

ON CREATING THE FUTURE

THERE are things we must do for ourselves, and other things which cannot be accomplished except socially, in collaboration with others. The requirement of acting together produces what we call Institutions—at once the source of both high achievements and oppressive barriers to human development. For both characterological and cultural reasons, we have difficulty in distinguishing between these two sorts of action, the personal and the social. What should we do without seeking help or any transfer of responsibility? What should we do, together, to provide an appropriate matrix for the independent actions which lead to human fulfillment and maturity? Our institutions form the objective answers we have given to these questions.

Needless to say, the institutions of our time are in a state of almost total confusion—the state, industry, the church, the places of learning, the professions—all are in flux and sometimes in stages of disintegration. Society is in trouble because we do not understand ourselves. And society is also in trouble because its institutions continually get in the way of our understanding ourselves. Our educational institutions have been singled out in particular as barriers to human growth. One major criticism is summed up in an observation by Laurens van der Post, the South African writer, in his *Dark Eye in Africa* (1955):

Not long ago I was in one of the university towns in my country and while I was there the political head of state came to address the university. He read a long, involved, earnest lecture on how the task of a true university was to serve the state with all its mind and all its heart. At the finish he received prolonged ecstatic applause which turned my blood cold, for it was a sound I myself had never heard in my own country before. The last time I had heard it was at a Hitler rally at Nuremberg. After the applause the young fell into obedient, automatic ranks and marched out of sight behind standards bearing portraits of their distinguished visitor over the slogan:

"You lead and youth follows." How often has one not seen the same scene enacted in Germany? I thought of Grey of Falloden in August of 1914 saying, "The lamps are going out all over Europe." I thought of my own people then and now, only forty years later; they no longer seem the same people to me. One by one the ancient proved lamps of the spirit that had brought us through the dark of our heroic past, were being put out in my country, too, with always an excellent reason, a high-minded argument or an admirable moral plea to justify it.

While an opposite tendency among students is evident in the United States, the subsidies to American Universities by the government, lately reported in detail, have created a parallel situation. Teachers whose prosperity is owed to government grants usually become transmission belts for administration attitudes. Alienation, not education, results.

A more general view of education in the United States is provided by Diane Ravitch in the *Summer American Scholar*. She begins with an account of the past expectations of reformers eager to improve the schools, and of the various means proposed to "extend their promise to all children."

If only teachers had college degrees and pedagogical training; *if only* teachers would band together to form a powerful teachers' union; *if only* there were federal aid to schools; *if only* all children were admitted to school regardless of race or national origin; *if only* all students of high ability were admitted to college; *if only* colleges could accommodate everyone who wanted to attend; *if only* students had more choices and fewer requirements in their course work; *if only* schools were open to educational experimentation; *if only* there were a federal department of education. . . . The "if only" list could be extended, but the point should be clear by now. All these "if onlies" have been put into effect, some entirely and others at least partially, and rarely have the results been equal to the hopes invested.

In reality, many present complaints are reactions to the hard-won reforms of the past. Though the educational preparation of teachers is more extensive than ever, at least when measured by degrees and years of formal schooling, the education of teachers is still a subject of intense criticism. The realization has dawned in many quarters that a credential from a state university or a school of education is no guarantee that its bearer knows how to teach, loves teaching or loves learning.

Miss Ravitch continues, showing the inadequacy of other measures which have been applied. After listing all the fine things that changes in educational institutions were supposed to accomplish, and then showing how in some or large part these efforts have failed, she says:

In retrospect, it was folly to have expected the schools to transform society or to mold a new kind of person. The schools are by nature limited institutions, not total institutions. They do not have full power over their students' lives (even total institutions, like prisons, have discovered the difficulty of shaping or reshaping the lives and minds of those they fully control). Schools are not fully independent in their dealings with students; they are interrelated with, and dependent on, families, churches, the media, peer groups, and other agencies of influence. Nor can schools be considered as if they were machines, all operating in the same predictable manner. Teachers vary, administrators vary, students vary, communities vary, and therefore schools vary. The schools, being complete institutions composed of actors with different goals, different interests, and different capacities, cannot be treated as if they were all interchangeable.

It seems evident, quite apart from the imperfections of human beings and the built-in limitations of institutions, that reformers—and people generally—have loaded the schools with impossible tasks and obligations. Schools are bound to reflect the confusions of society as well as its good intentions, and, what is worse, will often institutionalize those confusions as necessary and right. If it is a part of human nature to evade and delegate responsibility, then the schools may be expected to exhibit massively the negative results of this tendency.

Suppose we start with the idea that the role of institutions should be restricted to activities which individuals and their natural associations (families) cannot perform for themselves. Let us add that institutional functions in even their appropriate areas should be held to a minimum, since it is obvious from experience that overgrown institutions go bad in various ways, and are then extremely difficult to alter, reduce, or eliminate. What, then, would be the ideal arrangement? No matter what might be suggested in answer, all sorts of objections could be found. The ideal arrangement in a situation filled with messes and failures would have to be very different from the ideal arrangement in an ideal society. Everywhere compromises would be required, and the purists are unable to understand such requirements.

Reference to history, therefore, may help us more than speculations about what we should now do. In his contribution to "Children . . . and Ourselves" for April 9, 1975, Arthur Morgan gave attention to the origin of formal schooling:

Conventional formal education grew from recognition that certain skills, acquired by man during the last two millennia, are not adequately developed in the informal course of family and social life. Reading and mathematics, for example, require designed and tested methods to ensure their being learned. As civilization became more complex, the advanced disciplines were increasingly transmitted by formal institutions, while common, practical skills were left to be acquired through the ordinary course of living. This somewhat haphazard pattern of development, mainly a proliferation of forms of education in special skills, has been influenced by authority, tradition, usage—with occasional breakthroughs of insight—producing an almost random medley of method and content, without consistent coverage of basic questions. By reason of the exclusive attention given to certain intellectual skills, a large part of human culture is ineffectually transmitted by unorganized social processes. Needed, therefore, is a fresh concept of education which encompasses the entire range of living, with particular attention to matters of human importance thus far neglected by organized education.

This is an interesting and useful analysis. Morgan is saying that before we became a

technological society, nearly all that the young needed to know was taught to them in everyday life in and around the home. And as the communitarians and decentralists of our time often point out, home and rural community made a richly educational environment in those days. Parents and neighbors and friends were all educators. Teaching the young was a spontaneous, natural, and continuous affair. The Greeks had a word for it—*Paideia*. Morgan's point is that when growing up in the West began to involve more and more technical information, schools to provide it came into being. Eventually, these schools became so important that it was more or less forgotten that the home is the natural place for primary and essential education. Then, with far-reaching changes in the composition of the population and the reduction of the role of the home as the source of both practical and cultural education, large gaps began to appear in the knowledge of the young. Morgan considers the consequences:

Most educated men become specialists. In our society specialization is necessary, yet general and special education should both be part of an over-all design. Often eminent specialists are called upon to deal with issues outside their areas of competence—questions on which they have acquired only bits of information, and without understanding of the fundamental principles involved. Yet these issues may be crucial, as is certainly the case in matters such as maintaining personal health, rearing children, personal economics, and other concerns in which we are all involved. A nation of specialists may find itself living on what must be identified as a low level of general education.

Morgan turns to such central questions as the meaning and significance of life, now "systematically neglected." He speaks of the consequence of this neglect:

In a country like the United States, there has been a truce among competitive theologies, resulting in tacit agreement that "the church" shall convey "the meaning of life" as determined by tradition, while public education shall instruct in practical ways and means. This cultural failure to relate ends and means has meant uncritical reliance on biological drives,

emergence of vacuum-filling cultural tendencies, and acceptance of residues of traditional belief—a policy of drift balanced somewhat by free, critical inquiry. But unless strong concern for purpose and significance introduces an ordering principle for both life and education, sustained effort will be lacking, and there will be a tendency to lapse into biological hedonism.

Morgan was one of America's great educators, a man who dared to point to precisely those lacks in the thinking and philosophy of the American people which have led to the weaknesses and inadequacies of the schools. An "ordering principle for both life and education" is the heart of the matter, and finding it is a task of individuals, not government, not law-makers, and not professional educators. Only the people themselves, starting with their own lives and with their own children, will be able to take back the responsibilities that have been delegated to the schools and, eventually, redesign the institutions of the future, making sure that they are fragile, mortal, although very much alive. John Holt, the grade-school teacher who decided that it was useless to try to reform the schools, is now campaigning, with considerable success, for the home-teaching movement. He publishes *Growing Without Schooling* (\$15 for six issues—729 Boylston St., Boston, Mass. 02116), and his book, *Teach Your Own* (Delacorte Press, \$13.95), came out earlier this year. Holt is working to arouse "the invisible molecular moral forces" that William James declared for in 1899—forces which "work from individual to individual, stealing in through the crannies of the world like so many soft rootless, or like the capillary oozing of water, and yet rending the hardest monuments of man's pride, if you give them time."

At the end of her discussion of "The Problem of Educational Reform" in the *American Scholar*, Diane Ravitch spoke of the probable folly of regarding "the school *solely* as a tool of social reform and *solely* as a resource to be redistributed."

One consequence is that the school's diploma is confused with the learning that it is supposed to

represent. In recent years, policymakers have sought to equalize educational attainment (years-of-schooling) without regard to the quality of education. This is like putting people on a diet of eighteen hundred calories a day without caring whether they are consuming junk food or nutritious food. Years-of-schooling, or a diploma, has been treated as an end in itself. Thus we have seen courts require school districts to present a diploma to students who could not meet state standards of literacy as if it were the diploma itself they needed rather than the learning the diploma is supposed to signify. When school reformers in the nineteenth century advocated universal education as a way of improving society, they meant a broad diffusion of knowledge and wisdom, not a broad diffusion of diplomas.

The last paragraph of this article shows that, today, the schools of America are coping with internal problems of institutional survival rather than the needs of the young.

Confronted with conflicting demands from those who want reduced requirements and those who want curricular substance, many schools have resolved the dilemma by reducing requirements while expanding electives. Thus students may take history courses to meet their minimal graduation requirement, but may choose history courses that are little more than classes in current events. Or they may meet their English requirement by reading popular fiction, mystery stories, and science fiction. There is no harm in what is included; from the perspective of liberal education, what is unfortunate is the wide body of knowledge that is excluded when course proliferation and lax requirements are joined together. Professors regularly encounter students who are ignorant of anything that happened before the Civil War as well as anything that happened, or was written, outside the United States. They may have heard of Plato or Aristotle in a survey course, but they have never read anything written by either and have only a dim notion (usually wrong) of what they "stood for." Mention Dickens, Tolstoy, Conrad, or Melville and they have heard of them too, but they "didn't take that course." Some professors who teach literature have been astonished to find students who know nothing of mythology or the Bible; allusions to Job or Icarus must be explained to those who have no intellectual furniture in their minds, no stock of literary or historical knowledge on which to draw beyond their immediate experience. In a recent issue of *Commonweal*, J. M. Cameron soberly observes that if Freud attended school today, he might not be able to

think up the Oedipus theory because he would not have enough mythology in his head to do so. We seem now to turn to television or the movies to teach the history and literature that were neglected in school. To permit knowledge to be fragmented, as we have, by serving it up cafeteria style, with each person choosing whether to be minimally literate or to be a specialist, contributes to the diminution and degradation of the common culture.

The point of bringing in this material is not to inaugurate a period of disconsolate mourning of the failures of education, but rather to suggest that the time has come for recognizing the natural law of institutional decline and to make a new beginning. The point is that, since we are human beings and not cogs in a social machine, we are able to make new beginnings *under almost any circumstances*. It may be historic fact that we live at the end of the age of institutional dinosaurs, giving opportunity for learning from their inevitable demise, and for a new start.

The reconstruction of society cannot come about except through the reconstruction of individuals. This means that all beginnings will have to be small-scale. Every great reform, as Emerson said, was once a private idea in a private man's mind. Morgan knew this. Holt knows it. The restoration of Paideia will come about by the spread of influences from individual to individual, from community to community. We are learning this at every level of the common life. Institutions can never be anything more than somewhat mechanized tools for the cooperative use of human beings. They have no initiative in them and their responsibilities, ethically and morally, are recorded in conventions and sets of rules. The *esprit de corps* of people working together and the compounded strength that results from deliberated union are substantial realities, but they grow out of the voluntary human fellowship involved. They are not secretions of organization. The wonder of orchestrated cooperation, like the majestic beauty of a symphony, is not something that people put together the way you build a house. Its order results from individual discipline harmoniously related. All such areas are

forbidden ground to the legislator. You cannot make a Decalogue out of the Sermon on the Mount.

We are talking about a society in which compulsion is held to its irreducible minimum. For such proposals to make sense, it is necessary to look at the existing society, and to attempt to separate what human beings do of their own choice and motion from what they do only because they are obliged to by institutional requirement. It soon becomes apparent that the savored and precious aspect of our lives springs from what people do voluntarily. This is the high culture of civilization, often concealed from view by the interlocking networks of institutional pressures and rules. We know that in our time a great many of the rules no longer make sense. So we have to figure how to conduct our lives independent of the rules, or outside of their scope, or above the level of their application, while improvising adjustments to the necessities of so far-reaching a change. As Karl Polanyi once remarked, it is like rebuilding your house while living in it.

There will of course be new institutions. Institutions will be needed until human behavior is as spontaneously harmonious as a flight of birds. Some rather good institutions have already come into being, and they can be studied as examples to follow. They are transition forms of human association, arranged ad hoc by people who know what they are doing and are able to preserve useful and helpful relations with the past, while creating the future as they go along.

REVIEW

THE FORMATION OF A MAN

THE vast detail of Pyarelal's book, titled *Mahatma Gandhi—The Discovery of Satyagraha* (\$20.00—Sevak Prakashan, 306, Shri Hanuman Industries Estate, G. D. Ambekar Marg, Wadala, Bombay 31, India)—instead of being a reason for avoiding the weighty volumes by the man who was for years Gandhi's private secretary—gives the grain of life in which the Indian leader's character was formed. One who wants to understand as much as possible of how Gandhi grew into a modern hero—very nearly the only one who has emerged during our time—will find Pyarelal's studies of his life practically indispensable. Two other volumes of the series have already appeared. The first, *Mahatma Gandhi—The Last Phase*, was published by Navajivan in 1956; the second, *The Early Phase*, was brought out by the same publisher in 1965. Now we have *The Discovery of Satyagraha*, a book of more than 500 pages devoted to Gandhi's labors in South Africa from 1896 to 1901, with attention to his subsequent visit to India until the conditions which emerged in South Africa after the Boer War obliged him to return and renew his struggle there.

Gandhi first went to South Africa in 1893 to work as a lawyer. He was soon drawn into the courts in behalf of the Indians who had been brought to Natal as cheap "coolie" labor to work on the farms, the railroad, and in the mines. Legally they were entitled to the rights of British subjects, but the conditions imposed on them were practically unbearable. Gandhi determined to win recognition of their legal rights in the courts, and in two years, as Pyarelal says, "a shy, shrinking, raw Indian barrister was transformed into a force to be reckoned with both within Parliament and outside in a self-governing English Colony."

Thrown among a community of businessmen [Indian shopkeepers] who had come to a foreign land to make a living, who lacked a sense of identity, and were utter strangers to public life, he infused into

them a new sense of dignity, cohesion and self-respect. By the time he left for home the Government's mouthpiece and fosterchild of Natal's Prime Minister, the *Natal Mercury*, was wishing "a European Mr. Gandhi to come forward and put life and movement into the dry bones of our political ideas."

It should be remembered that in those days Gandhi thoroughly believed in loyalty to the British Empire. As Pyarelal says:

The Empire stood in the eyes of many patriotic Indians at that time, as it did in Gandhiji's, for the values enshrined in the Queen's Proclamation of 1858 which pledged equal citizenship rights to all the members of the Empire and equality before the law irrespective of considerations of race, religion or colour. These were the values that they had long cherished and struggled for. The Empire ideal that stood for these values, they thought, was worthy of their allegiance and it was for them to fasten upon it and to make it work.

Gandhiji's fierce loyalty to the Empire was the obverse of the same coin of which his determined fight for the attainment of the rights enshrined in the Empire ideal was the reverse. Jealous of the honor of the ideal he had adopted, when that ideal was betrayed he turned upon those who were responsible for the betrayal with the same fierceness with which he had served it. Linked to his philosophy of love, it pointed the way to creative suffering, which is Satyagraha.

The Discovery of Satyagraha is a book which traces step by step the evolution of Gandhi's ways and means of applying his principles. Moral ideas formed the core of his character, and his life in South Africa during the closing years of the nineteenth century made the field in which he learned to extend the idea of love for one's fellows to the wider area of the social and political order. From Gandhi's career one may identify the intricate processes by which a great man creates himself. Pyarelal's book, then, is an "illustrated" treatise on moral development and psychology:

Rejecting the time-honored notion that the practice of law was not possible without compromising on truth, he turned it into a means of service and his service into a means of self-realization. This invested whatever he did with a

suggestion of universality. His legal clients became more and more his co-workers and colleagues, who shared his ideals and in the end threw in their lot with him in the Satyagraha struggle to share with him the hardships of imprisonment.

Gandhi always appealed to the best in others, whether friend or enemy. Never throughout his life did he adopt or practice a "we" and "they" psychology. His fundamental project from the first was self-reform, and as his conception of self grew to include the larger society, so his attitude toward others was always an effort to evoke the best in this common self. Again, as Pyarelal says:

Behind this astonishing phenomenon lay Gandhiji's passion for humanitarian service which in substance consisted of awakening and serving the divine in man. It gave to the institutions that he built their inner strength. When they passed into the hands of those who lacked his passion for service they wilted.

Not a small part of Gandhiji's time and energy in this phase of his career was devoted to the fundamental work of evolving new norms of personal and political conduct for those working in public institutions that rested on no other sanction than the moral, and a new pattern of relationship with the members of his own family so that love of family and love of the community, instead of being rivals and mutually exclusive became complementary. Each became the fulcrum and springboard for the other and self-transcendence the test of its genuineness.

Pyarelal shows that Gandhi's experiences in South Africa amounted to an "apprenticeship" for the work he would later undertake in India, in behalf of the independence of his native land. When he first arrived in Natal (in 1893) the population included 470,000 Zulus, 4,000 Europeans, and 46,000 Indians, of whom 16,000 were indentured workers, 25,000 ex-indentured or "free" Indians, and some 5,000 who were Indian traders and clerks. The Indians were both intelligent and hard-working and had become the backbone of the Natal economy, as both laborers and shopkeepers. Their success in business enraged the European traders whose careless ways and habits made them unable to compete with the hated "coolies" who were coming there in

increasing numbers. Pyarelal describes what Gandhi was up against:

The savagery of the colour prejudice against the Indians had only to be seen to be believed. Wrote one member of the racist lunatic fringe in the *Natal Advertiser* of January 30, 1900: "Bible is for the coloured people to set them right on the day of General Judgment. Heaven is for the whites only where colour dare not enter." When an Indian jewellery store and some adjoining Indian stores caught fire, the colonial whites, it was reported in the press, "enjoyed the fire immensely," looking upon it "as a fine Saturday evening entertainment." In short, every one of the problems that Gandhiji had to tackle later in the course of India's non-violent struggle had its prototype in this microcosm of South Africa—including the question of the Indian Muslim's attitude vis-a vis the Sultan of Turkey as the Khalifa of the Muslim world, which later gave birth to the vexed issue of the Khalifat and even cost a Secretary of State for India his office.

In South Africa Gandhi began an extraordinary task:

There, he had to raise from the dust a people who had come to regard insults and humiliations in pursuit of a living as their lot, who were torn by dissensions and divided into factions in which each group regarded the others as aliens. . . . The authorities were but too eager to set Hindus against Muslims, Christians against non-Christians, and colonial-borns against Indians. Only their abysmal ignorance about a people whom they despised and regarded as beneath notice frustrated their attempts to play the game of "divide and rule" which was so successfully played by the British in India.

What happened as a result of his efforts?

When Gandhiji landed in Durban in 1896 one of the leaders of the Demonstration [organized to prevent Gandhi and other Indians from leaving the ship] had exhorted the demonstrators to "spare Gandhi" so that "they would have an opportunity of spitting on him if he was allowed to live in their midst instead of being snuffed out." But on the eve of his departure for India four years later, the warmest tributes ever paid to a coloured man in a British colony were being showered upon him by the cream of the Durban whites. The *Natal Mercury* recognized in the home-bound Indian "a gentleman in word and deed," who in his profession had won the support of both Bench and Bar "as much by his legal

attainments as by his high principles of conduct." "Should he elect not to return to Natal," the journal went on, "he would meet in India with the success his abilities as a lawyer and his excellent parts as a gentleman deserve."

How did he accomplish this? By pointing out to the British how they were violating their own declared principles in mistreating the Indians, and making this clear with such calmness, good manners, and at the same time meticulous attention to the terms of the law, that he brought out the best in his opponents. Such was Gandhi's record until after the Boer War.

We conclude with a paragraph which shows how the stage had been set for the discovery of Satyagraha and non-violence, when he returned to South Africa a year later:

His faith in the ideals embodied in the British Constitution, in the British sense of fair play and justice, and above all in the absolute impartiality and integrity of the British judiciary at the highest level had until now survived all shocks. But when the time came to translate those ideals into practice vis-a-vis the Indian question after the war he found himself up against a stone wall. . . . Faced with outright repudiation by the rulers of their own declarations and principles which they had hitherto professed and prided themselves on, and with the prostitution of the machinery of law and justice to legitimise the legally and juridically indefensible, he began to search for a sanction of a different type—a power that would tame power and purify it without contradicting itself by imitating what it was pitted against. His search led him to explore the inner dimension of his being by the cultivation of basic spiritual disciplines. With these disciplines as his tools he started experimenting with a new way of life. This constituted his *sadhana* or striving for the discovery of Satyagraha.

Gandhi is known to us by reason of his impact on history. Pyarelal's writings, in particular this book, provide the basis for understanding something of how this power to affect history was generated, and how it actually worked.

COMMENTARY

NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE

SATYAGRAHA, a term invented by Gandhi to describe his resistance to injustice in South Africa and put into practice by the Indian community under his leadership, has frequent definition in his later writings. In *Harijan* in 1940 he gave *Satyagraha* a larger meaning than Passive Resistance:

Its equivalent in the vernacular rendered into English means Truth-Force. I think Tolstoy called it also Soul-Force or Love-Force, and so it is. Carried out to its utmost limit, this force is independent of pecuniary or other material assistance; certainly, even in its elementary form, of physical force or violence. Indeed, violence is the negation of this great spiritual force which can only be cultivated or wielded by those who will entirely eschew violence. It is a force that may be used by individuals as well as communities. It may be used as well in political as in domestic affairs. Its universal applicability is a demonstration of its permanence and invincibility. It can be used alike by men, women, and children. It is totally untrue to say that it is a force to be used only by the weak so long as they are not capable of meeting violence by violence. . . .

Gandhi knew that perfection in the practice of Satyagraha was a distant achievement, but he always explained it in ideal terms.

Let no one understand that a non-violent army is open only to those who strictly enforce in their lives all the implications of non-violence. It is open to all those who accept the implications and make an ever-increasing endeavour to observe them. There will never be an army of perfectly nonviolent. It will be formed of those who will honestly endeavor to observe non-violence. . . .

Since *satyagraha* is one of the most powerful methods of direct action, a *Satyagrahi* exhausts all other means before he resorts to *satyagraha*. He will therefore constantly and continually approach the constituted authority, he will appeal to public opinion, educate public opinion, state his case calmly and coolly before everybody, who wants to listen to him, and only after he has exhausted all those avenues will he resort to *satyagraha*. But when he has found the impelling call of the inner voice within him and

launches out upon *satyagraha*, he has burnt his boats and there is no receding. . . .

The argument for *Satyagraha* is far-reaching:

We cannot all suddenly become such men, but if my proposition is correct—as I know it to be correct—the greater the spirit of passive resistance in us, the better men we will become. Its use, therefore, I think, indisputable, and it is a force which, if it became universal, would revolutionize social ideals and do away with despotisms and the ever-growing militarism under which the nations of the West are groaning and are being almost crushed to death—that militarism which promises to overwhelm even the nations of the East.

So are its rules:

It is never the intention of a *Satyagrahi* to embarrass the wrong-doer. The appeal is never to his fear; it is, must be, always to his heart. The *Satyagrahi's* object is to convert, not to coerce, the wrong-doer. He should avoid artificiality in all his doings. He acts naturally and from inward conviction. . . .

A *Satyagrahi* goes to prison, not to embarrass the authorities but to convert them by demonstrating to them his innocence. You should realize that unless you have developed the moral fitness to go to prison, which the law of *satyagraha* demands, your jail-going will be useless and will bring you nothing but disappointment in the end.

These quotations are taken from *Selections from Gandhi*, compiled by Nirmal Kumar Bose, and published by Navajivan, Ahmedabad, in 1948.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves AN ESSENTIAL ART

IN his introduction to *Masters—Portraits of Great Teachers* (Basic Books, 1981), Joseph Epstein, editor of the *American Scholar*, tells why he decided to publish a series of articles on teachers who have left a distinctive mark on their times. *Scholar* readers have enjoyed these essays during recent years. Now available in a book, they are likely to lift the reader, and may also inspire him, as teachers, real teachers, are meant to do. Of the plan for the essays, and later for his book, Mr. Epstein says:

This seemed a useful idea for a number of reasons. First great teachers have left no record of their pedagogical accomplishments. The effect of their work has been rather like that of opera singers before the advent of recordings: there was, that is to say, no trace of their work beyond the circle of their auditors. It does not do to overemphasize the comparison, but there is a sense in which teaching, like opera, is a performing art. Not only must the teacher get up his subject, but he must get it across. There is many a tried, but no true, method for doing this: Socratic teasing, sonorous lecturing, sympathetic discussion; passionate argument, witty exposition, dramatics and other sorts of derring-do; plain power of personal example, main force of intellect, and sometimes even bullying. But these are all matters of technique and vary from one teacher to the next. What all the great teachers appear to have in common is love of their subject, an obvious satisfaction in arousing this love in their students, and an ability to convince them that what they are being taught is deadly serious.

Understanding this, generally and in particular, has notable rewards. As collector and editor of the contents of this book about teachers, Mr. Epstein says:

Another reason for these essays is that they bring out some of the best qualities in their authors. To write about a teacher who has been an important influence in one's life causes a writer to dig deep within himself not only to bring off a piece of persuasive intellectual portraiture but to ascertain the subtle nature of intellectual influence as it is passed

on from teacher to student. The authors of the essays in this book were instructed to write "critical appreciations"—eulogies and testimonials were not wanted—and to be as autobiographical as they deemed necessary. To recall oneself as a student, still very malleable intellectually, under the sway of a teacher with a powerful mind, requires powers of exposition and introspection of the first order.

What, really, is the importance of this book? It has more than one dimension. First in importance is probably the opportunity to discover something of how the living quality of ideas is communicated. About the best brief discussion of education that we know of is the opening chapter of Ortega's *Some Lessons in Metaphysics* (Norton, 1969), and he reaches the same conclusion as Mr. Epstein, saying that "primarily and fundamentally teaching is only the teaching of a need for the science and *not* the teaching of the science itself whose need the student does not feel."

Another thing this book does is generate respect for teachers and the teaching profession. All the great civilizations of the past paid great honor to their teachers. A reading of these essays brings awareness that there are such individuals, that they are devoted to the common good, to the awakening of minds and hearts, and that they are in several senses the most valuable people in the world. There can hardly be a restoration of American culture and civilization without full appreciation of the work of those who are drawn by their fundamental motives to become teachers.

Here, for example, is Kenneth Lynn's recollection of the teaching of F.O. Matthiessen:

I first encountered Matthiessen in the fall of 1942, my sophomore year at Harvard, when I took his course in Shakespeare. . . . *Translation* was the title that Matthiessen gave to the published version of his Ph.D. thesis, and the crossing of boundaries from one realm to another was an idea that appealed to him in many ways. The translation of printed pages into living gestures was certainly one of his main goals as a teacher of Shakespeare. To that end, he required us to memorize several lines of poetry, and to show our mastery of them, not by writing them down in class, but by reciting the speeches he called for in private

meetings in his office. The fact that this requirement took a great deal of his time casts light on his dedication to teaching. He was absolutely determined—as he often pointed out Coleridge was—“to reinstate the Logos as a living power, to demonstrate in poetry itself the word made flesh.” Having us speak Shakespeare to him was a part of that effort.

Two writers, Peter Stern and Jean Yarbrough, recall their experience of Hannah Arendt as a teacher:

One of the qualities that made Hannah Arendt a great teacher was her ability not only to make ideas come alive and seem important (all good teachers possess this gift), but, going beyond this, to handle them in such a way that they evoked a vivid, tangible sense of reality—of a specific, concrete situation and man's confrontation with it—so that the ideas she discussed became one with the realities they described. What she analyzed conceptually conjured up a world of experiences we recognized even when they were not our own. In her hands, ideas were not simply steps in an argument, but the very essence of experience distilled into the language of conceptual thought.

This achievement stemmed in part from the combination of an immense literary gift with a powerful philosophic mind—always a rare blend of talents. Literary sensibility is usually concerned with capturing meaning through imagery and narrative, according to a vision of the beautiful, while philosophy, by way of logical argument, aims at what is true. It was Hannah Arendt's genius to combine these two modes. Uniting logical rigor with the use of metaphor, example, and a clear sense of the shape of a story, she helped us to grasp the central concerns of philosophy and the concrete contexts out of which these arose. Part of her success as a teacher, then, lay in her “gift of thinking poetically,” an expression she herself used to describe Walter Benjamin's mode of thought.

Back in 1966, the American classical scholar, William Arrowsmith, addressed an academic audience on “The Future of Teaching.” What he said is sufficient evidence of the cultural importance of a book of the sort Mr. Epstein has put together. Arrowsmith spoke of

the ancient, crucial, high art of teaching which alone can claim to be called educational, an essential

element in all noble human culture, and hence a task of infinitely more importance than research scholarship. With the teacher as transmitter or conductor of knowledge, as a servant or partner of research, I have no concern. . . . so long as the teacher is viewed as merely a diffuser of knowledge or a higher popularizer, his position will necessarily be a modest and even a menial one. And precisely this, I think, is the prevalent view of the teacher's function, the view overwhelmingly assumed among even those who want to redress balance in favor of the teacher. Is it any wonder then that the teacher enjoys no honor?

Only when large demands are made of the teacher, when we ask him to assume his primary role as educator in his own right, will it be possible to restore dignity to teaching. . . . Behind the disregard for the teacher lies the transparent sickness of the humanities in the university and in American life generally. Indeed, nothing more vividly illustrates the myopia of academic humanism than its failure to realize that the fate of any true culture is revealed in the value it sets upon the teacher and the way it defines him.

FRONTIERS

Water for California

CALIFORNIA is only one of the fifty states of the U. S., but for a number of reasons what happens in this populous and highly productive agricultural region is of interest to all the world. One learns from the history of California, for example, that ruthless tyrannies result when social formations become too large. The farms, for one thing, are too large, bringing continuous exploitation of agricultural labor. The cities—especially those in desert areas, such as Los Angeles—are too large, leading to conscienceless domination of other parts of the state. As long ago as 1904, the bankers, developers, and politicians of Los Angeles saw that if the city were to grow, a much larger water supply would be needed. So, by stealth, deception, and overwhelming economic power the city acquired control over the water which accumulated in the Owens Valley drainage basin, more than two hundred miles to the north, built an aqueduct, and took the water—which was mostly used at first to open up an enormous real estate promotion in the previously waterless San Fernando valley.

In *Harper's* for last March, Page Stegner told once more the story of how the natural environment of the Owens Valley was sacrificed to create the artificial one of the Los Angeles region. He said at the end:

The American Way of seizure and exploitation has a long history but a dubious future. It has produced ghost towns before this, when the resources ran out and the frenzy cooled and the fortune hunters drifted away. Without suggesting that Los Angeles will become a ghost town, one knows that in the arid West there are many communities whose growth is strictly limited by the available water. To promote the growth of any community beyond its legitimate and predictable water resources is to risk one of two things: eventual slowdown or collapse and retrenchment to more realistic levels, or a continuing and often piratical encroachment on the water of other communities, at the expense of their prosperity and perhaps their life.

Man, the great creator and destroyer of environments, is also part of what he creates or destroys, and rises and falls with it. In the West, water is life.

Stealing water in order to sell land seemed a perfectly legitimate thing to do to the Los Angeles businessmen at the beginning of the century. And today, with the land sold and the region occupied by close to ten million people, they *have* to go on stealing the water, or so they believe. What sort of people would know better than to build a great city in a desert? How do you develop people of such good sense?

Another writer, Franz Schurmann, looks at California in another way. In an article in the Summer issue of *Cry California*, he says:

Though it is not generally known, government in California is much more highly centralized than in most other states. The things we view as the special wonders of our state—the swimming pool lushness of Beverly Hills, the farms of the Central Valley, the freeway system, the sprawling suburbs—are the products of this centralization. The most important part of all this—indeed, the salient political reality of California—is the huge state-wide water-delivery system.

Schurmann draws on the German historian, Karl Wittfogel, for his analysis of the "hydraulic society," a concept that fits California. Wittfogel used China for his example:

Wittfogel said China had evolved a highly centralized form of government and a homogeneous society spread over a large area precisely because of the unique role played by government-controlled irrigation. North China's Yellow River has a river-bottom that is many feet above the level of the land along hundreds of miles of its downstream course. Only massive dikes contain the waters and—as Wittfogel saw it—only the ever-watchful central state could keep the system intact. However, although Wittfogel's analysis is perceptive and valuable, he missed something of great importance. To see what that was, let us look at another "hydraulic society."

Anyone who has ever lived in one of the great arid regions of the world, such as the Middle East, knows that its oases are really states of mind. They come and go. If a river changes its course, if an underground aquifer is depleted, the oasis vanishes.

One civilization that took steps to protect itself from the uncertainties of nature was Khwarazm in Central Asia some 1,000 years ago. It became a "hydraulic society" with a system of waterworks that was the marvel of the Islamic world, with a sophisticated bureaucracy to manage the system and with a brilliant civilization built upon it—brilliant until Mongols invaded in the 13th century and totally destroyed it.

The Mongols attacked the cities, killing off the Khwarazmian elites and the managerial class. The dikes and canals, however, were not beyond repair, but there was no one to tend to this and the whole social system collapsed. As Schurmann puts it: "The central management that had been the linchpin of the civilization was also its greatest weakness; Khwarazm vanished as a society." China's experience was different:

China, however, survived through many disasters. And the reason it did was that its "oriental despotism" was not really as all-pervasive as Wittfogel believed. During a good part of its 2,000 years of history, China's central government was weak, incompetent, beset with internal quarrels and interested in very little of local affairs beyond tax collection. It was not the watchful central government that kept the dikes intact but the active commitment of local communities. These stable and self-sufficient village and farm societies had everything to lose if dikes were not kept in repair, and they took the initiative that maintained the water-delivery system through many wars and natural disasters. The contrast between China and Khwarazm is clear: China had a great central government, but it also had a myriad of strong local communities. Khwarazm, in typical Central Asian or Mesopotamian fashion, did not.

Which civilization does California most nearly resemble? I think we would have to say that California has more in common with that centralized and semi-nomadic system of artificially maintained oases, Khwarazm, than with China. At least it did during the booming 1950s, '60s and '70s.

However, Mr. Schurmann also thinks that the rapidly growing "third world" population of California has more in common with the Chinese communitarians than with the big-time developers, and that these multiplying people, as they gain influence and power, will help California to "end up more like China than like Khwarazm." They

are, he says, "accustomed to frugality with resources, minimal use of water, reliance on public transportation." And many of them "come from small farming backgrounds." The suggestion has appeal.