

UNCERTAIN ASSAY

READING in books like Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth*, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful*, journals like *Environment* and *Ecologist*—all chronicles, in varying measure, of the misuse of the planet by human beings, and of one another—it is natural to wonder what hope there may be, and where our best hope lies. One can always find encouraging reports, yet the verdict, "too little and too late," seems an inevitable accompaniment. Where, then, are the most promising of constructive human activities to be found?

In *Nature's Economy* (Sierra Books, 1977), a volume deserving periodic rereading, the author, Donald Worster, provides a definition that raises questions as much as settling them:

ECOLOGY: The branch of biology that deals with interrelationships. The name was coined in 1866 by Ernst Haeckel for his study of the relations between organisms and their environment. But the study of ecology is much older than the name; its roots lie in earlier investigations of the "economy of nature." The major theme throughout the history of this science and the ideas that underlie it has been the interdependence of living things. An awareness, more philosophical than purely scientific, of this quality is what has been generally meant by the "ecological point of view." Thus, the question of whether ecology is primarily a science or a philosophy of interrelatedness has been a persistent identity problem. And the nature of this interdependence is a parallel issue: Is it a system of economic organization or a moral community of mutual tolerance and aid?

While, in his early chapters, Mr. Worster gives close attention to the ideas of Henry David Thoreau—a man whose outlook seemed to typify the union of scientific observation with ethical understanding and responsibility—he also notes the origins in the West of ecological themes in Plato and the Neoplatonists. But while moral science has this heritage, periodically renewed, as by the Cambridge Platonists in the seventeenth century, its influence has been among the few—

the distinguished few who found themselves capable of uniting the scientific spirit with moral insight. Until the middle of this century, scientific inquiry and its technological applications were pursued without moral inhibition, on the vulgarized Enlightenment ground that morals are no more than religious custom and must not be permitted to interfere with the advance of scientific truth. What happened then? Worster says:

The Age of Ecology began on the desert outside Alamogordo, New Mexico, on July 16, 1945, with a dazzling fireball of light and swelling mushroom cloud of radioactive gases. As that first nuclear fission bomb went off and the color of the early morning sky changed abruptly from pale blue to blinding white, physicist and project leader J. Robert Oppenheimer felt at first a surge of elated reverence; then a somber phrase from the *Bhagavad-Gita* flashed into his mind: "I am become Death, the shatterer of worlds." Four years later, although Oppenheimer could still describe the making of the atomic bomb as "technically sweet," his worry about the consequences of that achievement had increased. Other atomic scientists, including Albert Einstein, Hans Bethe, and Leo Szilard, became even more anxiously determined to control this awesome weapon their work had made possible—a reaction eventually shared by many ordinary Americans, Japanese, and other peoples. It was increasingly feared that the bomb—however justifiable by the struggle against fascism—had put into man's hands a more dreadful power than we might be prepared to handle. For the first time in some two million years of history, there existed a force capable of destroying the entire fabric of life on the planet. As Oppenheimer suggested, man, through the work of the scientist, now knew sin. The question was whether he also knew the way to redemption.

One way of settling this problem would be to acknowledge that the work of scientists, not only in the construction of nuclear weapons, has gone on over the heads of the rest of us, so that the work of "redemption" is similarly obscure. How

can people be persuaded to change, first their minds, then their objectives, finally their day-to-day habits?

Another question might be: Are the earthly experiences of humans part of some sort of cosmic curriculum, not exactly designed, yet elements in a rationally understandable scheme? Are there things in which the evolutionary law is attempting to instruct us? Which is to consider the possibility of a natural science of right and wrong. If such a science should be possible, then its laws will be metaphysical, and is it conceivable that the science of physics (and the engineers) will submit to the guidance of metaphysical principles? At present we can hardly imagine how, although the thinking of David Bohm might provide a clue (see his *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*).

In his final chapter Mr. Worster describes the rising tide of ecological concern. By 1958 some leading American scientists united to form the Committee for Nuclear Information, with the intention of informing the public of the dangers in nuclear testing. This meant going counter to government policies and intentions. One begins to see why ecology has been dubbed the "subversive science," and sometimes a revolutionary science. Government, after all, is from one point of view little more than the organization and enforcement of mass habits of thinking, and of grossly collective ways of acting. How could a few scientists turn tendencies with that sort of support around? Yet they tried, and are still doing what they can.

Mr. Worster continues his narrative, showing that biologists—eminent among them Barry Commoner—rallied to the ecological cause. Rachel Carson's book (1962) showed that "the atomic bomb was only the most obvious threat to the sanctity of life." She spoke of the progressive "contamination of man's total environment with such substances of incredible potential for harm—substances that accumulate in the tissues of plants and animals and even penetrate the germ cells to shatter or alter the very material of heredity upon

which the shape of the future depends." Now not only government had reason to be ranged against ecological intelligence, but industry, too, was aroused to minimize Miss Carson's warning and to question her scientific credentials. (See Frank Graham Jr.'s *Since Silent Spring*, Houghton Mifflin, 1970.) Little by little, it began to be evident that our earth is "a terribly fragile place," nature having become "a defenseless victim" of ruthless human enterprise. In 1970, Michael McCloskey, director of the Sierra Club, called for a new kind of revolution which would alter "our values, outlooks and economic organization."

For the crisis of our environment stems from a legacy of economic and technical premises which have been pursued in the absence of ecological knowledge. That other revolution, the industrial one that is turning sour, needs to be replaced by a revolution of new attitudes toward growth, goods, space, and living things.

Mr. Worster develops the implications of this call:

If the overthrow of bourgeois civilization is the historical import of the contemporary ecological movement, it is ironic to find the movement's strongest appeal among the Anglo-American middle class. This has been well noted, with not a little indignation, by the would-be middle classes of the world. Many have asked: Is the message of ecology a sermon on the virtues of poverty, to be heeded only by those who are still have-nots? Can middle-class environmentalists bring off a revolution against their own economic self-interest, or do they in reality mean to enact liberal, pragmatic reforms that will leave the base of the bourgeois culture intact? Is it possible at all, two hundred years after Watts' steam engine, to abandon the Industrial Revolution, or has the chain of events bound us to a self-propelled technology? What would an alternative social order founded on the science of ecology look like—and would the middle class really accept such a world? Perhaps more significantly, would the billions of people living today in relative or absolute scarcity want to live there?

The task, to put it briefly, is to "unsell" all those people on the two-hundred-year-old faith the articulate promoters of our society have been propagating with ever-increasing intensity—"the world view of the aspiring middle class, with its

dedication to technology, unlimited production and consumption, self-advancement, individualism, and the domination of nature."

The project of reform is formidable.

Other books bring into focus the same verdict. One of these—still of first importance—is *Food First* by Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins (Houghton Mifflin, 1977), a study of world food supply which reaches the conclusion that hunger around the world—a hunger that is growing—is not the result of inevitable food scarcity due to population growth and the exhaustion of arable land. The authors say at the beginning of this book of 466 pages—filled with facts—that the real cause of world hunger is the widespread use of food resources for export in order to make money, instead of feeding the population. In summary:

As we studied, read, traveled, and interviewed people, we found that the media-repeated themes of scarcity, guilt, and fear are all based on myths. In fact, we had to learn that:

There is no such thing today as absolute scarcity. *Every country in the world has the capacity to feed itself.* . . . Hunger, in fact, is not the problem at all. Hunger is the symptom of a disease, and we are its victims in much the same way as are the nomads in Mali or peasants in India.

Moreover, we came to see that no society setting out to put *Food First* can tolerate the concentration of wealth and power that characterizes most nations today. . . . food distribution only reflects the more fundamental issue of who controls and who participates in the production process. Thus to accept the challenge of *Food First* is to accept the challenge of confronting the basic assumptions of our present economic system. . . .

What Americans think of as "food-deficit areas" caused by the pressure of over-population are often "food-deficit areas" because much of the food produced goes to small urban elites or is exported. Worst of all, the exports are frequently made in the name of "development."

Here are some food paradoxes to ponder:

Africa is a net *exporter* of barley, beans, peanuts, fresh vegetables, and cattle (not to mention

luxury crop exports such as coffee and cocoa), yet it has a higher incidence of protein-calorie malnutrition among young children than any other continent.

In Mali, peanut exports to France increased notably during the years of drought while production for domestic consumption declined by 1974 to one quarter of what it had been in 1967.

Mexico now supplies the United States with over one half of its supply of several winter and early spring vegetables while infant deaths associated with poor nutrition are common.

Half of Central America's agricultural land produces food for export while in several of its countries the poorest 50 per cent of the population eat only half the necessary protein. (The richest 5 per cent, on the other hand, consume two to three times more than is needed.)

The thing to remember about such reports is not so much the wickedness of the multinationals but the common attitude of people in the advanced or affluent countries—the dedication to "technology, unlimited production and consumption, self-advancement, individualism, and the domination of nature." The multinationals are licensed by these common goals.

Food First, as we said, is filled with facts—facts like the above. Another book of similar merit, Joan Gussow's *The Feeding Web* (Bull Publishing Co., Palo Alto, Calif. 1978), provides many similar facts and accompanying ironies. The author (and editor) begins one section by quoting from Philip Slater: "Americans continually find themselves in the position of having killed someone to avoid sharing a meal which turns out to be too large to eat alone." She says:

We in America have been taught to perceive ourselves as generous, yet as Georg Borgstrom points out (in another chapter), we have remained persistently ignorant of our roles as consumers rather than providers of global food resources. Our self-centered educational system, he writes, has failed to make us all aware of the extent of our dependence upon vast reaches of Asian, African, and Latin American topsoil. When the European population explosion occurred in the middle of the last century, Europeans spread over the globe and began to send

back to Europe the produce of other lands to support the growing population.

"Western man," Borgstrom writes, "commissioned the entire globe for his well-being with little concern until the 1950s for the legitimate needs of the other three fourths of the world's people. . . . It is not yet fully realized by the peoples of the industrialized nations of the West that their high standards of living have been—and in part are continuing to be—achieved by massive exploitation of the world's total resources and a concomitant accumulation of capital." And now that those lands we have exploited are experiencing their own population explosion, we have left them no place to go; even their own croplands and coastal waters are often used to produce foods to meet not *their* legitimate needs, but *our wants*—tuna for cat food, carnations, coffee, cocoa, cotton.

Joan Gussow's book is appropriately subtitled "Issues in Nutritional Ecology." For what her book tells about are the interdependencies of human life. One question, of course, concerns what can be done to change the pattern of exploitation which brings hunger to other parts of the world while we eat well and luxuriously. Frances Moore Lappé and Joan Gussow are doing what they can to throw light on this question. But the deeper question might be to inquire into the attitudes which would have prevented people from blindly going ahead with their "unlimited production and consumption," their "individualism, and domination of nature." Unless other attitudes are adopted—from the bottom up—there can hardly be progress in the right direction.

Such changes start in the home. They grow out of what parents think and talk about, and what they do. Sometimes they begin with the practical revulsion of an entire generation toward the acquisitive standards of the present society. Help comes from good books such as Stewart Udall's *The Quiet Crisis* (1963), which tells the story of conservation in America, starting with Thoreau, then George Perkins Marsh, with attention to John Wesley Powell and John Muir. The more we understand of the ideas of such men, the more likely we are to try to act like them, as we acquire something of their taste. Then, in *Nature's Economy*, Donald Worster gives an account of

how one distinguished American writer acquired his ecological point of view:

The Age of Ecology is a still unfolding phenomenon, and we may be too close to it to have a full sense of all its moral ramifications. But one brief reference may serve to sum up how the interdependence ideal has most recently been used and understood. One of the key figures in shaping this new movement was the late Joseph Wood Krutch, who died in 1971 at the age of seventy-eight. The intellectual conversion that Krutch underwent may stand for a more general trend in Anglo-American culture. In his earliest work, *The Modern Temper* (published in 1929), Krutch announced that in order to attain full development as a human being he must consciously secede from nature. Man seeks individuality, he contended, but nature does not value the quality, indeed penalizes it in the collective struggle for existence. This was a position perfectly in tune with the alienated mood of 1920s intellectuals. Two decades later, however, he made a dramatic about-face, swinging around to the position that mankind's greater problem was not the stifling of selfhood in group-oriented animal life, but rather the lonely, often desperate isolation of modern man from his only companions on earth—the other species. "We are all in this together," he concluded in 1949, not long after he finished writing a biography of Thoreau. Once a rather melancholic humanist, Krutch now became a kind of pantheist or ethical mystic, caught up in the joy of belonging to "something greater than one's self." Reading Thoreau again and again was partly responsible for the radical change in his outlook; the other chief influence was an education in ecological principles. "Every day," he observed, "the science of ecology is making clearer the factual aspect as it demonstrates those more and more remote dependencies which, no matter how remote they are, are crucial even for us." Krutch's tutoring in science confirmed him in an organismic sensibility, partly pragmatic but more fundamentally ethical: "We must be a part not only of the human community, but of the whole community; we must acknowledge some sort of oneness not only with our neighbors, our countrymen and our civilization but also some respect for the natural as well as the man-made community."

Speaking of this ecological ethic of interdependence, Mr. Worster remarks that its moral sensibility must be united with the testimony of science.

Perhaps, too, a quasi-religious conversion, similar to Krutch's, will be needed to open men's eyes to the "oneness" in or beyond nature. . . . Ecological biology, while in general reinforcing certain values more than others, has been and remains intertwined with many of man's ethical principles, social aims, and transcendental ambitions. There is no reason for believing that this science cannot find an appropriate theoretical framework for the ethic of interdependence.

One recalls, here, the historical roots of the ecological outlook in Neoplatonic metaphysics, while recognizing how natural it would be, in this period of philosophic and religious questioning, for the pantheism implied by ecology to find its intellectual justification in a working Neoplatonic revival. Since this is a time freed of the dogmas which drove the Enlightenment into the arms of the atheist and materialist thinkers, there now seems opportunity for the birth of another kind of Enlightenment. It may come slowly; such changes, being far-reaching, have their own pace, but there are now pioneers working in this direction, and their influence is growing strong. Thoreau is no longer the neglected man he was a century or more ago. The truly creative energies of the present seem almost entirely on the side of life, while the old ways, if everywhere present and in control, grow brittle day by day.

REVIEW

CITIES—WHAT IS AND WHAT MIGHT BE

PRACTICALLY everyone living in the United States knows something about the hazard, inconvenience, and pollution caused by gasoline-powered vehicles, and for the inhabitants of cities the threat of cars and trucks has reached monumental proportions. This is the subject of *Livable Streets*, a large book of more than 350 pages, filled with photographs and diagrams, by (the late) Donald Appleyard, professor of urban design at the University of California in Berkeley, published by the University of California Press (\$27.50). While the author ranges around the world for material on excessive street traffic and what some people are doing about it, he naturally gives major attention to San Francisco's problems, which for him are close to home, and to other California cities.

In the coastal metropolis, people are more concerned about the dangers of traffic than about street crime. Speaking of selected streets in San Francisco, Prof. Appleyard says:

Residents were quite able to list specific problems that they felt were caused by the traffic. Eighty-five per cent were annoyed by the truck traffic on the street [19th Avenue, most heavily traveled of the streets studied]; this was closely followed by annoyance with traffic noise, vibration, and air pollution. Buses annoyed 65 per cent of residents; the danger experienced when backing out of driveways, careless drivers and the danger posed for children were also problems that annoyed at least half our respondents. "When my daughter was going to kindergarten I had her quit school because of the danger from the traffic. It was safer for her to stay home than to cross 19th Avenue."

The most vulnerable to the hazards of traffic are the old and the very young. For the old who are uncertain on their pins, going to the store becomes a dangerous expedition. They stay home as much as they can, confined, like the children, to limited space. And of children, the author says:

In the United States during 1976, a total of 51,000 child pedestrians under fifteen years of age

were injured in traffic accidents, and 2,080 were killed (National Safety Council, 1976).

One half of our residents considered their street to be poor or not very good for children. The most disturbing effect of traffic was when children were playing outside. In fact, over one third of the residents refused to let their children play in the street. It was on a street near one of our selected blocks that a child was knocked down and killed by a truck in 1974. For a short period, the adults erected their own barrier across the street to prevent trucks from coming through. On a street in London, residents blocked traffic as a demonstration after a similar death. . . .

What happens on the street where there is little or no traffic was studied by Zerner in a number of cul-de-sacs in San Francisco. Such is the power of the automobile on our thinking that these streets are called "dead end" streets, when of all the streets in the city they are the most alive with children. They come from all over the neighborhood to those rare, protected places. In fact, they are so rare that a street like Shotwell becomes overloaded with children.

The importance of the street for children's play depends on whether there are alternative places for them to play. In the suburbs there are large back yards, front yards, and most of the streets have light traffic. In the inner city, such conditions are rare.

Reflecting on the content of this book—which includes extensive description of what various cities have done to reduce the problems created by heavy street traffic—one will probably conclude that so long as the number of automobiles on the streets continues to grow, the solutions reached by regulation will be temporary. The planning experts make their studies, listen to people, classify the complaints, propose alternatives, try temporary solutions, make adjustments, and then decide on permanent measure, but rare indeed is the arrangement that can make everybody happy. Speaking of the temporary solutions, usually involving devices that reroute traffic, the author says:

The problem, however, is that there are at least two impact phases. In the first period, changes are felt in all their force. For those who experience increased traffic, this will be a period of acute discomfort and angry protest; for others it will be like

a honeymoon. There follows a second phase of adaptation, when people change their habits and resign themselves to a new situation. They learn the new routes through the community, and, over time, moderate changes are absorbed into everyday routines. In European cities, it has been shown that it takes *three to six months* for travelers to change their patterns of travel in relation to pedestrianized shopping centers. Retail sales drop, but then climb back up again and increase after this period.

An important psychological factor which affects motorists is the impression they gain as they drive through an area. If a successful effort has been made by both planners and residents to create the appearance (and reality) of a place where people *live*—clean, inviting, with trees and greenery wherever it will fit—the drivers are less likely to race through what they regard as no more than a channel to their destination. Prof. Appleyard has illustrations of places where this has been achieved, in both Europe and America. In other areas, however, where there are complicating factors, changes have been almost completely stalled by reason of the conflicting interests of angry residents and commuting motorists. But if you want to read about carefully documented surveys of what has been done, what might be done, with identification of the best procedures, this book is ideal. Not least is the realization it produces of the depth of the problem.

This raises a question that occurred to the reviewer soon after beginning *Livable Streets*. Shouldn't such a book have a utopian section? What else could people—all of us—have done to keep cars from becoming insolent chariots which invade our daily lives almost everywhere in the country, threatening accidents, harming our children, polluting the air, bruising our eardrums, and reducing community planning and architecture to make-do improvisations? This is not a question that Prof. Appleyard takes up. Perhaps he feels he has enough to do without trying to revolutionize the status quo. Yet the idea of a utopian section for his book still seems good, and we have an illustration of what it might be like in another

publication—also from the Bay area—which seems about right. This is a booklet of sixty-four pages, *Reinhabiting Cities and Towns: Designing for Sustainability*, by John Todd and George Tukel, and published by the Planet Drum Foundation, P.O. Box 31251, San Francisco, Calif. 94131. (We don't know the price as a separate booklet, since it is offered for sale with two others for ten dollars. But the Foundation might part it for five.)

Borrowing the term "succession" from the ecologists, Todd suggests that there can be progressive succession in towns and cities:

Take, for example, in human settlements. Look at a typical city block . . . and there is a good chance that you will see all identical buildings with no topographical variation or range of architectural or cityscape expressions. As a monolithic neighborhood made up of a single architecture in a sterile environment, it is the equivalent of a mowed lawn. There is no diversity of expression. It was probably built during a period of rapid growth or an "early successional" period when housing rather than a neighborhood was the focus of the builders. This kind of city block has the potential to estrange people from each other and the world, whereas a neighborhood with trees, fountains, parks, shops, businesses, and residences intimately woven together can be a pleasure. They are an expression of diversity shaped for human ends.

Well, of the people interviewed by the researchers Prof. Appleyard quotes, perhaps one in a hundred (or a thousand) would actually be engaged by this way of thinking. They are busy with other things. But that one person might be the most important person on the block, or in the neighborhood, for the reason that a livable future can only be made by such individuals, who work as pioneers. George Tukel writes the back part of the booklet, devoted to rather exciting plans (more than just dreams) of how a community might begin to turn itself into a utopian neighborhood. The multiplier effect of such writing needs stimulation. As John Todd explains:

The possibilities for change within communities depends upon the biogeography of the larger area, its prior development and use, and, in addition, our

perceptions of the place. Prior development is inherited, but like the skeleton in the body it is the basis for structure, movement, and action. From a biological perspective, what is inherited is the background against which ecological ideas are superimposed. If a neighborhood is mostly vacant buildings or abandoned factories there are reasons for it, yet those same reasons can be turned around to illuminate new possibilities. Renewed social and economic possibilities now often lie fallow in old land, infrastructures, and buildings.

Todd writes with imagination for other people with imagination:

To transform and rebuild existing buildings and communities is challenging, even noble, work. Run-down buildings, shabby blocks, abandoned warehouses, and the like are the real new territory for urban reinhabitation.

There are lots of drawings and plans in this well-designed booklet.

COMMENTARY

A SELF-SUSTAINING MODEL

THIS week's lead article ends by speaking of pioneers who are now trying to bring to birth "another kind of Enlightenment." A book which has come in for later review has in it what seems a practical illustration of this effort. In *Workplace Democracy and Social Change*, edited by Frank Lindenfeld and Joyce Rothschild-Whitt, and published by Porter Sargent late last year, Daniel Zwerdling, one of the contributors, relates the story of a Washington, D.C. insurance business started in 1964 by James P. Gibbons, "a spectacular insurance salesman." He developed a way of selling health insurance to groups by mail, which turned out to be astonishingly successful. Then, in 1972, "he announced he was transferring half the company ownership to the employees in a nonsalable, profit-sharing trust." It worked, but it took two years to make worker ownership and responsibility a fairly smooth-running operation.

Interviewed by Zwerdling, Gibbons said:

"I had always thought I'd sell the business and use the money to set up some sort of foundation, like the Stern Fund or something, and give money to political causes," Gibbons says. He's sitting at his desk, which is one of many in a large room; there are no executive offices at IGP [International Group Plans]. "But then I started thinking, 'What's the point? Set up another foundation that is trying to change the very people and system that gives us all our money?' It occurred to me what we really had to do was create an economic institution that was self-sufficient. And that," Gibbons says, "is when I became consciously committed to making this company a self-sustaining, living model of social change.

"What I've done," he says, "is to create the first corporate power structure in this country which the employees have the power to change as they want. I'm not talking anything short of a total revolution."

A fairly complete story of the ups and downs of this company is provided by the writer—mostly ups, from a business point of view, bringing profits of a million a year, with 340 employees

who share in this income. It is not wholly utopian—faults can be found—but Mr. Gibbons has certainly done his part in moving in a utopian direction. Zwerdling, a reliable journalist, says in conclusion: "The system does work—better than any other self-managed enterprise in the country, and, I would argue, better than any other corporate system in America."

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves MISCELLANY

IN an essay on Prometheus, accompanying his translation of Aeschylus' "Prometheus Bound" (*Prometheus*, University of Washington Press, 1968), Eric Havelock remarks that humans with promethean qualities (latent in us all) suffer "a certain loneliness." Their lives, he says, "give witness that philanthropy is not requited, that the benefactor is evilly treated, that pity wins no pity in return, almost as if this were a historical law." The real Promethean learns, sooner or later, that his self-sacrificing services will not be repaid in kind, and he comes to regard complaints as juvenile.

This is what A.H. Maslow called "intrinsic learning"—learning that fits people to deal intelligently with the realities of life. Surely, the young—especially the young—need exposure to the promethean sophistication Havelock speaks of. To know in advance that the world is not likely to be grateful for even their best efforts has a sustaining effect.

Some writers know this well. There is, for example, a poignant passage in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Across the Plains*, laying the ground for balanced (undiscouraged) pessimism:

We look for some reward of our endeavors and are disappointed; not success, not happiness, not even peace of conscience, crowns our ineffectual efforts to do well. Our frailties are invincible, our virtues barren; the battle goes sore against us to the going down of the sun. The canting moralist tells us of right and wrong; and we look abroad, even on the face of our small earth, and find them change with every climate, and no country where some action is not honored for a virtue and none where it is not branded for a vice; and we look in our experience, and find no vital congruity in the wisest rules, but at the best a municipal fitness. It is not strange if we are tempted to despair of good. We ask too much. Our religions and moralists have been trimmed to flatter us, til they are all emasculate and sentimentalized, and only please and weaken. Truth is of a rougher strain. In the harsh face of life, faith can be read as a bracing gospel. The human race is a thing more

ancient than the Ten Commandments; and the bones and revolutions of the Kosmos, in whose joints we are but moss and fungus, more ancient still.

Man, remarks Stevenson, after a recital of historical and other evidence confirming this view, "is indeed marked for failure in his efforts to do right." Then adds: "But where the best consistently miscarry, how tenfold more remarkable that all should continue to strive; and surely we should find it both touching and inspiring, that in a field from which success is banished, our race should not cease to labour."

This is the wonder, perhaps the principal wonder, of the transcendent element in human nature, and who can be called educated who does not give it musing reflection?

If only for a little comic relief, we provide an extract from Richard Bissell's story, *High Water* (Little, Brown, 1954), in which a young man tells why he is unlikely to ever want to go home again. This seems peculiarly American humor. Recalling a character in the Minnesota town where he grew up—"an old boy who is all the time reciting Shakespeare"—he says:

Our bughouse Hamlet was so small he could never have been mistaken for John Barrymore in any of the famous roles, and he wandered around town in an old ratty coat with a beaver collar on it surmounted by a derby hat of the old style with brims that curled up. . . .

"I suppose you think Warner Buckingham is a big joke," my Dad used to say. "Well, get one thing into your head, son, anybody who can reel off so much Shakespeare by heart as Warner can is no fool, even though he does sit around the midnight lunch counters."

"I never said he was a joke," I said.

"Everybody else does," said my Dad. "Don't get small-town like them. You have to look people over and find out what they really are; don't listen to what *anybody* in this town has to say."

I never actually took anything seriously that anybody in that old town had to say, but I must admit I listened. And I sure heard some swell stuff which I can't remember, but I wish I could because it was all for the birds and would prove in ten minutes that we might as well have pulled stakes and headed off for

another county toward the setting sun. There was more assorted and unclassified ignorance running around loose in that town than you could find if you had a thousand years to make a door-to-door canvass of the whole world. I wouldn't say right out that my old town was the most ignorant in the U.S.A. because I have knocked around quite a bit and have hit some dumps that were pretty bad, but my old town was right up there in the semifinals for the title of Worst One-Peso Dump North of Key West, Fla. . . .

Some people go away and some people stay forever. Some of the people back there, lots of them, had never been to St. Paul, 90 miles away, and hadn't the slightest notion in the world of going, either. Then there was some who had been and said it didn't amount to much and the prices was away out of line and the restaurants a big gyp.

I was only a kid, but I must have felt it; I never had enough education to put in your eye in those god-damn public schools so it wasn't in quest of higher things that I left. It must of been that I just smelled a dead cat in the air, dumb as I was, and blew, because I wasn't unhappy at home. . . .

Well, when reviewing perspectives on "life," this is one that should not be entirely neglected. And now, after a preparatory text from Vladimir Soloviev (a Russian philosopher who died in 1900), we take a look at a largely forgotten aspect of a great experiment on the land in Israel. In *Justification of the Good* (1898), Soloviev wrote:

To accept selfishness and self-interest as the basic motive for work means that we deprive the latter of significance of a universal commandment and transform it into something accidental. It is clear that if I work only for my own family and my family's welfare, as soon as I can gain that welfare by *other* means, I automatically lose my only motive for working. . . . Indeed, facts compel us to recognize that if we begin with private material interests as the purpose of work, we finally arrive at universal discord and destruction instead of universal happiness. . . .

People often talk about the importance of "research" on the means to peace, but a half-dozen quotations along the lines of this one would, we think, be enough to keep people busy trying them out in practice for the next hundred years or so. And it is one of the sadder ironies that at a time when the air is still filled with recriminations about what happened in Lebanon, there should be consistent neglect of

human qualities which move in the opposite direction. We speak of course of the mass media. Thoughtful journals do their part. In the *Ecologist* for May-June of last year, Nigel Pollard relates the accomplishments of the kibbutzim (plural of kibbutz), the first one of which began in Israel in 1909. Then, in *Kidma* for last Spring, Ephraim Tzur, a founder-member of a kibbutz, writes about them for the general reader. He says of the people in these communities:

The individual member of a kibbutz is not motivated mainly by his own private interests or by some personal advantages, because *individual benefits are not determined by individual working records*. The effective motivating forces are thus not of an individual but rather of a social and moral nature, more nearly comparative to the active sense of obligation and pride which characterizes small-scale communities with tribal or family traditions.

There is plenty to be said in criticism of the kibbutzim, and both the *Kidma* and the *Ecologist* writers say it, but our point is that *any* communitarian success—and in Israel 25 per cent of the country's agricultural manpower working in kibbutzim supply forty per cent of Israeli agricultural production—deserves attentive study. Israel has 250 kibbutz-like communities with an average of 500 people in each one. Study of their achievements, Mr. Tzur says, "should be done for development purposes, not in any attempt to copy structures, methods, or organizational devices, but in order to broaden our understanding of hidden human driving forces, to uncover human potentials, and to harness all the unused capacities of human beings striving to create a better world in which to live." And the *Ecologist* editor points out that the kibbutzim are the only places where—on a considerable scale—one can find working attempts at the sort of practical development proposed in *Blueprint for Survival* published by the *Ecologist* in 1971. (Addresses—*The Ecologist*: Worthyvale Manor Farm, Camelford, Cornwall PL32 9TT. UK.; *Kidma*: 3 Moshe Wallach St. P.O. Box 13130, Jerusalem 91131, Israel.)

FRONTIERS

The Program of Henry George

VIRTUALLY all the major proposals for social reform, during the past 150 years, have involved an increase in the coercive power of the State to enforce the change. Both reformers and revolutionists are explicit concerning the "rights" of the people, it being obvious that these rights are to be guaranteed by some political authority. This assumes of course that the sovereign government is a virtuous and selfless institution devoted to the well-being of all.

Most people know better today, which leaves the field of political change fairly formless, which is perhaps as it should be. There was, however, one nineteenth-century reformer who combined a theory of social justice with *reduced* government authority, a man whose present-day followers quietly point out that his thinking is entirely consistent with ecological and environmental and antiwar concerns. We speak of Henry George, who wrote *Progress and Poverty* and is popularly identified as the champion of the "single tax." A reader has supplied us with three useful pamphlets on George (1839-97). One is a review-essay by Mildred Loomis of *Henry George: Citizen of the World*, the biography of her father by Anna George Demille, telling the story of a heroic life. George went to work at twelve to help support his family (they lived in Philadelphia), and at fourteen went to sea. He saw conditions in India, China, the Mediterranean, and Australia, noticing who suffered most from hard times. One thing in particular impressed him: wages were low in old countries, higher in new countries. "Why," he asked himself, "should this be?"

Years later, as editor of the *Sacramento Reporter* in California, when he opposed subsidies to the Central Pacific, he was forced to resign. He then published a pamphlet of 130 pages which exposed "reckless land grants and exorbitant land-holdings," and proposed a solution:

Wages are high in new countries where the land is free but in the old countries where land is monopolized, wages are low and poverty is great. The return for the use of land (economic rent) should be collected and employed for social needs, and no taxes at all need be levied on the products of labor.

George found this idea ethical as well as practical:

The value of the land is something which belongs to all. In taxing land values, we are merely taking for the use of the community something which belongs to the community. The mere holder of the land would pay just as much taxes as the user of the land. . . . Land prices would fall; land speculation would receive its death blow; land monopolization would no longer pay.

The heart of the matter, for George, was disclosed in an incident related by Mildred Loomis:

Horseback-riding over the unused hills near Oakland (Calif.), George asked a passing teamster, "What's land worth here?"

"A man over there where the cows are grazing will sell some land for \$1,000 an acre."

"A thousand dollars? It's worth only a small fraction—this soil is no more fertile than thousands of acres further away, not so near the growing colonies of people."

Quick as a flash, George knew he had touched the answer to his troublesome riddle! When settlers came, when population increased, land grows in value. Without a stroke on the part of the owner (who could live in Siam if he wished) these idle stretches near Oakland, Berkeley, and San Francisco would become worth a fortune. In anticipation of this rise in value, the owner was now holding his land for \$1,000 an acre. Soon he would be able to collect the value that he had no part in creating.

Suddenly, it was clear to George that land value is not the result of a person's activity, but of the growth of the community and the development of its activities. Morally, he reasoned, this unearned gain "belongs to all." To permit a few individuals to take this wealth that is created by the community thereby forces the community to levy exactions upon labor and thrift for the maintenance of community services. This very process, while penalizing labor and thrift, offers rewards to the few for withholding land from use by the many. Its rewards accrue to the speculator,

a profiteer in land—land which is absolutely necessary to human life. Here were fundamental reasons for the increase of poverty along with the increase of wealth.

George was becoming well-known as a writer and a speaker. Asked to address the students and faculty of the University of California in Berkeley on political economy, he said, among other things:

If you trace out the laws of production and exchange of wealth, you will see the causes of social weakness in laws which selfishness has imposed on our ignorance, but entirely within our own control. . . . And you will see the remedies—not through red destruction nor lead-strings to an abstraction called the "State," but to simple measures sanctioned by justice.

In 1877 he began writing *Progress and Poverty* to explain his ideas. Published in 1879 by D. Appleton, the appeal of this book filled with obvious common sense made it a best-seller. The first edition was exhausted on the first day of publication. George's teaching won the life-long support of Bernard Shaw, and later, Leo Tolstoy. Once asked what he would do if he was Czar of Russia, Tolstoy replied: "I would establish the system of Henry George, and then abdicate."

Unable to meet his contentions with logic, George's enemies—the wealthy, of course—called him names. To these critics he replied in an address at Cooper Union:

I read in the papers that I am a communist, a disturber of social order, a dangerous man, and a promoter of all sorts of destructive theories. What is this terrible thing I do? I want in the first place to remove all restrictions upon production of wealth and in doing this I want to secure that fair distribution of wealth which will give every man what he has fairly earned. What I contend for is that the man who produces, or accumulates, or economizes, the man who plants a tree or drains a marsh or erects a building, should not be fined for so doing. It is to the interest of all that he should receive the full benefit of his labor, his foresight, his energy, and his talents. In other words, I propose to abolish all taxation which falls upon the exertion of labor or use of capital, or the accumulation of wealth. I propose to meet all public expenses out of that fund which rises, not from the exertion of any one individual, but from the

growth of the whole community. Consider, gentlemen, how enormously wealth would grow if all taxes were abolished which now bear on production.

One of the other pamphlets, by Jack Schwartzman, draws passage-to-passage parallels between the two "Henry's"—Thoreau and George; and in *The Land Question* by Shirley-Anne Hardy the writer gives reason for believing that were he among us today, George "would be in the very forefront of the ecological movement."

These materials on Henry George are available from the School of Living, P.O. Box 3233, York, Pa. 17402.