

## BETTER SOLUTIONS THAN OURS

THE distinction between knowledge and wisdom is given more and more importance in present-day criticism and discussion, but the world of affairs still demands that in order to dispose of besetting problems more "research" is required. The reason for this insistence is plain enough. What have been regarded as all major accomplishments since the time of Francis Bacon are seen to have resulted from research of one sort or another. Scientific discovery is followed by the applications developed by engineers, with practical benefits in construction, transport, communication, and in countless labor-saving conveniences which have largely altered the circumstances of our lives.

Yet our troubles multiply. We were warned of this by Plato. He regarded science and mathematics as useful disciplines of the mind but claimed that they did not lead to the wisdom we need, which Socrates named self-knowledge. But Plato was not the first to say things like this. The ancient Indian treatises of instruction, the *Upanishads*, taught that humans have a need for ignorance as well as knowledge. "Knowledge alone, or ignorance alone," Vinoba Bhave said in an article on education, leads man into darkness, but he added: "the union of fitting knowledge with fitting ignorance is the nectar of eternity."

How is this puzzling statement to be understood? Perhaps as Socrates might have understood it, as revealed by the defense he made against the charges brought by his accusers in his trial in Athens. He said:

For let me tell you, gentlemen, that to be afraid of death is only another form of thinking that one is wise when one is not; it is to think that one knows what one does not know. No one knows with regard to death whether it is not the greatest blessing that can happen to a man, but people dread it as though they were certain that it is the greatest evil, and this ignorance, which thinks that it knows what it does not, must surely be ignorance most culpable. This, I

take it, gentlemen, is the degree, and this is the nature of my advantage over the rest of mankind, and if I were to claim to be wiser than my neighbors in any respect, it would be in this—that not possessing any real knowledge of what comes after death, I am also conscious that I do not possess it.

This consciousness, Socrates argued, saved him from the terrible fate of feeling that he ought to conform to what some Athenians demanded of him, in order to survive, instead of being attentive to his inward monitor. The argument, we may say to ourselves, is not the most persuasive in the world, and it had little effect on his judges, although it had sufficed to convince the Oracle that Socrates was the wisest man in all Athens. His wisdom consisted in avoiding what Plato called "double ignorance," supposing one has knowledge about matters of which one knows nothing—the stubbornest kind of ignorance. Most people can cope with ordinary ignorance—simple not knowing—for then they simply take steps to find out what they need to know. But if they mistake their ignorance for knowledge, they are likely to make the most terrible mistakes.

Erich Kahler, in *The Meaning of History*, sees double ignorance as the chief characteristic of what he calls modern collective consciousness, in which we all know that a vast sum of knowledge exists among our various kinds of experts, no one of which knows what the others know, and we assume that, somehow or other, we possess this knowledge. We don't, of course, but have only a limited power to purchase its application. But we take or endorse courses of action with great confidence, as though we had all this knowledge ourselves. Consider the contradictions which result. Kahler says:

Years may be devoted to saving the life of a single child, while, in the field of war technology, rationality juggles the lives of millions of human beings as mere proportional figures. The most dainty

comforts are produced alongside of colossal destructivity. The prevalence of reason in human affairs would presuppose a comprehensive evaluation of all factors, including psychic and generally human factors, in a given situation. But in the anarchical condition of an incoherent collective consciousness, functional rationality has reached a point of autonomy where it simultaneously serves the most contradictory ends, among them purposes which human reason must regard as monstrous insanity.

Involved in this analysis is a clear differentiation between reason, as the power of a human being to decide what is right to do, and rationalization, which is the capacity to apply the techniques of reason to areas where neither good nor evil exists, but simply problems of the manipulation of matter. Yet, as Kahler puts it:

Scientification, combining abstraction and analysis, spread not only to the scholarly studies dealing with human affairs but through its application—technology—it extended to human life itself. Automation is but a symptom of a general process which pervades our world: the accelerating conquest of nature by a science that passes immediately into technology, and is, in turn, pushed along and sustained by technology. More and more, the human being is acting through machines, living by and among machines, in the conduct of life he is reduced to directing from an ever more remote place an ever more complex and overwhelming apparatus. Observing the rapid increase of population, we may foresee the gradual vanishing of nature, landscape swallowed up by buildscape. Natural growth is displaced by artificial *making*, a process which is very near to reaching life itself. All this reacts on the human being. In his very making, man is circumscribed by the application of his applied scientific laws and by the systems and machineries it produces. Mechanization attacks spontaneity, the creative growth in man himself.

The point is clear enough: the more we research the operations of nature and adapt them to our own purposes, the less we think about wisdom in their use. For this reason our addiction to research may well be questioned. It is the source of our affliction by double ignorance—the supposition that our experts, knowing how to increase our know-how, also know where and

how to use it. The verdict of history—virtually every kind of history—shows that they don't.

What should we call that other faculty that we have—what Kahler calls Reason or *Nous*, what Jesus termed Charity, what modern thinkers name Insight?

A "sense of the fitness of things" seems a good way to speak of this ability. This "sense" operates at various levels, ranging from the practical to the moral and ethical. From present-day studies we know that it has been responsible for a great many of the inventions on which we rely, but it may also be a factor in the human decision to let certain areas of research strictly alone. Brought down to earth this attitude has an illustration in the resolve of Rex Tremlett, a mining engineer working in Africa, never to become responsible for the horrors produced for the Blacks by discovery of the Kimberley diamond fields and the gold unearthed at Witwatersrand. "I determined," he said, "that if I found a mineral deposit in Uganda which appeared capable of supporting one large mine, or several scattered small ones, I would report it. But if I found indications of another Witwatersrand or Northern Rhodesian copper belt, I would remain silent."

Then there is the similar conclusion of a modern biochemist, Erwin Chargaff, who said in his autobiography:

My life has been marked by two immense and fateful scientific discoveries: the splitting of the atom, the recognition of the chemistry of heredity and its subsequent manipulation. It is the mistreatment of a nucleus that, in both instances, lies at the basis: the nucleus of the atom, the nucleus of the cell. In both instances do I have the feeling that science has transgressed a barrier that should have remained inviolate. As happens often in science, the first discoveries were made by thoroughly admirable men, but the crowd that came right after had a more mephytic smell. . . .

The public, if there is such a thing, had no opportunity beforehand to discuss or deliberate on, the development and the use of the atom bomb. It was all a very well-kept war secret. But would an open discussion have made any difference, would it

have halted the truly inexorable progression? There would have been a great deal of gabble and of drab and dull posturing, but the movement, a movement without movers, a fall without gravity, would have continued. Ask the lava where it flows. It would answer with what I have called the Devil's doctrine: *What can be done must be done*. And a lot can be done! . . . Today the cure of genetic diseases, tomorrow the experimental improvement of the human character.

So, as Vinoba found the *Upanishads* to say, there are forms of human ignorance that are sanctified by the sense of fitness. There are techniques of manipulation which it is better not to know.

There is, then, an ignorance which we need to learn to live with, or that we shall not be able to survive without. In his paper, "People, Land, and Community" (in *Standing by Words*, North Point Press, 1983), Wendell Berry quotes from a newspaper article which spoke of the hundreds of billions invested in atomic weapons and of the "sophisticated strategies to fine-tune their use to avoid a holocaust," then calling "the system meant to activate them" the weakest link. Berry comments:

Always the assumption is that we can first set demons at large, and then, somehow, become smart enough to control them. This is not childishness. It is not even "human weakness." It is a kind of idiocy, but perhaps we will not cope with it and save ourselves until we regain the sense to call it evil.

Neither "evil" nor "good" are proper scientific terms. This being the case, we can hardly use these terms unless we become convinced that there is an order of reality outside—or beyond—the world described by science. It is the world of human decision, human thinking, human aspiration and human mistakes. It is the only world where freedom—which means choice—exists, in company with knowledge and ignorance. Our sense of fitness is the only guide we have in this world, although there are schemes of meaning which may enlarge this sense, increasing the range of its application. These schemes are known as religion, metaphysics, philosophy, leading to

ethical principles giving fitness its theoretical validity. They have to do with the structures of the invisible world of moral reality, of which we now know little or nothing, save for the hints given by conscience and intuition. Such hints, strong and compelling for rare individuals, shape our sense of fitness. They inform our reason or *nous*; their presence in human beings confirms Michael Polanyi's declaration that "We know more than we can tell."

What is the difference between an informed sense of fitness and the fruit of research? The difference is crucial, and confusing to us. The findings of research, when reported and confirmed, become "public truths," accessible to all. They are no more debatable than the sums of elementary arithmetic. And, in the long run, they will do no more for us than the sums of arithmetic. These are the apodictic truths so much respected by Aristotle—truths that you cannot deny and still claim to be a reasoning human.

But the truths of the sense of fitness are not demonstrable in the same way. They are private truths—truths, apparently, which require some kind of inner development or organs of perception in order to be recognized. A most undemocratic arrangement, some will say. Yet those who reveal the capacity called wisdom have never been a threat to democracy. Their concern was always with "the least of these," since, as Gandhi maintained, the superior man is one who will never use the power he has gained to inflict his will on others. He becomes a *teacher*.

Well, if the teacher is one who understands the ground of the fitness of things, we might turn to him for help if he were one; but there have been many teachers, and their teachings seem far from identical. The worst wars history records have been religious wars. Looking for help, we find a contradiction in terms. The sense of fitness, if it comes from some indescribable grasp of inner and higher laws, must be *one*, and its expressions ought to be unanimous. But these expressions, historically speaking, have not been the same.

Perhaps at root they were once the same, but in that case they have certainly been altered by the people who received them. These were, we might say, half-taught disciples who began by making unwitting mistakes of interpretation and recording, and these mistakes gave access to managerial types who built the great and often exclusive orthodoxies of which we know.

A further source of difficulty is that all the high religions seem to have begun with two doctrines—one for those able to grasp the subtleties of self-reliance and the need for individual confirmation, and one for those not ready to undertake so demanding a task. The much-abused term "esoteric" applies here. The esoteric is what Jesus revealed to his disciples, the "mysteries" of the Kingdom of Heaven, what Krishna explained to Arjuna in the cipher of the *Gita*, and that the Buddha taught his disciple Ananda, while remaining silent on such matters when questioned by the profane. From this evidence, we may conclude that an "esoteric" teaching which is talked about is inevitably *ex*-esoteric, or vulgarized. It is a secret that: has lost its power, although it may still contain faint clues. In a broader sense, the feeling of fitness is such a clue, since if \*lied upon and developed it may attain to a kind of certainty, for which indeed we long. But certainty for us, as for Socrates, begins with admission of ignorance.

We return now to Wendell Berry's essay in *Standing by Words*, to a passage concerned with ignorance:

The trouble, as in our conscious moments we all know is that we are terrifyingly ignorant. The most learned of us are Ignorant. The acquisition of knowledge always involves the revelation of ignorance—almost *is* the revelation of ignorance. Our knowledge of the world instructs us first of all that the world is greater than our knowledge of it. To those who rejoice in the abundance and intricacy of Creation, this is a source of joy, as it is to those who rejoice in freedom. ("The future comes only by surprise," we say, "thank God!") To those would-be solvers of "the human problem," who hope for knowledge equal to (capable of controlling) the

world, it is a source of unremitting defeat and bewilderment. The evidence overwhelmingly suggests—with Genesis—that knowledge *is* the problem. Or perhaps we should say instead that all our problems tend to gather under two questions about knowledge: Having the ability and desire to - know, how and what should we learn? And, having learned, how and for what should we use what we know?

One thing we do know, that we dare not forget, is that better solutions than ours have at times been made by people with much less information than we have. . . .

This is not a recommendation of ignorance. To know nothing, after all, is no more possible than to know enough. I am only proposing that knowledge, like everything else, has its place, and that we need urgently now to *put* it in its place. If we want to know and cannot help knowing, then let us learn as fully and accurately as we decently can. But let us at the same time abandon our superstitious beliefs about knowledge: that it is ever sufficient; that it can of itself solve problems; that it is intrinsically good; that it can be used objectively and disinterestedly. Let us acknowledge that the objective or disinterested observer is always on the side that pays best.

This is a way of arguing that the right decision, in a great many matters that need attention, can never be deferred until all "the facts are in." The complexity of our problems always exceeds the scope of the available facts. Like it or not, that is the nature of human life. What have we then as a guide? We have our sense of propriety, Berry would say, our sense of the fitness of things. All our important acts are in some sense acts of faith. The faith comes from our idea of the way things are, and how the way they are relates to what we think they ought to be. But which things need to be changed? Our things, or the natural order? To what extent have we the right to bend nature to our purposes?

This is the same as asking whether we are conquerors or collaborators. It is asking what we think about the world around us. Is it an accidentally accumulated pile of raw material or a vast natural enterprise with goals and meanings of its own? Are we part of the enterprise, or are we intruders with counter purposes of our own?

These are ethical questions, religious questions, philosophical questions. Happily, they are now questions being asked, although only by those who have already decided that we are collaborators. How are these questions to be made into a more general inquiry, such that they will be more widely faced? We need the questions, not the answers, since the answers are almost entirely on the side of the fitness of things. Precocious answers are always made into doctrines of belief and tend to become dogmas which engender sects. The secret of good teaching does not lie in reciting answers, but in nudging people toward independent discovery. The good teachers never give more than half or quarter answers, since complete answers immediately become something else, eventually distractions in forms of double ignorance. Teaching intended as a stimulus to growth—which is obviously what we need—requires addition, interpretation, independent thinking on the part of the learner. Socrates was an expert in this art, based upon the solid foundation of his understanding of ignorance.

Others have been good at it, too. In a paper in defense of Ortega y Gasset, in the journal, *Aesthetic Education* (October, 1969), Robert McClintock gives attention to this rule, saying:

Culture gods notwithstanding, neither the medium nor its emissions are the message; information theory has confirmed what careful writers long have known: in reality, not in intention, the message sent proves to be neither more nor less than the meaning received. Such a message is educative neither by virtue of what its sender asserted nor of the means by which it was sent, but rather by virtue of its recipient's need to exercise beneficially his intellectual capacities in receiving its meaning. A communication is educative because it exercises the interpretive power of a person in such a way that his capacity to receive meanings is increased. A communicator can easily subvert or ignore—and thus damage—the interpretive powers of his audience. He may try to compel a particular interpretation, against his followers' better judgment, by using various nondiscursive suggestions. He can try to prevent a significant interpretation by insisting that his words

mean exactly and only what he wants them to mean. Or finally he can remove occasion for interpretation by giving a bland summation of a complete, closed system that is readied for rote recital by passive readers. All such communication is diseducative, because no matter how persuasive, entertaining, or informative it may be, it degrades the recipient's intellect by habituating him to distrust his interpretive powers. . . . Ortega's writing gained its pedagogical power from his determination to respect the intelligence and intellect of his audience.

This is the method of all real teachers, who address individuals, not organizations or orthodoxies.

## *REVIEW*

### PLAN FOR COMMUNITY

BOOKS written with the intention of being popular, in the hope that the ideas presented will take hold of and affect human decision, often serve as litmus papers, or thermometers, or weather vanes of public opinion. Reformers of the nineteenth century were almost to a man socialists of one sort or another. The spectrum of proposals ranges from the Communist Manifesto of 1848 to Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, published in 1888. Also included were dozens of plans for communitarian communism which in many cases were carried beyond the proposal stage to practical adventures on the land, some of which soon failed while others lasted for years, undergoing various changes. Those founded with a religious inspiration seemed to have more staying qualities than the secular groups which relied on economic conceptions as their foundation.

Today, after a century of such social experiments, the conception of collectivist organization in behalf of economic justice no longer excites and inspires. It isn't that people looking for ways out of our present mess remain capitalist in conviction, but they have reached the conclusion that state capitalism—which is what applied socialism turned out to be—is no improvement on our present arrangements. "Pluralism" is the vague preference of most present-day advocates of change, although this term suggests a backward-looking view because our hopes for a better future involve so much more than choosing some system of political economy. Today reformers or would-be reformers are much more concerned with how to get rid of the state instead of defining its appropriate form. The question is rather: What should be the relation of a human society with the planet we inhabit, to the earth which is our host? Since political economy, whether capitalist or socialist, has been the instrument leading to disaster after disaster, we now tend to agree with

Thoreau that the best government is the least government and wonder how to reduce its importance in our lives, and thereby its power.

A recent book embodying some of these ideas is Charles Mauch's *Too Much of Everything* (Moderation Press, P.O. Box 741955, Dallas, Texas 75374-1955), which the author subtitles "A plan for living better without wealth or excessive material possessions." The bulk of the book is given to describing the practical arrangements for a community on the land—about a thousand acres with about 680 people, 320 adults and 360 children. The site, which is to be purchased with money raised by the founders, is to have (if possible) 500 acres of farm land, 300 in pasture, the rest partly wooded and partly open, the terrain to be gently rolling hills with a moderate climate. The initial problems are to be considered by committees which will define the undertaking in all major particulars and decide what to do. Practical questions are considered in detail. In these respects the plan resembles the preliminary definitions of nineteenth-century communitarian enterprise, adding special consideration to desirable personal freedom and the right to leave the community with reimbursement for one's original investment.

Why should people want to undertake an experiment of this sort? Essentially, the author suggests, because so many are dissatisfied and unhappy with the way things are. He begins his introduction:

This book is addressed to all the little cogs in the great American Business Machine who perform essentially pointless tasks with little or no enthusiasm to earn always-too-small paychecks to buy inferior goods to sustain a lukewarm existence in an all-encompassing economic system that supports an exceedingly mediocre society.

One need not be a great sage to perceive the multiple deficiencies, the vast aridity, the profound futility of our present economic system and the society dependent upon it, and that it is getting worse, not better. If we are to make all we can of our lives—and obviously we can make much more of them than this, infinitely more—it is high time to begin. If we

are to rise above this banality and achieve true freedom, along with its risks and responsibilities; if we are to achieve personal dignity and a sense of individual worth; if we are to reach our true human potential without exploiting others; if we are to find a process that will enable to live in peace and be free, and a way to make it happen—then we had best get about it.

The author is himself tired of responding to the compulsive need to have more "things"—a demand which is never satisfied and will never go away—and he is convinced that a substantial number of middle class Americans (who have the resources to try another way of life) feel about as he does. He says:

In the last few years I've talked with many, many thoughtful people who are very worried about our country. Not about inflation, foreign policy, taxes, corruption, pollution, all the usual long list of concerns, but the very bedrock, the free enterprise system itself. Discussion groups, individuals neighbors, friends, guys at the office. I've read about these same concerns in books, magazines, and newspapers. A lot of ordinary people are beginning to wonder what's going to happen.

Most of us have more than we need, more than enough, more than we can possibly use, but must keep on consuming more to generate jobs, the opportunities, and the ever-expanding GNP that the system requires. There finally must come a time when we can't keep it up, it will become physically impossible, and surely we are nearing that point. The forced consumption, the frivolous gadgetry, the waste and greed and crazy value system—it confuses us, we can't reconcile it with our spiritual life, our deep-down feeling that it's wrong; our desire is to live well but modestly, or at least not like—this. . . . Even many of those who are able to cope with the system quite well aren't sure it's worth the sacrifice to stay in the fast lane, and are beginning to slip back in the pack with the also-rans. Why fight it? It's a merry-go-round, all music and lights and mirrors and noise, with no destination at all. They are beginning to want off.

Want off for what? What do these awakening souls really long for? The answer must be that they are far from sure; that they want something more inwardly satisfying than the pursuit of material goals, which has turned out to be a

meaningless race. Satiety is only momentary. We grow skeptical before it is reached, making the game not worth the candle.

The author chooses the self-actualization of A. H. Maslow as an end worth striving for. He summarizes Maslow's psychology, describes the "hierarchy of needs," which distinguishes between deficiency-needs and being-needs, suggesting that fulfillment of being-needs is the only way to realize the dignity of man. He says:

We have in essence cut off the top of Maslow's hierarchy and established the lower level items—the physiological needs, safety and security—as our highest goals. All the truly important things—love and belongingness, family, self-respect, and especially self-actualization—have been sacrificed and ignored in our mad scramble after the least valuable ones. As one might expect, the results have been truly disastrous. This odd preoccupation with base matters and neglect of higher things has been the primary factor in creating the American paradox.

It is difficult to fault anything this writer says so far as diagnosis is concerned. He speaks to our condition. He hopes that his plan for community will be a basic remedy, a pattern for others of like mind. But there is a side to Maslow's thinking which may not have had sufficient attention in developing a counter-ideal to our materialistic pursuits. That is the matter of *role* adopted by the self-actualizers. They all, Maslow suggested, are profoundly concerned with interests beyond themselves. They labor unselfishly for causes, quietly perhaps, but consistently. In his later essays Maslow often used the term *Bodhisattva*, meaning, in Buddhist philosophy, the rare soul who, having completed his human development rejects the reward of Nirvana, or perfect bliss, in order to remain with the suffering world to do what he can for those who have not yet liberated themselves. This, we might say, is a Promethean conception of the meaning of being human. We are here to work for the welfare of others, as did the Titan god. That is a task which, like the acquisition of goods, is never done, yet work which enables us to hold up our heads with self-respect while we are doing it.

This idea of universal service, shorn of sentimentality and egoistic posturing, may be the motivation which has the strength to alter the prevailing pattern of our society into one that will actually work, without needing careful planning, whether political or economic. Community would naturally result from application of this attitude, with even adverse circumstances counting for little.

In the critical portion of his book, Mr. Mauch gives close attention to the modern corporation, making it a symbol of our way of doing things. Curiously, he finds that the corporation's basic purpose is the same as what recent studies have shown to be the purpose of all institutions—self-perpetuation.

Back in the days when there really was a shortage of all kinds of material goods and more production was urgently needed, the corporation was found to be an excellent means for achieving this end. But then an unforeseen thing began to happen—the corporations were *too* effective, made more and more of everything until society had all that it needed and then some, but the corporations couldn't stop producing, they had to keep making more and more and society had to keep buying it, whether it was needed or not. . . . To increase demand, you create markets. Invent the concept of consumerism, use it up and throw it away and buy another one, don't repair it. . . . We have geared our entire way of life to the perpetuation of this absurd cycle of production and consumption and are constantly exhorted by the Learned Authorities to produce *more*, and consume *more*, to make the good life even better, despite the multiple deficiencies of the entire system. . . .

Quite evidently, Mr. Mauch's criticism is a model of maturity and common sense. Whether the same can be said of his plan for a community remains to be seen. In the limited experience of the reviewer, the only communities which have actually worked have been extremely modest associations of a few people who got together, not to live "the good life," but in order to do more efficiently and economically something that the members felt needed to be done. Since the mechanics of living together became in this way of little importance, there were no quarrels, and

when friction occurred they soon found some lubricant that worked. One may doubt that such things can be planned in advance.

## *COMMENTARY*

### THE RIGHT TO DECIDE

THE qualified recommendation of a proper ignorance by several of those quoted in this week's lead article—especially that of the chemist, Erwin Chargaff, who speaks of science having "transgressed a barrier that should have remained inviolate" (see page 2)—made a passage in Jacob Bronowski's posthumous book, *A Sense of the Future*, in which we have been reading lately, stand out because of its opposition to this view. Bronowski goes so far as to call the scientist who dares to suppress, on moral grounds, some discovery he has made, a "maniac," a madman to suppose that he has the right to deprive the world on his own judgment of the potentialities of what he has found out. It is society's right to determine the value and use the discovery, he says, not the right of the discoverer.

While Bronowski was among the most brilliant mathematician-scientists of our epoch, we think that he was completely wrong in this judgment. After all, when he says "society," he is actually speaking of the modern nation-state, and when it comes to decision-making at this level, the "people" are seldom given opportunity to speak in behalf of "society," but remain unable to influence the secret decisions of political leaders and the military. Our actual society had nothing to say about the atom-bombing of Hiroshima.

Moreover, Bronowski seems to have given no attention to the historical record in matters of this sort. What might he have said about the German physicist, Otto Hahn, discoverer of the secret of uranium fission in 1939, who refused on his own judgment to put this secret at the disposal of the Nazis, who then represented the "society" of Germany? Was Hahn a "maniac" or a responsible human being as well as a distinguished scientist?

The record goes back much further in Western history—to Leonardo da Vinci, for one, who was the capable inventor of destructive

devices used in war, but then decided that the rulers—practically robber barons—in the Italy of his time could not be trusted to use these infernal machines wisely, so he stopped making them. Then, after World War II, the American scientist, Norbert Weiner, refused to open to military designers his research bearing on "guided missiles," explaining that their use would mean "only to kill foreign civilians indiscriminately," while giving "no protection whatever to civilians in this country." Will anyone dispute that these individual decisions proved far better than the opposite decisions of the "societies" of our time?

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### CHILD LIFE IN YELLOW SPRINGS

PEOPLE who live in big cities—and most of us now do—may need occasional reminders of what community life used to be like, and, here and there, still is, as in the case of the town described by Shirley Mullins in the September-October 1984 *Community Service Newsletter*. She begins with a story—a conversation she had while waiting for a bus. After some talk with a man who was also waiting, he said: "You must be from out-of-town."

"Yes, I live in a small village in southern Ohio—just 4,000 people."

"God! What do you do? How do you stand it?"

I smiled to myself as the gentleman ran to board the bus. Poor soul. I would have bought him a cup of coffee and told him about life in Yellow Springs, Ohio. . . .

Some folks call this beautiful spot. an artistic colony, a writer's mecca, a safe place to raise a family, and so forth. It all depends on your point of view. In our case, we came to the Village in 1963. That makes us still "new blood" in the eyes of the oldtimers. My husband had decided to leave university teaching and return to the elementary school classroom. That was our first tip-off that Yellow Springs was special. What other small, private alternative school would hire a teacher with a B.A. from Yale, an M.A. from Harvard and a Ph.D. from the University of Iowa to teach its youngsters? "Children must be important to these folks," I thought. After twenty years in this remarkable place, I can tell you that *children* and *education* are the center of their universe.

Our family remains in Yellow Springs for many reasons. Our school-community educational system is an important part of the picture. The boundaries between school and home are pleasantly blurred. Teacher-parent conferences are frequently held at the fruit and vegetable counter of the local supermarket. A teacher giving a unit on almost any topic can find a resource person right in town, someone who will come into the classroom and share his experiences. "Yes, my grandmother was a slave. She escaped by way of the underground railroad not far from here."

"Yes, my family was interned in a camp for Asian-Americans out in California after Pearl Harbor." Many nationalities are present with dozens of languages and cultures available for sharing through the classroom and community activities.

Our highschool students win top awards in various fields and are accepted into the finest schools in the country. This year our student population of 250 produced eight national merit finalists! . . . Students in our schools are allowed to be human beings. Children who get into trouble can find help. They can make mistakes and overcome their problems. . . . Our younger children can bike any place they want to go in ten minutes or less. They can go alone to the public swimming pool when they turn eight, which serves as a local "rite of passage." . . .

I telephoned a friend who writes children's books to suggest an idea for a story. Our school piano has an ingenious mouse who built a condominium for his family inside the action. He used felt from inside the piano to build his home, topping it off with magnetic tape from the recorder. The elementary children would squeal with delight whenever the mouse would appear during our rehearsals!

Another joy of our community is that children, adolescents, young adults, and older people communicate. Age lines are blurred and offer no obstacle to friendship. Our young musicians play for the Senior Citizens, the Nursery School and the Children's Medical Center. . . .

It sounds like Utopia, doesn't it? Well, it's not. We have problems just like everyone else. Our families suffer through divorces, child neglect, alcoholism, suicide and all the other human problems abounding in the 1980s. But in our village no one has to suffer alone.

"How do you stand it?" the man asked. "I wish I could have told him," the writer says at the end. "I wonder if he would have understood."

How did Yellow Springs come to preserve the qualities of community life? A reading of Arthur Morgan's books would help to supply an answer. He lived there from about 1921 until he died at ninety-seven in 1975. His life shows how much a person can do for community if he thinks about it and is resourceful. Morgan's books are available from Community Service, Inc., Box 243, Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387.

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If you are tired of being a "consumer" and decide to get out of that category and live another sort of life, since you will still eat, need at least some clothes, and require a place to live, the advertising and marketing fraternity will still locate you on the scale of buying inclinations. For these experts you will be a consumer until you die. Even if you opt for Voluntary Simplicity, you will be classified by Madison Avenue as Integrated and be put on mailing lists with tailor-made appeal, and ads will be placed in the papers you are likely to read.

Summarizing the activities of sophisticated marketeers of this sort in the *Atlantic* for last October, James Atlas writes at the end of a long article ("Beyond Demographics"):

How will these attitudes affect business in America? Some changes are visible already: a preference for low-tar cigarettes, decaffeinated sodas, foreign cars, low-alcohol beers and wines. But products are products, and there's no indication that the "graying counterculturalists" . . . will be spending any less. The "bottom line," according to the VALS introductory brochure, is "how to apply values and life-style information in marketing, planning, product development, and other areas of business"—in other words, how to get across the message that it's okay to be a consumer again.

What does VALS mean? Early in his story Mr. Atlas explains that these letters mean the various "consumer types" identified by the Values and Lifestyles Program of SRI International, formerly the Stanford Research Institute, in Menlo Park, California.

Devised by a group of market-research analysts associated with the Institute, the VALS typology divides Americans into nine life-styles or types, which are grouped in four categories, based on their self-images, their aspirations, and the products they use. Survivors and Sustainers are in the Need-Driven category, which accounts for 11 per cent of the population; I-Am-Mes, Experientials, and the Societally Conscious are in the Inner-Directed category, 19 per cent of the population; Belongers, Emulators, and Achievers . . . are in the Outer-Directed category, 68 per cent of the population; and

at the very top of the VALS hierarchy are the last type, the Integrates, a mere two per cent of the population.

The people at Stanford who work in the Stanford Research Institute regard themselves as on the side of the angels. Mr. Atlas relates:

On the wall of every staff member's office is a framed copy of the VALS "Mission Statement":

"The mission of the VALS program is to exert a positive and creative force in the evolution of American culture. VALS aims to do this by acquiring, disseminating, and applying insights into how values can aid institutions and individuals to operate in a more humane, productive, responsive, and ethical way." . . .

VALS, then, is more than a market-research outfit; it's a credo, an aesthetic, a way of interpreting contemporary life.

Here one recalls an article by a California teacher, a few years ago, deploring the way readers for the early grades focus on buying and spending as the common denominator which permits a book for first and second year children to have a market all over the country. Having a national market for children's texts keeps production costs down. Nothing in them with regional interests—only going to the store and buying, which everybody does. And now, at the "post-graduate" level, researchers at Stanford are confirming that buying is the most important thing to study—the best way to "exert a positive and creative force in the evolution of American culture." So not just the grade schools, but the universities—at least in the case of Stanford—have adopted the market system as a primary article of faith. This is of course what Wendell Berry and John Holt have in effect been charging for more than ten years.

## *FRONTIERS* An Epic Life

How did Richard St. Barbe Baker, first called the "man of the Trees" by Lowell Thomas, actually acquire this title? Where did he come from? What did he do throughout the ninety-two years of his life?

These questions are properly answered by Paul Hanley—a farmer and writer who lives in Saskatchewan—in the *Structurist*, an annual edited by Eli Bornstein of the University of Saskatchewan, for 1983-1984 (a double issue). Hanley, who met St. Barbe in 1975 in a Saskatchewan tree nursery, tells his story.

Born in England in 1889, the son of a preacher and nurseryman, St. Barbe was trained as a landscaper and gardener. At age seventeen, lured by the promise of frontier adventure, he sold his fourteen beehives, bought a passage for Saskatchewan, and established a homestead near Saskatoon.

St. Barbe's early experiences on the prairies had an important effect on his tree sense, but it was Africa that molded his vision. . . . Following graduation from forestry school [in England, where he had come after being wounded in World War I] and a short stint as a lecturer, St. Barbe joined the Colonial Service as Assistant Conservator of Forests in Kenya and, later, Nigeria. It wasn't long before he realized that the role of conservator was to supervise the plunder of the African forest. . . . The great Sahara, five million square miles of wasteland, was eating relentlessly at the heart of Africa, not only unchallenged but abetted by the Colonial Service. He responded to the challenge with characteristic creativity, enlisting the help of local chiefs and elders in a reforestation project through a dance to celebrate the spirit of the trees. In Kenya everything from seeding to harvest began with a dance, so he offered prizes of a fatted bullock to the best-dressed warrior and a string of beads to the fairest maiden. At the appointed time three thousand warriors arrived at his camp accompanied by nine thousand friends and relatives—twelve thousand forestry workers. The volunteers were called *Watu wa Miti* (Men of the Trees) and they promised before the high God to protect and plant trees each year. In time many hostile tribes were united through the planting of several million trees under their motto *Twahamwe*

(Pull Together). That was the beginning of the Men of the Trees, later to become an international organization with affiliates in more than one hundred countries.

His life thereafter was to organize the planting of trees throughout the world—some twenty-five billion of them, according to an estimate by his friends. In 1929 he formed the Men of the Trees in Palestine, starting forty-two nurseries which eventually produced a hundred million trees. In New Zealand he drew up plans for what became the largest man-made forest in the world, and later launched a successful orange orchard in Australia. When he came to America in 1930, Dial Press published his first book—on his adventures in Africa, called *Men of the Trees*. In time he would write thirty books on trees and treeplanting. He called the California redwoods "the supreme achievement of tree growth" and said of the largest of them all (the General Sherman):

The wood contained in the trunk alone would be enough to build three hundred bungalows. There is as much timber in this tree as is found in twenty acres of pine forest. It would require ninety railway cars and three engines to move the trunk alone. The total weight . . . is over six thousand tons. Just think of it, this mammoth tree, sprung from a tiny seed, smaller than the head of a match. Let us stand in awe and wonder.

He inspired President Roosevelt to include tree planting in the CCC program: "in nine years of operation his CCC employed six million men and had planted two billion trees!" In St. Barbe's book, *Sahara Challenge*, he pointed out that two million square miles of the desert had once been fertile farmland which could be reclaimed by the planting of trees. "In the desert, trees could grow from eight-inch seedlings to eighteen-foot trees in three years, without irrigation, creating a microclimate suitable for growing grains and fodder." Paul Hanley says:

The surge of ecological consciousness in the past two decades has added even greater relevance to St. Barbe's experience and vision. With the new environment movement has come wider acceptance of

traditional wisdom, which often is able to articulate what science has only recently begun to verify in the fields of ecology and physics.

St. Barbe did not oppose resource development and always stressed conservation rather than preservation, believing that wise management would ensure a perpetual yield of natural resources. He opposed clear-felling and supported selective cutting and especially reforestation as the key to continuous supplies of forest products. Similarly, he regarded monoculture food production and schemes to increase productivity through forest clearing, massive irrigation projects, and intensive use of agricultural chemicals, as unscientific. He advocated a garden culture that emphasizes poly-culture, tree farming, and human scale technologies as the only sustainable agricultural system and the key to an ever-advancing civilization. . . .

In India he had for several years played an important part in the Chipko (tree hugging) movement. Chipko is an epic struggle, spanning three centuries, by villagers of northern India to protect the Himalayan forests from destruction by logging interests; hugging the trees, the Chipko villagers place themselves between the axe and the bark. . . .

At ninety-one, in 1981, he visited China, where he saw the maturing stand of pines grown from seed he had sent there in 1943. China was for him a forester's dream come true: "thirty-two million Chinese were employed full-time in forestry work, tree cover had been increased from seven to twenty-eight per cent, and a 'great green wall of China' was holding back the desert." Today six hundred million Chinese have pledged themselves each to plant five trees annually—three billion a year!

In 1982 he toured the United States, planting trees with little children, and in June he returned to Saskatchewan to encourage the establishment of a school of deep ecology at his Alma Mater, the University. He was confined to a wheel chair, but he came. He died on June 9 and was buried at the foot of a tall tree.

A debt is owed to the *Structurist* for publication of this fitting tribute to the Man of the Trees. The rest of this magazine devoted to art

and nature—itself a major achievement in the graphic arts—is of similar quality. MANAS editors find it a source of exquisite material in both text and illustration. The address is *The Structurist*, Box 378, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada S7N 0W0. Double issues are \$18.50.