

## THE EVERYDAY THINGS

THERE seems something a little indecent in the way eager reformers eye the members of the coming generation, even at the infant or kindergarten stage, as prospective recruits for some righteous cause. Since basic character formation is now regarded by many psychologists as taking place during the first five years of life, one enthusiast of biological verities believes that giving the young the right ideas about human relationships with nature must begin very early. For this purpose, he suggests revising nursery rhymes, offering the following example:

See-saw, Margery Daw,  
Jenny's employed as a blaster  
She's destroyed a park and a bay  
And a mountain of pure alabaster.

One thinks also of four-year-olds seen in demonstrations, carrying signs lettered by their parents, and of ideological slogans echoed by pre-adolescents.

These oddities all grow out of good intentions, of course. Nor is this comment intended to dispute the righteousness of the causes involved. But in later years a generation with psyches so ardently shaped to righteousness, while able to repeat many "correct opinions" concerning the uses (more likely, the misuses) of power, may know little or nothing about the most important ingredients of normal, everyday, community life. While one could say that such a life has already been denied them by a degraded institutional environment, this is never entirely the case.

Not only the young are subjected to this barrage of righteous opinion. Adults, especially those who make some effort to live socially responsible lives, receive endless appeals and calls, some of which certainly merit active response. But here, too, there is the tendency to regard all these movements, measures, and activities as somehow representing the sum total of

constructive action. Yet they cannot be this, unless we are prepared to admit that the good things of life the healthful modes of existence, the happy, spontaneous, and uplifting forms of human expression—are indeed directly connected with the goals of protest movements and the demands of pressure groups which seek by arousing public opinion to change the evil habits of power. It is true, of course, that abuses of power stand in the way of many aspects of the good life. This is far more true, today, than it was years ago, when most of the people were farmers and the cities were comparatively small places. But the abuses of power, excessive as they are, have not altered the fact that, in the long run, the everyday lives of the people afford the means of gaining immunity to power's irrationality, since only in those everyday lives can there be accumulated both the strength and the understanding necessary to become independent of the rule of power.

Why do reformers seek power? Or if they do not seek power, but only to limit it or change its direction, why must power be dealt with at all? It hardly needs pointing out that power grows most readily in order to fill vacuums left by irresponsibility and neglect. Mailing campaigns and public meetings are arranged to overcome public apathy, to create a specific sense of responsibility for the correction of some obvious abuse. The reformer believes that he must compensate for the inactivity and indifference of a great many people who have lost sight of their obligations. And the impatient reformer is always tempted to become a manipulator, in order to hasten the reform. When this happens the achievement of the concrete objective rather than the re-education of the people becomes the meaning of the reform. The people, of course, will still have to be told what to do next, since manipulation is anti-educational.

This line of reasoning could turn into a familiar critique of the pitfalls of righteous political action—which is something of a dead end—so let us return to the essential needs of constructive change. Getting a better life is not accomplished by drives in behalf of the *symbols* of a good life, but only by living it. A healthful natural environment, to take an example, is undoubtedly one of the conditions of a good life. The conservation organizations use dramatic symbols of the tasks of environmental preservation; they *must* do this, to win support; and in return for this support they often accomplish good things in behalf of the general public. Mighty campaigns by the Sierra Club and other groups have saved large areas of the Grand Canyon from desecration by dams, and now, as the result of cumulative efforts of this sort, the Red River Gorge in Kentucky will be spared by the Army Corps of Engineers. But as one of the supporters of the conservation organizations' efforts, especially in Kentucky, Wendell Berry has nonetheless pointed out that the labors of such groups, both as lobbyists and in the forums of public opinion, must be supplemented by another kind of effort on the part of the people themselves—"an effort to rebuild the life of our society in terms of a decent spiritual and economic connection to the land." This, he says, is not the work of organizations, but of individuals, families, and small groups. People need to go and *live* on the land, bind up its wounds, restore its lost fertility, and devise a way of life that is not parasitic and destructive. The conservation organizations, as Mr. Berry says, cannot do this. They do not know how, although individual members may, and may be trying to do it. These organizations educate by the use of symbols, declare principles which the symbols illustrate, and gain help from thoughtful persons who agree with the principles. A great many who gave their help to save the Grand Canyon did not personally "know" the Canyon. They were glad to protect it on principle. Their response is necessary and fine, but true reconstruction will come from people

who know the land, through intimate connection with some particular part of it, and who feel a kind of reverence for it. This is the point of Aldo Leopold's chapter, "The Land Ethic," in *A Sand County Almanac*. As he wrote:

It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value. By value, I of course mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense. . . . The "key-log" which must be removed to release the evolutionary process for an ethic is simply this: quit thinking about decent land-use as solely an economic problem. Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise. It of course goes without saying that economic feasibility limits the tether of what can or cannot be done for land. It always has and it always will. The fallacy the economic determinists have tied around our collective neck, and which we now need to cast off, is the belief that economics determines *all* land use. This is simply not true. An innumerable host of actions and attitudes, comprising perhaps the bulk of all land relations, is determined by the land-users' tastes and predilections, rather than by his purse. The bulk of all land relations hinges on investments of time, forethought, skill and faith rather than investments of cash. As a land-user thinketh, so is he.

Mr. Berry was talking about the everyday lives of people living on the land, restoring themselves by restoring the natural world around them, learning how to be a friend and collaborator with nature. Not everyone is able to do this, but some can and some are. More could. It is crucial to recognize the importance of what such people are doing and to give them encouragement. The feeling for the meaning of a natural life is surely developed in this way, and feeling of this sort becomes the foundation for a whole range of intelligent judgments which affect everything that people do. Involved is the restoration of community.

Another approach to this general question, although at another level, is offered by Gordon

Harrison in his new book, *Earthkeeping* (Houghton Mifflin). We quote from the extract which appeared in the *Saturday Review* for Nov. 6:

If the ecological revolt exhausts itself in a giant pick-up/ clean-up, if indeed the new awakening to man's dependence on his environment is diverted into a passion for cleanliness, and we pursue that *Doppelgänger* without precisely counting the costs, we will have failed the challenge, and may end up with a cleaner but otherwise worse world. If, for instance, the charge for cleanliness is added to everybody's cost of living, the poor will pay disproportionately. . . . Finally, if the economy purges itself of the burden of pollution only in order to be free to run even faster after endlessly elaborated consumer goods, then we will have profited no more from our sober interlude than the junkie who kicks the habit in order to go on to cheaper highs.

In a world where everything is connected, tinkering with one problem at a time is a sure way of multiplying problems. That lesson sounds as clear a warning to the anti-pollution enthusiasts as to the dam builder. So you would have the rivers clean because that is the "right" thing to do. But at what sacrifice? Who will make it? If the rivers are not merely to be made clean now but kept clean, the way we use them will have to be radically changed. . . .

Cleaning up is indeed a simple job. What is hard is to ravel out the implications and go about the job in such a way as to make the world not just cleaner, but better overall. Above all, that means concern for the social costs and very difficult decisions to apportion the costs fairly. We need therefore to be clear about what the task is: *The task is not to get rid of pollution but to manage producing systems of all kinds so that they do not pollute.*

Here is a project that could engage many sorts of talents and ingenuity. It is obviously connected with economic theory and the whole conception of the role of material things in human life. As we know, the dynamic of the growth-theory of economics that has dominated modern thinking for several generations is that there must be an ever-increasing flow of goods and services. This theory must be replaced with a conception of self-limitation and the reduction of wants. The idea of obsolescence will have to go. Everything made should be made to last a long, long time. As

a result, everything would then be better made and would be better designed. There would be a vast elimination of waste and rubbish. People would become healthier because, being affected by the new outlook, they would probably stop overeating and other indulgences.

These are changes in the everyday ways of ordinary people, and the reforms Mr. Harrison points to as absolutely necessary cannot take place without them.

The economic solutions are really the least of our problems, or would be, if enough people interested themselves in working them out. Americans are peculiarly fitted for solving such problems, and already a number of people are working on them in various ways. Diversity of solution will be a key, since decentralization and getting rid of the stultifications of uniformity will be a natural part of the reversal of processes encouraged by growth-theory economics.

The arts and literature can be left to themselves, since there will be a spontaneous tendency for the arts to turn back into crafts, for renewal and health, and literature may hope to gain a new inspiration during a period of the exhaustion of old forms. Journalism ought to change radically, learning to do without advertising. This would solve the problem of excessive publishing, reduce paper use, and vastly improve writing and reporting. There would be no more journalistic empires and we might get some independent editors who would write editorials worth reading.

All these are everyday things that will have to happen before there can be a significant change at the level of "power," which can only come as a result of a new temper in the lives of the people. And as Theodore Roszak has said: "Political institutions will be among the *last* things to feel counter-cultural change." Roszak added, speaking of the youth movement:

We need a return to the cultural values that existed long before society became sick. This is what the youth movement is saying when it chooses the

American Indian as its cultural hero, because the Indian lived in harmony with nature instead of trying to conquer it. When people return to that healthy form of consciousness, then the counter culture will replace the existing culture.

The ideas of the American Indians are not our only resource. They were the choice of the break-away generation, of the young who simply could not stomach what they were expected to believe about themselves, their obligations, and their role, and who picked the Indians as their ideal for the reason Roszak gives. The Indians, moreover, were the first Americans. Yet world literature on community provides a rich variety of alternative conceptions. In a book devoted to the community life of the Burmese people during the closing years of the nineteenth century, Fielding Hall, a British magistrate, describes the extraordinary resourcefulness and orderliness of a simple people when they were left to live their lives in villages, more or less without interference. We quote Hall for his interesting point of view on the question of "power":

It is a Burmese proverb that officials are one of the five great enemies of mankind, and there was, I think (at all events in the latter days of the kingdom), good reason to remember it. And yet these officials were not bad men in themselves; on the contrary, many of them were men of good purpose, of natural honesty, of right principles. In a well-organized system they would have done well, but the system was rotten to the core.

It may be asked why the Burmese people remained quiet under such a rule as this; why they did not rise and destroy it, raising a new one in its place; how it was that such a state of corruption lasted for a year, let alone for many years.

And the answer is this: However bad the government may have been, it had the qualities of its defects. If it did not do much to help the people, it did little to hinder them. To a great extent it left them to manage their own affairs in their own way. Burma in those days was like a great untended garden, full of weeds, full of flowers too, each plant striving after its own way, gradually evolving into higher forms. Now (under the domination of a strong British government) sometimes it seems to me to be like an old Dutch garden, with the paths very straight,

very clean swept, with the trees clipped into curious shapes of bird and beast, tortured out of all knowledge, and many of the flowers mown down. The Burmese government left its people alone; that was one great virtue. And, again, any government, however good, however bad, is but a small factor in the life of a people; it comes far below many other factors in importance. A short rainfall for a year is more disastrous than a mad king; a plague is worse than fifty grasping governors; social rottenness is incomparably more dangerous than the rottenest government.

And in Burma it was only the supreme government, the high officials, that were very bad. It was only the management of state affairs that was feeble and corrupt; all the rest was very good. The land laws, the self-government, the social condition of the people, were admirable. . . .

The central government of a country is, as I have said, not a matter of much importance. It has very little influence in the evolution of the soul of a people. It is always a great deal worse than the people themselves—a hundred years behind them in civilization, a thousand years behind them in morality. Men will do in the name of government acts which, if performed in a private capacity, would cover them with shame before men, and would land them in gaol or worse. The name of government is a cloak for the worst passions of manhood. It is not an interesting study, the government of mankind.

One can fight with these statements all one wants, speak of how times have changed, of how the isolation of communities from central government is no longer possible—one can say all these things, but there will *still* be the substance of truth in what Hall says. His book is a fascinating account of how the Burmese villagers lived and conducted their affairs, and of the effect of their religion—Buddhism—on their daily lives. The point, here, is the desirability of regaining for ourselves something like the autonomy that these Burmese villagers enjoyed.

Perhaps it should be observed that these people had earned their freedom from officialdom, at least for a time. At any rate, a sense of fitness pervaded the practical decisions of their lives. One story Hall tells will illustrate. The British had military posts throughout the country, and since

there were often orders to be transmitted quickly, they established a kind of "pony express" to carry the official mail. An Indian was brought in to drive the coach, since no Burman would take the contract. The driver was given a subsidy and expected to supplement his income by carrying passengers. At the end of the first term, he said he would have to have a much larger subsidy. When asked why he was losing money, in view of the opportunity for passenger traffic, he said the Burmese did not ride in his coach. They either hired a bullock cart or walked. He did not know why they would not ride with him. An inquiry was made, and it was found that, no, the fares were not too high; no, it was not uncomfortable but the driver mistreated his ponies:

No Burman would care to ride behind ponies who were treated as these ponies were—half fed, over driven, whipped. It was a misery to see them; it was twice a misery to drive behind them. "Poor beasts," they said; "you can see their ribs, and when they come to the end of a stage they are fit to fall down and die. They should be turned out to graze."

The opinion was universal. . . . Many and many times have I seen the roadside rest-houses full of travellers halting for a few minutes' rest. They walked while the coach came by empty; and nearly all of them could have afforded the fare. It was a very striking instance of what pure kind-heartedness will do, for there would have been no religious command broken by going in the coach. It was the pure influence of compassion towards the beasts and refusal to be a party to such hard-heartedness. And yet, as I have said, I do not think the law could have interfered with success.

This was an everyday thing, learned by human beings from one another and from their own humanity. The villagers' feeling of regard for the beasts of the field, so spontaneous, so universal among the people, is a striking illustration of what the people of today need to learn, together, in respect to the earth, its creatures, and their fellow men. Perhaps centuries were occupied by the Burmese in learning things of this sort. How long, one wonders, will it take us?

## *REVIEW*

### THE MYSTERIES OF FORM

THE study of the nature and development of *form* is gradually becoming the central interest of scientists who are as much concerned with the meaning of scientific inquiry itself as with some particular branch of research. This interest is therefore a philosophic interest, aimed, one might say, at restoring to scientists the role of natural philosophers. For a long time the major emphasis in scientific inquiry has been on providing causal accounts of natural phenomena in terms of the primary units of matter. Atomism, in other words, has been the prevailing scientific philosophy, while the explanation of complex activities, including those of living things, by the laws governing the primary units, has been the method.

Today, however, a definite change in mood among some of the most accomplished scientists is plainly apparent. While it is true enough that the world is filled with "building blocks"—the atoms and the void of Lucretius—it is equally true that the world is filled with forms and structures and functions, and it is these to which human beings attach meaning. To reduce all these forms and structures to "atoms," or some later version of ultimate particles, in the name of scientific knowledge, begins to mean, as one critic remarked recently, that science as it progresses departs more and more from the essential concerns of human beings. There is good reason, therefore, to say that it is the *forms* of matter and life that need to be understood, even more than the building blocks, especially since atoms seem to have dissolved into nothing more tangible than constellations and congeries of energy. To ask what "matter" is, in itself, has proved a dead end. What then is form?

The word includes so much that we hardly know where to begin. The biologists were among the first to declare the need for the study of form. R. E. Coker observed in the *Scientific Monthly* for February, 1939: "My vision of the future

encompasses no conceivable state of biological and chemical science when all or any biological phenomenon will be reduced to chemical and physical terms." Ross G. Harrison said in *Science*, April 16, 1937: "Living protoplasm is a complex mixture of substances, deriving its properties not merely from their chemical nature, but also from their arrangement in space." And Edmund W. Sinnott, a pioneer in the study of morphology, summed up in *Science* for Jan. 15, 1937:

. . . within the last few decades, and recently in increasing numbers, many biologists, as well as thinkers who have approached biological problems through the physical sciences and through philosophy, are agreed in emphasizing one particular problem, one general phenomenon of life, as of primary and dominant significance. This may be stated in a word as the problem of *organization*. Living things are well termed *organisms*. The activities of their manifold structures are so integrated and coordinated that a successfully functioning whole individual develops. As to how this is accomplished very little is known.

Because of the preoccupation of science with physical and chemical laws, attention to form had come mainly from artists, writers, and, we could add, all those concerned with "practical" problems, so that when scientific interest at last turned to wondering what would be a disciplined approach to the question of form, there was little or no "overall" thinking on the subject, save for a few philosophers. The subject, in short, has little order except for its all-inclusive title. While the ancient Greeks, as Werner Jaeger has shown in *Paideia*, pursued the study of form in terms of geometrical figures, making the resulting harmonies the basis of education and even the foundation of ethics, these uses of mathematics did not continue in modern times. Geometry and algebra, for us, are rather tools for making things. They are handy instrumental devices, not sources of meaning.

It follows that when a contemporary writer comes to the question of form, he can hardly start with general principles, save at the most abstract level, but finds it necessary to branch out almost

immediately into widely diverse illustrations of the problems of form. A problem-setting beginning, however, was made twenty years ago with publication of *Aspects of Form* by Lancelot Law Whyte. Now available in a 1968 paperback with a new preface by the editor, this book contains contributions by a physicist, an astronomer, several biologists, a psychologist and an art historian. It has a good bibliography and a chronological survey listing major events in thinking about the question of form.

In his 1968 preface, Mr. Whyte reports on recent developments in the sciences, noting the discoveries of the molecular biologists and speaking, also, of the increasing interest in *hierarchy* as a principle of organization now suspected to pervade all nature. One passage in this preface is of a very general character and deserves attention:

Since around 1870 the branch of physics concerned with natural tendencies—i.e. processes going one way towards some characteristic terminus—has been somewhat unbalanced in its emphasis. Much attention has been paid to the tendency toward dynamical disorder (heat processes, entropy), and much less to the extensive and important class of contrary processes leading towards spatial order. Curiously enough this class has not yet a clear scientific name of its own, though it must be responsible for the existence of organisms and of organisms with minds. In my view Schrödinger insulted this preeminent class of processes by giving them a negative and, in certain technical respects, misleading name: negative *entropy* (now structural neg-entropy).

To do something to correct this unbalance, to emphasize the positive aspect of these formative processes, and to make clear how extensive and rich with consequences they are, I have given them a scientific name: *morphic*. This is defined to mean "displaying a movement toward greater three-dimensional spatial order, symmetry, or form."

After a brief outline of the great divisions of morphological processes in nature, one ranging from atoms to galaxies, another going from the smallest organic units to complete organisms; and, finally, those involved in the elaboration of so

complex an organ as the human brain, Mr. Whyte says:

All these morphic processes generate new ordered units, i.e. arrange parts to form new wholes. Thus morphic processes build up the hierarchies of structure, while entropy processes tend to disperse ordered units and to break down hierarchies. This is an intriguing vista of two great tendencies in the universe and their contrary effects on the hierarchies of structure. Exact science has only recently begun to study this in a systematic manner.

To take note of the essays of the various contributors would require a specialist with background in each of the fields covered. The problem of the reader of this book, as of its reviewer, is much as Mr. Whyte says in his introduction:

Every reader will discover for himself the ideas which strike him as most significant, but here is what impresses me about the volume as a whole: contemporary science appears to have recovered the ancient and medieval sense of the importance of form, and yet it is almost completely ignorant of the basic laws of form. Every contributor recognises the challenge and yet none (with the partial exception of the physicist in relation to some simple systems) can cite a single *fundamental* principle concerning the development of the forms in his branch of science. Following the Pythagoreans, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, and Francis Bacon, exact science recognises that the form of a thing is its very essence, giving to this old idea a new, more precise, and comprehensive meaning. But it cannot yet give this ancient intuition reliable scientific expression in laws governing form and transformation. It is clear that there is a tendency towards form, not only in "external nature," as Aristotle knew, but also in the human organ of perception and thought. But science cannot yet formulate what eye and brain are doing all the time. It is as though the formative processes were too pervasive to be seen clearly.

There seems a sense in which the modern need *to experience* whatever we say that we "know" is at once the genius of the age and its downfall. The coming apart of things, the running down of nature, the death of organisms, so far as the causes of these events are concerned, are more "objective" than the creative and synthesizing processes which preceded them. What makes a

living form wear out and disappear? We know the answer: it gradually loses its energy and its capacity to hold together until finally, as we say, it "dies." We know how this happens and we can assign causes. Birth is more obscure, and original beginnings are still more obscure. Yet where did all the world come from if everywhere there is only death? Everywhere there must also be birth, but we do not know how, to say nothing of why.

The ancient intuition of form traced it to *idea*, and idea requires mind, but the principle of objectivity stands in the way of this theory, so far as our science is concerned. "Mind" in or of nature is indeed a dangerous idea, for who will control the speculators, the dogmatists, the theologians, once the door is opened to such conceptions? How could demonstrations of such propositions become possible?

Yet quite conceivably, we shall not have a really supportable account of the nature or origin of form until we dare to consider such possibilities. It is after all completely reasonable to say that in our experience ideation precedes formal elaboration. Everything that men make, at any rate, comes about in this way. If men are natural beings, an expression of the powers of nature, then what is so unacceptable about the proposition that men manifest a sequential process which nature accomplishes on a much larger scale?

How? That is another question. As Ortega says, philosophy cannot presume to issue decrees; it only offers suggestions. But it was another ancient intuition that man is the microcosm of the macrocosm, so that, as a suggestion, this idea has the weight of many centuries of human thought behind it. What could scientists do with such a suggestion? Nothing much, perhaps, except use it to keep their minds open to wider possibilities as they go about their investigatory tasks. The verification of intuitions is surely a natural part of scientific inquiry.



## *COMMENTARY* GANDHIAN PRIMER

GANDHI'S book, *Hind Swaraj* (see Frontiers), is available in a low-cost edition from the Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 14, India, and in the United States from Greenleaf Books, South Acworth, New Hampshire, at 60 cents. In 1921, in *Young India*, Gandhi said that of the program outlined in *Hind Swaraj*, only non-violence was being carried out in some measure. The other objectives, he said, would require "a higher simplicity and renunciation than the people are prepared for." Yet he also declared his conviction that India would only gain by discarding "modern civilization."

The book has the form of a dialogue between a reader and the editor. A passage on the meaning of Swaraj illustrates the temper of Gandhi's thinking. The reader asks for Gandhi's views, and the editor begins his reply with some questions:

EDITOR: Why do you want to drive away the English?

READER: Because India has become impoverished by their Government. They take away our money from year to year. The most important posts are reserved for themselves. We are kept in a state of slavery. They behave insolently towards us and disregard our feelings.

EDITOR: If they do not take our money away, become gentle, and give us responsible posts, would you still consider their presence to be harmful?

READER: That question is useless. It is similar to the question whether there is any harm in associating with a tiger if he changes his nature. Such a question is a sheer waste of time. When a tiger changes his nature, Englishmen will change theirs. This is not possible, and to believe it to be possible is contrary to human experience.

EDITOR: Suppose we get Self-Government similar to what Canadians and South Africans have, will it be good enough?

READER: That question is also useless. We may get it when we have the same powers; we shall then hoist our own flag. As is Japan, so must India be. We must own our navy, our army, and we must have our

own splendour, and then will India's voice ring through the world.

EDITOR: You have drawn the picture well. In effect it means thus: that we want English rule without Englishmen. You want the tiger's nature, but not the tiger; that is to say, you would make India English. And when it becomes English, it will be called not Hindustan but *Englistan*. This is not the Swaraj that I want.

Gandhi meant that his questioner had adopted the European idea of civilization, and this, he maintained, was the real "conquest" of India, from which he sought emancipation.

# CHILDREN

## . . . and Ourselves

### KEYS TO TOMORROW'S COMMUNITIES

VERY nearly everyone is becoming concerned with utopian objectives—trying to imagine a society or conditions of life quite different from the ones which now exist. Some people, usually older people, compose essays on the subject, while a great many young ones are either dreaming of ideal communities or trying to make one work, as a commune or a plan of cooperative living. The available histories of experimental societies of the past are not especially encouraging, so far as permanence is concerned. Few of them survived, and the ones that did are not of a sort likely to attract modern devotees of community. The Shaker communities, for example, had a longer life than any of the others begun in the United States, obtaining their cohesive power, it seems, from rigorous sectarian belief. How, Arthur Morgan once asked, can the strength so often associated with narrow and even bigoted religious convictions be retained by people who grow open-minded and free in spirit? As a lifelong student of community, this seemed to him a central question. So far, no acceptable or workable answer seems to have been found.

Perhaps most communities attempt to accomplish too much with too little understanding of the requirements of a model society that would, at a single stroke, eliminate many or most of the undesirable features of the larger civilization. And Tolstoy, it is said, would never join a Tolstoyan community, giving as his reason that he did not want to isolate himself from the current of the common life. Yet one could say that there are all degrees of community, and the transition to other foundations for existence may be more successful for some people if it is gradually accomplished.

A reader who has been thinking about these questions speaks of both Athens and Florence as cities in which extraordinary heights of human achievement were reached. In one place he remarks:

One significant characteristic of both classical and Renaissance times was the small size of their

communities. Of Florence it has been said that it could be walked across in twenty minutes, and around in a couple of hours. One can see that in Florence everyone could know everybody else, with frequent contact and communication; it would be a matter of course to be aware of one another's wants, needs, and successes, and to share one's own. Such mutual personal contacts both liberated and stimulated the potential creativity of each.

During the Renaissance, as this reader says, not only superb masterpieces of painting, sculpture, and literature were produced by distinguished artists, but high standards of craftsmanship were developed among the artisans who included the goldsmith and jeweler, the woodcarver, and the potter. The apprentice system was universal and these skills could spread among all who were capable of learning them. Each village had smiths, weavers, woodworkers and leather-workers, and appreciation of beautifully made things grew naturally among the people.

By contrast, in Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd*, there is this passage in the chapter on "Jobs":

It's hard to grow up when there isn't enough man's work. There is "nearly full employment" (with highly significant exceptions), but there get to be fewer jobs that are necessary or unquestionably useful; that require energy and draw on some of one's best capacities; and that can be done keeping one's honor and dignity. In explaining the widespread troubles of adolescents and young men, this simple objective factor is not much mentioned.

By man's work Goodman means providing food and shelter. But farming, today, is an industrial occupation. The farm population is now less than 15 per cent of the total population; farm labor is the poorest paid in the country and the family farm is an obsolete economic unit. Goodman has an interesting comment on "shelter":

Building, on the contrary, is immensely needed. New York City needs 65,000 new units a year, and is getting, net, 16,000. One would think that ambitious boys would flock to this work. But here we find that building, too, is discouraged. In a great city, for the last twenty years hundreds of thousands have been ill housed, yet we do not see science, industry, and labor enthusiastically enlisted in finding the quick solution

to a definite problem. The promoters are interested in long-term investments, the real estate men in speculation, the city planners in votes and graft. The building craftsmen cannily see to it that their own numbers remain few, their methods antiquated, and their rewards high. None of these people is much interested in providing shelter, and nobody at all is interested in providing new manly jobs.

It might be added that because of the high cost of labor, construction relies more and more on prefabricating techniques which will eliminate on-the-job craftsmen. As industry adapts itself to such methods, a deadly uniformity results in architectural design, which makes for monotony as the price of building anything at all within a reasonable cost. There is less and less demand for cabinet makers and finish carpenters. While it is true that there has been something of a revival of the handcrafts, including woodworking and leather-working, these activities require a market among affluent people and do not represent those fundamental functions of which Goodman speaks. More encouraging, perhaps, is the rapidly growing demand for organically grown foods, which represents a field young people are entering. In fact, gardening is a popular transition activity for many.

Goodman looks at the rest of industrial enterprise:

Once we turn away from the absolutely necessary subsistence jobs, however, we find that an enormous proportion of our production is not even unquestionably useful. Everybody knows and also feels this, and there has recently been a flood of books about our surfeit of honey, our insolent chariots, the follies of exurban ranch houses, our hucksters and our synthetic demand. Many acute things are said about this useless production and advertising, but not much about the workmen producing it and their frame of mind; and nothing at all, so far as I have noticed, about the plight of the young fellow looking for a manly occupation. The eloquent critics of the American way of life have themselves been so seduced by it that they think only in terms of selling commodities and point out that the goods are valueless; but they fail to see that people are being wasted and their skills insulted. . . .

What is so strange about it? American society has tried so hard and so ably to defend the practice and theory of production for profit and not primarily

for use that now it has succeeded in making its jobs and products profitable and useless.

This is an "old" book by Paul Goodman—it first appeared in 1956—but its argument needs periodic revival, since these are the elements in existing society which have helped to produce the urgent longing for change. They are factors of instruction in the meaninglessness of life which is now so widely felt. Goodman describes many more of these factors:

People use machines that they do not understand and cannot repair. For instance, the electric motors: one cannot imagine anything more beautiful and educative than such motors, yet there may be three or four in a house, cased and out of sight; and when they blow they are taken away to be repaired. Their influence is then retarding, for what the child sees is that competence does not exist in ordinary people but in the system of interlocking specialties. This is unavailable to the child, it is too abstract.

And so on.

Another "old" book, first published in 1959, Edgar Z. Friedenberg's *The Vanishing Adolescent*, deserves similar revival. In his last chapter Friedenberg speaks of the loss of the sense of competence in the generality of youth, and urges that the schools must do what they can to restore it. But this is too much for the schools. It will take authentic community-makers to bring back a sense of competence. People interested in establishing communities might give some thought to the essential ingredients of community life as the vehicle of education in competence, in self-respect and integrity.

The man who is able to think of a better way to supply shelter and can find a place or region where he can make that method work surely makes a fundamental contribution to community. The moral qualities that we identify with the idea of community are indeed the most important, yet to be real they need the supporting matrix of practical activities that can be respected for the needs they fulfill in the common life. The development of new forms of these activities which can be used by individuals and small groups is surely a key to the future of the community movement.

## *FRONTIERS* "Quintessence" of Gandhi

IN an article on "Gandhi and Secularism" in the July *Gandhi Marg*, T. K. Mahadevan quickly shows that Gandhi did not believe in a state religion under any circumstances, holding that all such devices for the propagation of an organized or particular faith become barriers to the awakening of a true religious spirit. As he puts it: "A society or a group which depends partly or wholly on state aid for the existence of its religion does not deserve—better still, does not have—any religion worthy of the name." The writer then turns to what he regards as a more fundamental approach to Gandhi's thinking—the study of *Hind Swaraj*, or Indian Self-Rule, which Gandhi wrote in 1908. Mr. Mahadevan believes that this was the first fully comprehensive statement of Gandhi's outlook and philosophy. As he says in this article:

It was at forty that Gandhi wrote his celebrated (or notorious?) manifesto, *Hind Swaraj*. And I am convinced that this much-maligned, much-misunderstood, much neglected tract contains within it the quintessence of his total philosophy. . . .

*Hind Swara*; runs to a mere 30,000 words. On a rough count, this represents .03 per cent of his total literary output. Written aboard a steamer on the way from England to South Africa, the book took him ten days and 271 pages of the steamer's stationery. Quite an insignificant fraction of Gandhi's life, one might say—and yet I insist that it stands as the pivot of his entire thought-structure. . . .

*Hind Swaraj* is Gandhi's only book—his *Satyagraha in South Africa* and the Autobiography (ordinarily to be judged an incomplete document) having been written as serials. It is the only work he wrote (and probably had time to write) at white heat, averaging three thousand words a day. Not an inconsiderable achievement, seeing that in the ten days of the sea voyage he also translated into Gujarati Tolstoy's "Letter to a Hindu" and much other writing besides. As he remarked in a letter to Maganlal Gandhi, "There is no end to the work I have put in on the steamer this time."

*Hind Swaraj* aroused a storm of criticism. It was Gandhi's frontal attack on the whole idea of

modern civilization. Yet the moral power of his appeal was undeniable, which only added to the alarm felt by many readers. What we now call technology was typified for Gandhi as "machinery," which he took as the concrete symbol of the humanly weakening effects of civilization, along with its exclusive devotion to material welfare, its emphasis on speed in travel and communications, its dependence on courts and lawyers for justice, and, most of all, its ruthless violence. In condemning modern civilization, Gandhi indicted not merely the practices but the underlying attitudes which, he maintained, were infecting India and therefore represented the real conquest of the Indian people. Mahadevan quotes from an expression by Gandhi in 1920:

By western civilization I mean the ideals which people in the West have embraced in modern times and the pursuits based on these ideals. The supremacy of brute force, worshipping money as God, spending most of one's time in seeking worldly happiness, breath-taking risks in pursuit of worldly enjoyments of all kinds, the expenditure of limitless mental energy to multiply the power of machinery, the expenditure of crores on the invention of means of destruction, the moral righteousness which looks down on people outside Europe—this civilization, in my view, deserves to be altogether rejected.

It is easy to see why Gandhi and Tolstoy felt that they had so much in common with one another. In 1862, Tolstoy contributed to his periodical devoted to education, *Yasnaya Polyana*, an article on "Progress and Education" in which he challenged the claim that it was the task of education to keep students abreast of "modern progress." Only one small part of society, he maintained, believes in "progress"—the professional, governing, and leisured classes which profit by it. Like Gandhi, Tolstoy saw no value in material progress for the common people. In one place he says:

"Man takes possession of the forces of Nature; thought, with the speed of thought, flies from one end of the universe to another. Time is vanquished." All that is beautiful and touching, but let us see for whom it is advantageous. We have in mind the progress of

the electric telegraphs. It is apparent that the advantage and application of the telegraph is only for the higher, so-called cultured class. The masses, nine-tenths of the people, hear only the buzzing of the wires and are importuned by severe laws not to injure the telegraphs.

Over the wires flies the thought that the demand on such and such an article of commerce has increased and that, therefore, the price must be advanced upon it, or the thought that "I, a Russian landed proprietress, living in Florence, have now, thank God, stronger nerves, and embrace my beloved husband and ask him to send me forty thousand francs in the quickest possible time." Without making any exact statistics of telegrams, one may be firmly convinced that all the telegrams belong only to the kind, samples of which I have given here.

Both Tolstoy and Gandhi made sweeping judgments. Both had moral power, and both upset their readers by attacking well-nigh universal beliefs. Gandhi, it is true, made some exceptions to his attack on machinery—the sewing machine, for example—and later he said:

What I object to, is the *craze* for machinery, not machinery as such. The *craze* is for what they call labour-saving machinery. Men go on "saving labour," till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation. I want to save time and labour, not for a fraction of mankind but for all; I want the concentration of wealth, not in the hands of few, but in the hands of all. Today machinery merely helps a few to ride on the backs of millions. The impetus behind it all is not the philanthropy to save labour, but greed. It is against this constitution of things that I am fighting with all my might. . . .

I am uncompromisingly against all destructive machinery. But simple tools and instruments and such machinery as saves individual labour and lightens the burdens of the millions of cottages, I should welcome.

In 1908, Gandhi made what can be called an appeal to all India, but it had implications for all the world. He had the faculty of being *able* to speak to all the world. *Hind Swaraj*, simply by being a completely uncompromised statement of principles, was heard around the world. That it needed some qualification here and there—such as

Gandhi later provided—is hardly remarkable. The remarkable thing is its basic accuracy of diagnosis, its moral insight into the troubles of both India and the world. Gandhi may have realized that few if any would grasp his vision as it had come to him. The important thing is that this did not deter him in the least. One who speaks to the world has need to speak without hedging, without a certain sort of prudence. Years later, Gandhi gave his point of view concerning the realization of such a vision. T. K. Mahadevan provides the quotation from *Harijan* of Oct. 14, 1939:

Between the ideal and the practice there always must be an unbridgeable gulf. The ideal will cease to be one if it becomes possible to realize it. The pleasure lies in making the effort, not in its fulfillment. For in our progress towards the goal we ever see more and more enchanting scenery. . . . The key to understand [*Hind Swaraj*] is to realize that it is not an attempt to go back to the so-called ignorant dark ages. But it is an attempt to see beauty in voluntary simplicity, poverty and slowness. I have pictured that as my ideal. I shall never reach it myself and hence cannot expect the nation to do so.

Mahadevan adds:

That last sentence is intriguing and could be misconstrued unless due allowance is made for Gandhi's chronic humility. ("I have nothing new to teach the world," etc.) Elsewhere he has dealt with the problem more objectively. "I do not think it is right to say that the principles expounded in *Hind Swaraj* are not workable just because I cannot practice them perfectly"; "Even if I am not able fully to implement the ideas expressed in *Hind Swaraj*, I think there is nothing wrong with claiming that those ideas are correct."

It must be admitted that Gandhi found a way to have an enormous impact on the modern world. Such a man, even only partially understood, is better than one who is not heard at all.