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A MATTER OF TASTE

LAST spring—in MANAS for May 2—we quoted a passage from Arnold Simoni's *Crisis and Opportunity*, in which he said:

> My car is freedom, mobility, and power, and it is all these things on my terms because the variety of cars on the market is such that I was able to buy one exactly suited to my personality. Of course my car and I can be said to embody freedom and power only when we are considered in isolation, and this isolation ends the moment I have to pull up to a gas pump. For in buying gas I am putting myself in thrall to the oil companies, the tanker companies, the OPEC cartel, and various governments foreign and domestic—an expenditure of independence heavy enough to bankrupt a hermit. There is at least one other institution in this case: the institution that uses me as it will for eight hours every working day. In return it provides me with the money to buy the gas to run the car in which I roll down the highway like a king at his ease, one hand on the wheel, one elbow out the window, the very epitome of power and independence and regal self-expression. But where is the highway that will take me out of the empire of the institution? . . . Thanks to the car I can wake up in the same motel room with the same headache in a thousand places across America, and always, with the conviction that I might as well have stayed home. My car is in fact a sort of toy, a consoling simulation of the freedom and power I don't really have.

The rhetoric is splendid, the argument valid—valid, that is, if you have hermit tendencies—but the human reality is that a great many Americans would be delighted to exchange their colorless pedestrian lives for Mr. Simoni's transient existence in motel rooms. For them this would be travel and adventure. Is there, indeed, any persuasion that would cure Americans of wanting cars? None, it seems sure, except unaffordability, and that would be no cure, but the substitution of an obsessive longing. A subordinate point would be that it is psychologically necessary to have what you want, before you can arrive at the maturity of no longer wanting it. Gandhi understood this well. He believed with all his heart in simplicity of life, practiced it, preached it, but when a friend, Richard Gregg, asked his advice, saying, "I have a greedy mind and want to keep my many books," Gandhi replied:

> Then don't give them up. As long as you derive inner help and comfort from anything, you should keep it. If you were to give it up in a mood of self-sacrifice or out of a stern sense of duty, you would continue to want it back, and that unsatisfied want would make trouble for you. Only give up a thing when you want some other condition so much that the thing no longer has any attraction for you, or when it seems to interfere with that which is more greatly desired.

There are a lot of arguments in behalf of the simple life, these days. Among those who hear them and seem to be persuaded are persons who would like to be fashionable, but this motivation is neither substantial nor lasting. The main problem lies in the question: Is desire conversant with reason? What is it about desire that shuts out rational criticism? But even if we are able to answer this question, it doesn't make us more persuasive, but more likely will lead to long silences in what was once animated dialogue. Yet surely advocating simplicity and presenting sound reasons for it cannot be wrong. It is right when it is general; likely to be wrong when it is personal. In short, the argument for simplicity is never a political argument unless the people addressed already heartily believe in it on principle and are practicing it in their lives. And *they* are least in need of arguments. When there are enough of them they don't even need any politics.

The rock-bottom obstacle to success in preaching simplicity to other people is the fact that the goals sought by those who adopt a simple life are different from the conventional goals pursued by most people. Simplicity, for the great majority, means deprivation. The good life, they say, is the "more abundant life," and that means being able to

get what you want. This view has roots that go deep into American history. In his classic essay, "What Then Is the American, this New Man?" (*American Historical Review,* January, 1943), Arthur Schlesinger said: "The fact is that, for a people who recalled how hungry and ill-clad their ancestors had been through the centuries in the Old World, the chance to make money was like the sunlight at the end of a tunnel. It was the means of living a life of human dignity." Unhappily, in the course of two hundred years this has come to mean, "The more money, the more dignity, a proposition difficult to disprove, even with evidence. Where will you look for examples of dignity without money? Yet they exist. The life of the Amish farmer has both dignity and productivity and, of course, some money, but making money and acquiring things are only a means and a by-product for him. He is more of a curiosity than a model for other Americans. Yet the experience of seeing what the Amish accomplish—what their simplicity (and other qualities) do for them—may excite a little envy along with respect. Knowing about the Amish is not likely to inspire one to go and do likewise, but it will put into the memory bank, the association network, the picture of people who have something that we seem to lack, and who found simplicity an essential part of getting it. (The language of "getting" may be all wrong but the facts it represents are undeniable.)

So, for this reason, the example of the Amish, while limited in application and effect, is worth looking at. For this we turn to an essay (1981) by Wendell Berry, "Seven Amish Farms," in *The Gift of Good Land* (North Point Press), about the farms in northeast Indiana operated by an Amish man and his sons. They are all a hundred acres or less. After telling how the Amish work, what they grow, and raise (draft horses), and how the economics works out, Berry says:

> These little Amish farms thus become the measure both of "conventional" American agriculture and of the cultural meaning of the national industrial economy.

To begin with, these farms give the lie direct to that false god of "agribusiness": the so-called economy of scale. The small farm is not an anachronism, is not unproductive, is not unprofitable. Among the Amish, it is still thriving, and is still the economic foundation of what John A. Hostetler (in Amish *Society,* third edition) rightly calls "a healthy culture." Though they do not produce record-breaking "yields" so touted by the "agribusiness" establishment, these farms are nevertheless highly productive. And if they are not likely to make their owners rich (never an Amish goal), they can certainly be said to be sufficiently profitable.

What, on the farm, is the Amish simplicity?

Suppose you farm, not for wealth, but to maintain the integrity and the practical supports of your family and community. Suppose that, the farm being small enough, you farm it with family work and work exchanged with neighbors. Suppose you have six Belgian brood mares that you use for field work. Suppose that you also have milk cows and hogs, and that you raise a variety of grain and hay crops in rotation. What happens to your accounting then?

To start with, several of the costs of conventional farming are greatly diminished or done away with. Equipment, fertilizer, chemicals all cost much less. . . . figure, if you can, the value of the difference between manure and chemical fertilizer. You can probably get an estimate of the value of the nitrogen fixed by your alfalfa, but how will you quantify the value to the soil of its residues and deep roots? Try to compute the value of humus in the soil—in improved drainage, improved drought resistance, improved filth, improved health. Wages, if you pay your children, will still be among your costs. But compute the difference between paying your children and paying "labor." Work exchanged with neighbors can be reduced to "man-hours" and assigned a dollar value. But compute the difference between a neighbor and "labor." Compute the value of a family or community to any one of its members. We may, as we must, grant that among the values of family and community there is economic value—but what is it?

. . . a bushel of corn produced by the burning of one gallon of gasoline has already cost *six times* as much as a bushel of corn grown by Bill Yoder [the Amish farmer]. How does Bill Yoder escape what may justly be called the petroleum tax on agriculture? He does so by a series of substitutions: of horses for tractors, of feed for fuel, of manure for fertilizer, of sound agricultural methods and patterns for the

> exploitive methods and patterns of industry. But he has done more than that—or rather, he and his people and their tradition have done more. They have substituted themselves, their families, and their communities for petroleum. The Amish use little petroleum—and need little—because they have those other things.

There are also individual examples of the practice of simplicity. The Amish learn from their tradition and from each other, but there are those who learn from themselves, and perhaps a book or two. Why, someone may ask, do you look for *shining* examples? The answer is simplicity itself: Because they are more likely to make a dent in the armour of our egoism. Consider Harlan Hubbard, a landscape painter who for years lived in a shanty boat on the Ohio River, then took up residence at Payne Hollow on the Kentucky shore. Why did he and his wife choose life on a shantyboat? The simple answer:

> I had no theories to prove. I merely wanted to try living by my own hands, independent as far as possible from a system of division of labor in which the participant loses most of the pleasure of making and growing things for himself. I wanted to bring in my own fuel and smell its sweet smoke as it burned on the hearth I had made. I wanted to grow my own food, catch it in the river, or forage after it. In short, I wanted to do as much as I could for myself, because I had already realized from partial experience the inexpressible joy of so doing.

After living in his home-made house boat for seven years, sailing as far as the bayou country of Louisiana, the Hubbards settled down at Payne Hollow, building a house "out of rocks and trees." Those seven years are described in *Shantyboat*, published in 1953. *Payne Hollow*, which came out in 1974, tells about the Hubbards' life on the land. Here students from a nearby college would sometimes visit them:

> Having heard that a couple are living in Payne Hollow on their own, experimenting with a self-sufficient and independent life such as they desire themselves, they come to see how we are making out. Some are enthusiastic and interested enough to ask many questions. Others, the more radical in their views, seem disappointed, even hostile. We wonder about this attitude. It is not caused by lack of sympathy on our part. Perhaps our unspectacular way seems too much of a compromise to these zealots, who would fashion a rough life with more of the bark left on. Contentment, tolerance, order, some degree of comfort and neatness—such notions belong to the establishment.

Visitors also want to know how they manage financially.

> Since I do not work at a paying job, and seem never to have done so, it is assumed that we have a private income or public support. This is not so. The small amount of money we need dribbles in from here and there. We are used to "littling along." . . . The house back in town is still rented, a few paintings are sold, something has been set aside for a rainy day. The secret is, spend little and you will have plenty. How much does one need to live on? As much as one has, I say. The first requirement is faith—plus imagination, freedom from prejudice, habit and public opinion; simple tastes and inexpensive pleasures. We avoid discussion of such matters. Just as healthy people are not concerned about sickness and remedies, those who are truly solvent give little thought to money.

One thing the Hubbards gave up was the outboard motor on their rowboat used for picking up visitors from across the river, a mile wide.

> By its undeniable need for gasoline, a motor is another strand tying you to the city; but the greatest price I have to pay is agony of spirit at its erratic behavior, to start or run properly After a spell of ineffective pulling on the starting cord I feel degraded by what seems a servile relation to it. At the present time I have gone back to rowing, and thus regained my independence.

This comment returns us to Arnold Simoni's sense of peonage in the empire of the oil companies. But aren't there any "things" which do have a liberating effect? Gandhi thought the Singer sewing machine brought liberation to women; what he objected to was the system of machines that enslave. Tools, as others have pointed out, amplify our powers; machines, most of them, confine and reduce the humans who tend them. For inimitable prose on this subject, see Thoreau's *Walden* and his "Life Without Principle," and, in our own day (more or less) *The Search for the Good Life* and *Living the Good*

Life by Scott and Helen Nearing. (We've always preferred the first of these two books, mainly because of the title. The other one seems to say, "Look, We're Making It!" although they certainly did.)

Here it seems well to restate the issue of this discussion. A novel of wartime Greece will help. A young Greek woman who came to this country after the war was about to marry an American who worked for some government agency and his employer decided that an investigation of her background (she had fought in the Resistance) was required. During the interview with a counter-espionage agent, who asked about her connection with Communist guerrillas, she tried to explain the motivation of these desperate men and women, then gave up in hopeless frustration, exclaiming, "Oh, you Americans! You cannot possibly understand the Greeks. You regard Miller's play, *Death of a Salesman*, as a tragedy, but a Greek will probably say, 'What on earth was the matter with Willy Loman? He had a refrigerator! He even had a car! Food in plenty! What more could he want?' "

Is there any sort of social engineering that can bring about a change in taste? This is the question that both moralists and reformers—most of them—seem to ignore. They know, or think they know, what would be good for us all. But the good is something that you have to want for itself. Arguments and recommendations are almost useless, and while example sometimes has an effect—if the example is sufficiently impressive to attract our attention—it is common practice to deify or saintify the one who sets it, putting the example conveniently beyond reach. Or we say he is an oddball, a nut. But not everyone does that, so examples remain important.

Thinking about the Amish, Thoreau, Harlan Hubbard, and some others who have achieved simplicity without talking much about it, one may decide that for a great many people the problem is one of distinguishing between symbols and what they stand for. To live a life of sufficiency without excess is what most people really want, or would gladly settle for, but they remain deeply confused by the symbols of sufficiency. Look at the ads in the magazines: they are nearly all pushing things that they say you *need* in order to have a good life. Yet in practice those things add up to excess. They have been made into symbols of the states of feeling that human beings really want. In relation to material things, money is the ultimate symbol because with money you can get all the other "things." It is, as Schlesinger said, "the light at the end of the tunnel."

And now the question becomes: "How much is enough?" Gandhi wrote about this, and also Schumacher. The importance of this question becomes obvious when we reflect that we are living in a world rapidly going bankrupt from continual purchase of more arms for the guarantee of security. Critics point out that the more terrible our arms, the less secure we are, but the arms are symbols of security, much more desirable than what they are supposed to represent. And as de Jouvenel put it years ago, ours is the civilization of *toujours plus*—always more.

Quite evidently, the case for simplicity raises two vitally important questions, or the need for two definitions: What is self-interest? and, What is the meaning and fulfillment of human life?

The first, one could say, is a scientific question. The answer, that is, is obtained from the data of human experience. But how much human experience? What in the short term brings a kind of satisfaction may in the long term bring a train of ills. Barbara Tuchman's *The March of Folly* is a study of this probability for nations, which is now almost a rule. Her book is a recital of the consequences of the short-term policies of government—the larger the government the worse the consequences. There are also studies of short-term action by individuals in psychiatric case studies, in biography, and in personal experience. We get answers from all these studies, if we apply enough intellectual energy to the inquiry. So, as

we said, this is a scientific question requiring the use of reason.

The other question—on the meaning of life—is moral in both character and solution, although reason must also play a part. When you ask what is life's meaning, you ask for a definition of the self. The reasoning part of the answer stops where the idea of the self goes beyond calculation, and this will happen sooner or later. The moral life is little else but continual redefinition of the self. A good, wise, and generous man was once asked by a new acquaintance, "What do *you* get out of it?" The answer he got was, "Stick around and see." There is no use trying to explain decisions which go beyond calculation the terms of explanation have been left behind.

Why do some men live lives of self-sacrifice? You can't really say anything in reply except that, somehow, their idea of self has grown to include practically everyone. Such humans use the rules of self-interest all the time, but as modes of relationships, not of personal acquisition. That is the only way in which sacrifice can be made to count.

The Wisdom of Gandhi in his counsel to Richard Gregg is an illustration. Is altruism, then, no more than enlightened selfishness? Some believe so. Others would say that spontaneous action in behalf of others leaves calculation behind. The self is simply forgotten, and the word "selfishness" then loses its meaning.

Simplicity, as a way of life, as a principle of order, seems a result of both attitudes, sometimes more of one than the other. It ministers to needs in ways that make no disturbance, create no future problems. This is seen as completely sensible when the way it works is understood. When the elements of warmth, friendliness, and consideration for others grow into a strength we marvel at, the other factor is at work. What starts things going in this way, on both counts? Sometimes teaching, sometimes example, but mostly pain. Then comes the acceptance of pain. That is why learning to want simplicity takes so long.

REVIEW
THE GNOSTIC TEACHERS

THOMAS (styled Didymus, the twin) was one of the twelve apostles, later honored as a saint, of whom little is said in the Gospel narratives, save that he was devoted to Jesus but skeptical of the resurrection until the Master's reappearance convinced him of both the spiritual reality and the divinity of the risen Lord. So goes the Christian record. In later tradition, Thomas was said to have traveled to Parthia (Persia) and India as a missionary. An ancient book in Syriac, *The Acts of Thomas,* perhaps written by the Gnostic teacher, Bardesanes, has been called "one of the most remarkable pieces in Syriac literature." Little has been known of Gnostic teachings save for what was said of them in attacks by early Christian writers, but after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (Qumran) in 1947, and of the treasure trove of Gnostic manuscripts found near Nag Hammadi in Egypt at about the same time, there has been a much better understanding of their ideas, which were pre-Christian as well as post-Christian.

The occasion for speaking of these things is publication by Harper & Row of two books about the Gnostics. One is *Gnosis* (1983) by Kurt Rudolph, a German scholar (translated by Robert McLachlan Wilson), making 411 pages; the other is *The Gospel According to Thomas,* a rendition of a Nag Hammadi text edited by A. Guillaumont, Henri-Charles Puech, and other scholars—a bare 59 pages giving both the Coptic script and an English translation. The Rudolph book is $24.95, the Thomas Gospel $9.95. Having the two at the same time is a great advantage, for we should hardly know what to say about the Gospel without Rudolph as a guide. Publication of Thomas's Gospel in advance of a much larger edition to come is explained by both public and scholarly interest in a document by one of the disciples of Jesus. There is, moreover, a large number of readers who seem always glad to discover material critical of orthodox Christianity, some of whom find Gnostic teachings in key with current feminist contentions. We should say that the *Gospel,* which can easily be read in half an hour, has in it many passages familiar to those who know the New Testament, and in the back are four pages of parallels between these "sayings of Jesus" and Biblical passages. The reader of Rudolph soon comes to trust his impartiality and scholarly accuracy, feeling that he can be relied upon for information about a subject which has long been obscure and subject to controversy. A passage by Rudolph serves well as introduction to the reading of Thomas:

> . . . the gnostic theologians brought about a division of the Christian redeemer into two completely separate beings, namely the earthly and transitory Jesus of Nazareth and the heavenly and eternal Christ, and thereby created one of the most remarkable pieces of gnostic teaching. In this way it was possible to appoint the Christian redeemer for several tasks in the gnostic systems.
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> First of all Jesus is the revealer and proclaimer of gnostic wisdom, usually in the form of secret traditions which he imparts to his elect, often through the mediation of privileged disciples like Peter, James, John or Thomas, or in response to their questions. . . . Several documents finally, for example the Secret Book of John, affirm that the heavenly Christ appeared to one of the disciples in a vision and imparted to him the content of the document in question. No limits are set to the fantasy of this "apocryphal," i.e. "hidden" literature; it serves to sanction the gnostic doctrine as "true" Christianity over against the claims of the Catholic Church. The Gospel of Thomas presents the ancient material of the sayings and parables of Jesus in a gnostic interpretation and adds new material of the same sort. The superscription gives succinct expression to both claim and promise: "These are the secret words which the living Jesus spoke and Didymus (twin) Judas Thomas wrote them down and said: 'He who shall find the interpretation of these words shall not taste death'."

There is a further comment on Thomas's work later in Rudolph's volume:

> Texts like the Gospel, which accepts the ethical claims of the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' parables of the Kingdom of Heaven (indeed making them more demanding in places) and at the same

> time appeals to the sympathetic understanding of the initiated to whom this exegesis of the sayings of Jesus is to be imparted, show that the authors of this literature wished to address themselves to all gnostics. The one-sided reports of the Church Fathers who present only an incomplete picture of extreme developments must not be allowed to hoodwink us. The original texts are the only standard for obtaining a relatively correct view of the life of the community and they certainly offer a good cross-section of Gnosis in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. On these grounds it is remarkable and incompatible with certain older views on Gnosis that in these texts a high premium is placed on the exertions of the gnostic toward the just life and that there are also borrowings from the contemporary literature of wisdom and morality. . . .
>
> Gnosis is a stranger to any legal conception and in this connection has just as sharp an anti-Jewish attitude as Christianity, which led to the smooth adoption of Christian ethical ways of behavior, such as for example manifests itself in the Gospel of Thomas, although we are aware of this also through other sources. The determining fact is the internal motivation, not the external performance of commandments like fasting, prayers, giving of alms or food laws. Jesus replies to his disciples accordingly: "Do not tell lies, and do not do what you hate! For everything is exposed before Heaven. For there is nothing hidden that will not be made manifest, and nothing covered that will not be uncovered."

It is a pleasure to find in Rudolph a defense of Simon Magus, often in the past assumed to be the founder of Gnosticism, who certainly founded a gnostic community in Samaria. Christians claimed he was inspired by the Devil, spreading the story that he associated with a prostitute. But Rudolph says: "The Christian reports about Simon are often either misunderstandings, as in the case of Helena who clearly was only a symbol for the fallen soul which had made its abode in the 'brothel' of the world (perhaps elaborated by literary means as in the Exegesis on the Soul), or they are conscious misrepresentations and slanders to which already the title 'Magus' seems to belong.'

Another charge by the Christians against the gnostics generally was that of Libertinism, which commonly means the leading of a self-indulgent and dissolute life. But for the gnostics liberty meant ascetic withdrawal from worldly and even earthly life. The liberty involved was of the spirit, or *pneuma*. The gnostics believed that Jehovah was a second-rate creator who made a bad world fit only to be left behind. Rudolph explains:

> The whole idea revolves around the conception of the pneuma as the noble privilege of a new kind of man who is subjugated neither by the obligations nor the criteria of the present world creation. The pneumatic in contrast to the psychic is *free* from the law—in a quite different sense from that of the Pauline Christian—and the unrestrained use of this freedom is not just a matter of negative license but a positive realization of this freedom itself. . . . as to the question whether this attitude was the oldest put into the arena by Gnosis the sources have not yet supplied the answers. It is at any rate striking that thus far no libertine writings have appeared even among the plentiful Hammadi texts.

Who were the gnostics and what were their teachings? First of all, as Rudolph shows, some of them were non- or pre-Christian, whose ideas indicate an Eastern or Iranian dualism. Most of the gnostic texts were written in Greek, showing Platonic or Neoplatonic currents of thought, and perhaps Kabalistic influence. Hermetic themes are also evident. The Greek mystery religions played their part, including the Orphic school of the cult of Dionysus. The link of Gnosis with "Christian ideas," Rudolph says, "which began at an early stage, produced on the one hand a fruitful symbiosis which greatly helped expansion, but on the other hand contained a deadly germ to which sooner or later it was to succumb in competition with the official Christian Church." Gnostic ideas were found in many early Christian sects. They had many teachers of distinction, among them Simon, Basilides, Marcion, Valentinus, Marcus, Mani, and Bardesanes. Except for the survival of gnostic teachings in other religious groups (Islam among them), the last of the gnostics were the Catharists and Albigensians, slaughtered by the crusade launched against them by Pope Innocent III in the thirteenth century.

* * *

This seems a good place to quote once more from Henry Miller, by no means a "gnostic" yet a man with two sides, something like Rabelais, and with the same literary tendencies. In the closing pages of *The Colossus of Maroussi*, written in Greece as the war in Europe broke out in 1939-40, he reveals a dualism that gnostics might have liked:

> The greatest single impression which Greece made upon us is that it is a man-sized world. Now it is true that France also conveys this impression, and yet there is a difference which is profound. Greece is the home of the gods; they may have died but their presence still makes itself felt. The gods were of human proportion. They were created out of the human spirit. In France, as elsewhere in the Western world, this link between the human and the divine is broken. The scepticism and paralysis produced by this schism in the very nature of man provides the clue to the inevitable destruction of our present civilization. If men cease to believe they will one day become gods then they will surely become worms. . . .
>
> The light of Greece opened my eyes, penetrated my pores, expanded my whole being. I came home to the world, having found the true center and the real meaning of revolution. No warring conflicts between the nations of the earth can disturb this equilibrium. Greece herself may become embroiled, as we are now becoming embroiled, but I refuse categorically to become anything less than the citizen of the world which I silently declared myself to be when I stood in Agamemnon's tomb. From that day forth my life was dedicated to the recovery of the divinity of man. Peace to all men, I say, and life more abundant!

COMMENTARY
MODES OF PERSUASION

WHILE this week's lead article is titled "A Matter of Taste," an equally accurate designation would be "The Art of Persuasion." It proceeds from quotation to quotation, supplied as examples of different kinds of persuasion, and includes Gandhi's observation to Richard Gregg, a warning about using persuasion on others, trying to get them to take a position or pursue a way of life that they are not at all ready for.

Called for, in short, is review of the Platonic view of rhetoric, which is the instrument of persuasion. Plato is concerned with the question: What sort of rhetoric is *legitimate,* and what sort takes advantage of immaturity and prejudice? Surely persuasion which relies on the latter qualities will in the long term prove an anti-human practice, since, if successful, it leads people to assume false positions which they can't live up to, making them either failures or hypocrites.

To what extent, we might ask, are the established religions or religious organizations guilty of this last offense?

But if preaching virtue has this effect, should we then remain silent on the subject? Serious human beings who have a concern for the common welfare *can't* remain silent in relation to so important a matter. This being the case, what do they say? How do they avoid seeming to be either dull or pretentious moralists?

The best answer to this question is doubtless by illustration, and the best illustrations are likely to turn out to be geniuses—which may be frustrating to the ordinary questioner. Yet geniuses, in fact, are simply people who do well what the rest of us do rather poorly. Why not study them in order to get help?

Who, then, is most successful at the kind of persuasion that we feel is good, necessary, and legitimate? This question is of course an invitation to argument, yet the examples are necessary. Our first choice would be Henry David Thoreau. Has anyone been *more* persuasive than this man? How would you measure Thoreau's inspiration to others? Did it do *anyone* any harm?

We could add to the list—Wendell Berry for one; Scott Nearing, and, say, Ralph Borsodi, were also persons whose lives became models for a great many others. Why were they persuasive?

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
REPORTS FROM CANADA

LAST Spring—April 27—a Canadian paper, *Monday Magazine,* ran a story by Peter Grant on Canadian children living and going to school in Victoria, capital of British Columbia on the island of Vancouver. Three children about twelve, utterly charming, and two teachers, both personable and quoted at length, are illustrated, compelling you to read what they say about the threat of nuclear war. These three, who saw the film, In *the Shadow of Nuclear War,* which shows children talking about it, some of them in tears, gave their reactions, a girl, Karen, speaking first:

> "A lot of people don't talk about it. Parents, teachers don't talk about it." Why not? "Maybe they don't think we're smart enough or old enough to understand yet." Does she have some answers to the threat of nuclear war? "I feel we're old enough to know about it," is all she can say. Asked what they felt when watching the film, Colin says "sad." Tina says, "sad and scared." Karen says, "I felt disappointed that people are doing it. Don't they know what they're doing?"

The writer says:

> Many parents and teachers would rather not talk about it. Nuclear war is just too frightening for young minds, they feel. Some believe that talking about weapons threatens the balance of the arms race by encouraging mindless disarmament. Do we encourage despair by exposing them to the monstrous news of the imminent extinction of much life on earth? Should children simply trust the deterrent power of nuclear weapons and get on with their homework?

The rest of the story is devoted to comments by Canadian teachers, who don't all agree. One says that "clamming up" only represses the fear and makes for trouble. Another says that children "shouldn't be saddled with their parents' fears." He adds that older children should have their questions answered, "but only as far as they're capable of understanding." Most of the quotation from teachers is from Nora Lupton and Larry Dettweiler, who look like people you'd like to have around your children.

> Keeping children happily ignorant of the world's dark side is out of the question to Nora Lupton. She thinks that given the ever-present image of the mushroom cloud, five-year-old children are aware of nuclear bombs. Even before they can conceptualize it, children can feel the threat. "They deal with it in different ways," says Dettweiler. In his course for parents, he always tries to get the message across: children are aware, and they may be developing a distorted concept of the world.
>
> Lupton and Dettweiler draw on ideas of Yale psychiatry professor Robert Jay Lifton about the "psychic numbing" of the nuclear threat. Lifton wrote *Death in Life* after working with survivors of the 1945 Hiroshima blast. In a 1982 article, "Beyond Psychic Numbing: A Call to Awareness," Lifton exposed the "illusion" of security that more and bigger weapons bring; living with the danger requires the "numbing of everyday life."
>
> Alan Clews, a physician whose Victoria practice includes alcohol and drug abuse consulting in both outpatient and inpatient programs, sees families using the same strategies of denial, justification and rationalization that highly-placed government decision-makers resort to. He adds, "If children are not able to get the straight goods from their parents at a young age, it increases their anxiety."

Here the further question is obvious enough: Who knows what are "the straight goods"? Not the parents, surely, nor the teachers, nor, least of all, the government decision-makers. Which points to the conclusion that what the children may or almost certainly will get from their parents is *attitudes,* not properly ordered facts or judgments about them. The world is filled with unanswered questions, with the ones about nuclear war very much in the foreground, today. Moreover, it is now quite evident that ours is not a world which has very many right answers. Only at a low level of affairs are we able to tell the good ideas from the bad ones. Education, one could say, is largely instruction in the reality of this ignorance. And if life, simply in order to continue, requires affirmation, then defining the areas where affirmation is right and appropriate, in contrast to regions where uncertainty should be the rule, is a delicate and necessary operation.

This outlook can be translated into the terms of both young and old, the natural function of good literature. A recent addition to the now enormous

literature on nuclear war, Freeman Dyson's *Weapons and Hope,* is a splendid example. More generally, John Holt's reflections on teaching in his several books are valuable in acquiring the attitude that works well in life and for children:

The concluding portion of Grant's article in *Monday Magazine* seems worth repeating:

> One can't discuss the same grim realities with a six-year-old as with a 16-year-old, Dettweiler stresses. But in both cases feelings come before facts: "It's important for children to know you care about them and that there are a lot of people who care that the world goes on." Dr. Alan Clews agrees: "Lectures are totally useless, like the lecture about the birds and the bees. I don't advocate a heavy talk about nuclear war; it's cruel and pointless. But we have to be honest about our fears. Children are terrifically sensitive to their parents' fears."

Nora Lupton relates a story:

> "An adult who has a child in Grade I told me all the children in this normal-sized Victoria classroom believed they weren't going to grow up—except this one child who said, There's not going to be any war because my daddy goes to meetings. They're going to stop it."

Right or wrong, that seems healthy enough for a six-year-old.

What about higher education in Canada? We have the last April issue of the Canadian Association of University Teachers *Bulletin* which prints some sixteen thousand words on "The Role of Our Universities in the Nuclear Age," by the editor, Helen Baxter, and a colleague. This article says at the beginning:

> On campuses across the country and in national forums, academics and other concerned Canadians are speaking out strongly for a halt to the spiralling arms race. And the urgency of their appeals is attracting academics from all disciplines.
>
> The Canadian Association of University Teachers, at its annual meeting last May, called on the federal government to put pressure on the major powers to end "the development and deployment of weapons of mass destruction." The 26,000-member association urged the government to refuse to participate in the development and testing of any such weapons and their delivery and their delivery systems. It said that the cruise missile should not be tested over Canadian soil.

* * *

In the same mail with a copy of the *Parents' Bulletin* of the School in Rose Valley (School Lane, Moylan, Pennsylvania) we received from a friend the obituary notice of the death of Grace Rotzel, at ninety-four, the founding principal of the School. As a teacher of children, she had practically no rivals. And the school she began and ran for forty years, still going strong, is a monument to her capacity as an organizer of education for children. Happily, the writer of the notice knew all this and devoted more than half his space to an account of the school, which began in 1929, when few people had money for land and buildings. The teachers worked in improvised quarters for years, finally obtaining a site where construction could begin. A reporter said in 1934: "Lawyers, businessmen, scientists, university professors and their wives—they all saw, hammer, and plaster." The notice continues:

> The building project, later supplemented by additions to additions, provided an exceptional educational plant that now houses about 160 students. The main structure is surrounded by outbuildings. In its carpentry shop, everyone—even three-year-olds—still learns to saw and nail. In the yard, pupils scramble up apple trees to huts they made themselves, just as their parents did. In informal class settings, they study the life cycle of toads found in a nearby marsh. Hens and worms, even iguanas, are kept under constant observation.
>
> Field trips offer instruction in the life of the cricket, the turtle, wasp and newt. Early-morning bird walks, ending in cookout breakfasts, are a weekly event in season. All year round there are visits to flour mills, dairies, orchards, museums and seats of learning. Older students raise hens, keep bees, raise wheat, rye and oats, bake bread, make butter, and study the effect of man on his environment.

Miss Rotzel told about the modes of this program in her book, *The School in Rose Valley* (Johns Hopkins Press). "Many things were learned in the process," Miss Rotzel said, "but none more important than to involve parents in every step of the school's work and to help students do what they want in a learning situation."

FRONTIERS

American Reformer, Women in Asia

A REVIEW of the letters of Lydia Maria Child, dating from 1817 to 1880 (in *Dissent* for the Spring of this year) begins:

> Lydia Maria Child was one of the most remarkable American women of the nineteenth century. An author and reformer, she wrote extensively on social and cultural issues, was active in the anti-slavery movement, and supported women's rights. Her literary output was enormous and included novels, children's books, historical-philosophical works, humanitarian tracts, and thousands of letters.

Her relation to the women's movement is of particular interest, leading the reviewer, George M. Frederickson, to say:

> Despite her feminist sentiments, Child did not assume a leading role in the women's rights movement. When some female abolitionists began to agitate for sexual equality during the 1830s, Child held back on grounds that "It is best not to *talk* about our rights, but simply to go forward and do whatsoever we deem our duty. In toiling for the freedom of others we shall find our own." Her willingness to subordinate female emancipation to the cause of black freedom held firm throughout her career as a reformer.

He adds at the end:

> Her final solution was androgynous: "I think every individual, and every society, is perfected just in proportion to the combination, and cooperation, of masculine and feminine elements of character. He is the most perfect man who is affectionate as well as intellectual; and she is the most perfect woman who is intellectual as well as affectionate." The last clause might have been her epitaph.

We read this review a while back, being a little surprised (wrongly, perhaps) to find it in an independent socialist journal. Then, in *Asian Action* for May/June we came across what seemed an interesting parallel to Mrs. Child's views. This issue of *Asian Action,* a publication of the Asian Cultural Forum on Development (G.P.O. Box 2930, Bangkok, Thailand), presents twenty-eight pages on the plight of women in Asia. Most of it is painful to read, but an article on Buddhist women, after describing the status of women in India before the Buddha as "generally of low esteem and without honor," goes on to say:

> During the Buddhist epoch in the 6th century B.C., there was a change. Women came to enjoy more equality, respect and authority than hitherto accorded to them. Although their activities were confined within certain spheres—principally the domestic, social and religious—their position in general began to improve. The exclusive supremacy of man began to give way to the increasing emancipation of women. This movement was fostered by the innate intelligence of the women themselves, until it was acknowledged that they were what they were silently claiming to be—responsible, rational creatures with intelligence and will.
>
> It was impossible for the men, steeped in the Buddhist teaching, not to respond to the constant proof in daily life of the women's powers of devotion, self-sacrifice, courage and endurance. The Buddha preached to both men and women. And in his Dhamma, there is an equality of both sexes, as indeed he recognized no caste as superior in ethical status. Not only did he rebel against the supremacy of the intellectual Brahmin caste, but he also placed men and women on equal terms.
>
> The men, for their part, appreciated the Buddha's teaching, and acquiesced in the widening of the field of women's activities. Thus, the position of women, as manifested in secular affairs, became one which was honorable and esteemed. Women were acknowledged as capable of working as a constructive force in the society of the day. . . . As a widow, she was free from suspicion of ill-omen, and had the possibility of inheriting and managing property. Under Buddhism, more than ever before, a woman was an individual in command of her own life.

Another article in *Asian Action* is on the status of women in Burma, a Buddhist country. It begins:

> Women in most Asian countries have to fight for equality with men, especially on matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance. But women in Burma enjoy an equal status with men in all matters and in every walk of life. Women receive equal opportunity in education, in economic and professional life and equality in legal status. They work side by side with men ranging from working in the field cultivating paddy which needs, so to say, no

> school education, to clerks, lawyers, nurses, doctors and engineers. . . . They receive equal pay for work of equal value. They receive equal treatment.

Their situation is not "perfect"—in family life they are expected to be humble and submissive to the husband—but their lives are far better and happier than women in most other Asian countries. Moreover,

> In marriage there is no surrender of individual rights of a woman. Divorce is possible and acceptable especially when there is mutual consent. Women have full inheritance rights which are dealt with in accordance with the Burmese law.

Still another *Asian Action* story tells about the women who last year came to Gothenburg, Sweden, to attend a meeting there at the Asia Peace Institute—as guests of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom founded by Jane Addams in 1914.

It is noteworthy, this writer says, "that in the midst of the strident voices of propaganda, bursting bombs and border scrimmages which pervade the uneasy peace in the South East Asia Region, locking nation away from nation, a few women have met together to consider the things that make for peace."

> Women from Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos have quietly sat together to exchange the stories of their lives. They have asserted their opinions to each other in discussions and sharing and have met in a spirit of mutual understanding, friendship and cooperation. These women have found that it is good to come together. That which they hold in common as women—mothers, homemakers, career persons, citizens, concerned people—these loom larger in their lives and horizons than the seemingly insurmountable barriers which divide them. They all want and need the basic materials that make for a quality of life, values and happiness for their children, as well as emancipation and "freedom to be" for themselves. They aspire for their nations—peace, justice, and the opportunity to develop and live in the community of nations.

This article is signed by Ruth Cadwallader, co-field director with her husband of the American Friends Service Committee in Bangkok, and active for the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.