fly problem. The barn door was 12' x 16', and unscreened. We decided to separate eating from sleeping. Nearby was an old grain shed so we took down some partitions and moved our cooking into that area. Again, no screens on the shed door or on the two small 12" x 12" window openings. So FLIES. One of the children suggested we get some stickum paper and see if that helped. . . . It did, but for the fastidious visitor from the city we were still too buggy for

comfort and sanitation. We didn't use a pesticide for two reasons: (1) You can hardly spray the whole out-of-doors, and (2) on general principle we are suspicious of spraying around food areas and where it might come in contact with human skin. So we had flies to swat. It was a constant job to keep crumbly particles off the tables and to wipe all the cooking areas clean to discourage the flies.

For water we had to go to the old house foundation, turn a valve and wait for the water to come via a garden hose to a place near the grain shed, then rush out with pitchers, gallon jugs and pots to fill—trying to get enough for washing and cooking so that we wouldn't have to go through the process too often.

We had one temporary outlet for electricity in the grain shed, obtained with an extension cord from the house we are building. If the hot plate was on, the refrigerator had to be off. When you weren't cooking, you'd be heating water to wash dishes, for taking a bath, or be giving the fridge a spurt of juice. After dark you had to stop work or use a candle. There was no heat for warmth. Most of the time it was mild weather and the whole arrangement was quite pleasing once you were used to it. (I'd only add screens.) But the damp, rainy days were miserable. Your hands got cold doing necessary work. Closing the door, to think you were warmer, only made the place more damp and dark. The roof had some leaks and after a couple of wet days the place gave off a dank blend of miscellaneous smells, including that of the former occupants of the grain shed (mice, sour grain, etc.). One had to play a game of shifting in rainy weather so things wouldn't be ruined from getting soaked.

Sleeping was pleasant in the barn except on the coldest nights, and only two times during our stay there did it dip down to below 32 degrees. As long as you were in bed with plenty of covers you couldn't have cared less about the weather. However, dressing in the morning presented

another situation and shock to the body . . . it was cold out there, naked.

We had a series of driving rain storms during our stay in the barn. One of them lasted a day and a night and then even the barn leaked. We had to shift to a spot where there were no puddles.

One morning we noticed the dog and the cat were very alert and looking upward. (There were about a hundred barn sparrows in the barn when we moved in—so many that we had to dodge more than the rain on occasion.) We knew it wasn't the birds they were watching, as we had gotten these all out. We had plugged the holes, put a wire mesh over the barn opening to discourage their re-entry, and vacuumed the cracks for grain and removed old nests. The whole family lay in bed trying to find out what was holding the animals' interest so keenly. Finally, on an upper level, moving like a mono-rail train, we saw a little stream-lined animal running around the whole circuit of the barn. We guessed it was a long mouse, a rat, a chipmunk, and finally settled on a weasel. The cat was frantic to reach it but both its precipice location and the agility of the animal were too much for her. The weasel glided at great speed, stopping every few minutes to look down to see if the cat was still there. It lapped the barn a number of times and then seemed to go to another level. Now it appeared to have another member of its family along. That member finally darted into a hole near the roof and then looked down from there. We settled back to relax before we got out into the cold room to dress. The kids said that weasels ate mice so we decided they served a purpose.

Now what has all this to do with poverty and identity?

On one very cold, damp day, our younger daughter said: "Those poor people in Mississippi who have to live like this all the time!"

Precisely. We have had flies for a few weeks and it was a nuisance. The family living in a windowless shack, with no screens (what landlord

would put screens in a shack whose total worth might be \$10 in scrap wood?) can't ever get rid of flies, or any other insect varmints like cockroaches, ants, spiders.

(1) They can't afford a pesticide, or screens; (2) they must sleep and eat in the same area; (3) their water supply is probably limited (some walking half a mile for water at a neighbor's), so they can't wash much or wipe off the table with water easily.

We found it cold on some mornings. But we had plenty of blankets. We also had hot tea, cocoa, or milk for breakfast. The difference was just that—blankets and a hot drink. Plenty of people in the South, in Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Tennessee, don't have sufficient blankets (some none at all), and don't have the makings of a warm breakfast. Their houses leak air and water. What clothing they have is hard to keep nice with no closets, maybe only a nail to hang it on; they have no bed clothing, so probably sleep in their clothes. No place to move around in the room if the roof leaks, so they have to sleep on wet spots and like it. Chances of animals—mice and rats—running around in the same area are pretty good. With no containers for food, no refrigeration, a lot can happen.

When it is cold and your water isn't in the house, you don't think about how clean you are. You just think about *not* wanting to take off the clothing you have on, and you don't want to expose your skin to water or cold. So you wait.

What about toilet facilities? If you have time, you build an outdoor john. We didn't have time, so an unused, stainless steel milk can served the purpose. We'd empty it every two days and wash it out. One of the kids and I would walk the milk can down to the pasture and dump it. When you have eight or nine or ten children and a broken-down outdoor john, you have a lot of problems. You have a lot of flies. You have disease. It came to my mind one day as we carried the milk can to the dump what an awful job it must have

been for the slaves who carried the pots out of the plantations. The kids and I agreed that animal manure isn't as bad as humans'. They had plenty of experience cleaning their pig pens this summer, so they ought to know.

When it comes to personal matters, almost anyone can go to a drug store and get what is needed. But what about a woman or girl in the poorest rural areas? One girl told me they used cotton left from the cotton plants in the fields.

There is no doubt that poverty, for every reason, smells.

However, I find now, on going to a big city, it stinks. Garbage is dropped outside the waste containers. People let their dogs mess all over. The public transit systems overwhelm you with halitosis, hair sprays, perfume, deodorants and smelly feet. Certainly the majority of these people couldn't be termed poverty-stricken. So we might add, people in general *smell*.

What we realized from our research and reality is that we are living like this now, but not for long, and not because we are forced to, economically. It is our choice (to put up with it) until we can finish our house. The difference is we don't *have* to, while the poor everywhere are trapped in situations they can't get out of. And until others can see or hear about their needs, they will stay there. So far, we aren't really able to identify with them in the least.

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