DEFINITION OF CRISIS

TWO attitudes are characteristic of the thoughtful persons of our time. First, there is a strong sense of crisis; second, an ominous sense of drift. In combination, these attitudes tend to produce feelings of desperation, since courage, and even strength and determination, are frustrated when people do not know what to do. The pervading sense of being adrift—not simply from the loss of personal moorings, but also from cultural disorientation—sometimes becomes an agonizing psychological experience, since there is little that one can do to change the broad circumstantial environment.

The proposition to be defended, here, is that the sense of drift arises from a common inability to define the nature of the crisis. Human beings do not fail because of simple adversity. History is filled with dramatic instances of triumph over obstacles and difficulties. Our problem is not that we are confronted by difficulties, but that we are surrounded by difficulties that we do not understand. We cannot cope with them because we do not know what they are. Or, to state the matter in other words, we cannot cope with our difficulties because no one has been able to define them with the comprehensive clarity needed to convince us that he is right.

We do not lack, of course, for attempts at diagnosis. Some of them have an obvious relation to many of our problems. Some of them do indeed strike at one or another deep-rooted ill. Perhaps it is not so much a matter of getting better diagnoses, but rather of understanding the full implications of the ones we already have. There is the further need, however, of relating what our best critics tell us to some form of remedial action. If someone says that a basic lack in American culture, today, is moral sensibility, how would you go about improving our position? The familiar vocabulary concerning moral regeneration is filled with clichés in which we no longer believe. Soon the question becomes so generalized and far-reaching that it seems wholly unmanageable. As a result, nothing is done.

So, the crisis itself needs definition in terms that can be related to what we know how to do, or something that we can at least learn how to do. If we are confronted by an *ultimate* crisis of some sort, and if we are able to recognize it, we may still need to redefine it in more manageable terms.

Let us assemble some brief accounts of presently available definitions of the crisis. It is worth noting, also, that each general conception of crisis is involved in some sort of dilemma.

Take for example the crisis of international tensions. Those who are articulate in describing the character and issues of this crisis include such men as Supreme Court Justice Douglas, Stringfellow Barr, George P. Kennan, Lewis Mumford, Cyrus Eaton, Joseph Morray, and various others. This version of crisis contains a great complex of bristling problems. If we were to re-interpret the counsels of these men, turning them into programs of action, we should be obliged to undertake a considerable range of calculated risks. These risks might not be so extensive as some people make them out to be, but in the mouths of partisan antagonists they would be made to sound very great. In the first place, if the advice of these men is followed, we shall place more confidence in the possibilities of peaceful reconciliation with the Communist world than in the hope of frightening our rivals with ever-more destructive armaments. This would oblige us to face the question of whether the foreign policy of a large nation can move in two directions at once. If we rest our fate on military might, the domestic propaganda drive to support unlimited military preparation can hardly be

ambivalent. If we need the feverish pressure of an unabating threat of war to maintain domestic morale, how are we at the same time going to take the steps which are necessary to the friendly atmosphere of peaceful coexistence? You can *say* that we need to do both, but are they actually possible to do? Neither peace nor war can be prepared for half-heartedly. It seems only common sense to insist that there must be a clear and unequivocal swing of the balance, one way or the other.

The thing that makes this situation into an authentic crisis is the unimaginable destruction that would inevitably result from another great war.

Next we might consider the crisis in psychological health—a problem with so many facets that to sum it up in a few words is quite impossible. Yet the men who give their attention to this region of the human scene have little doubt but that a crisis exists. During the past twenty-five years we have learned that many of the habitual patterns of human behavior are actually self-destructive. Things thought, said, and done in the name of "morality" are often subversive of human welfare and mental health. Many conventional attitudes are only façades of protective self-deception. Human life is frequently a continuous flight from the pain of self-recognition. The working, everyday religion of many people is seen upon analysis to be made up of a series of formulas by which believers may escape from the responsibility of thinking and making decisions. There is a dreadful fear that some kind of nothingness or vacuum will be discovered at the heart of things, should one look too closely for himself.

The revolution implicit in the insights of modern psychotherapy is itself a crisis of unknown proportions. It might be said that the perceptive therapist knows that he has a tiger by the tail. For all those whose sense of identity is involved in precisely those aspects of human feeling and behavior which the therapist regards as

pathological, the latter becomes a nihilist bearing weapons of personal destruction.

Meanwhile, as the insights of psychotherapy filter into modern culture by means of literature and through other less obvious channels, a new kind of abstraction from the old sort of engagement with "life's problems" is making itself felt. Goals are slowly being identified as psychological rather than material. This is a process which is going on almost as a mutation in the species, rather than as a "trend" that can be evaluated and then "controlled."

One somewhat frothy result of this alteration in the way people regard themselves and what they do with their lives may lie in the phenomenon of the "Beat" generation. It is quite possible that when a new sense of self overtakes people in weakness or an escapist mood, their reaction will be very different from the response of more disciplined individuals. That the latter are undergoing inward changes in attitude is not altered by the fact that they make no sensational reports to the press about how they are feeling.

The rise of Existentialism is plainly an irrepressible development of our age. Fundamentally, Existentialism is an attempt to give an account of what it means to be a human being, apart from all the varying preoccupations which may take up a person's time. It endeavors to speak of the good life without reference to the relativities of acquisition, or any of the masks which people put on to convince themselves of their own importance. Existentialism peels off the cosmetics and strips off the costumes of modern pretense. It is extremely doubtful that Western man will ever be able to tolerate without shame the artificial values which Existentialism has been exposing.

There is a kind of terrorism inherent in this process. What shall men fall back upon for their security and sense of personal importance, when the ladder of status falls into disrepute? With what can they relate? Who are they? Where are they going? These are dreadful questions. For

answers, a choice must be made between private intuitions and the Grand Inquisitor. The plight of many sophisticated persons of our time is that they are too critically acute to accept the easy haven offered by the Inquisitor, yet not strong enough to rely upon private intuitions of independent identity.

This sort of crisis finds people at many different psychological levels of existence. It is obvious that the entire region of the religious life of man is likely to become involved, as the psychological crisis is increasingly felt.

Still another crisis gains broad definition from the relationships of technology, acquisitive enterprise, government, and the individual. This might be called the Institutional Crisis. Technology is the creature of acquisitive enterprise and government. Business uses technology for acquisitive purposes and government uses technology for military purposes. Business has its rules or laws of survival and success, so also government. When these various principles are integrated with the rigid necessities of technology, patterns are established which impose inflexible requirements on human beings. At the end of the processes of technology are goals which are said to relate to human welfare, and these goals are used to justify the multiple conformities required of human beings by the pattern of technology. The industrial or business use of technology is rationalized in terms of profits and prosperity—one a private, the other a general good. Government use of technology is justified by the promise of security.

As for profits, it may be admitted that they are more widely distributed than the profits of acquisitive undertaking were distributed in earlier periods of history. This condition may be termed prosperity. The fact, however, is that people find it a shallow and unsatisfactory condition. The idea of an "expanding economy"—one of the major pieties of the champions of our cultural-economic system—involves a multiplication of human desires to *make* the economy expand.

There is no place for balance or serenity in this equation. The Good Life is predicated upon always wanting and partially getting more and more. Satiety is an abstraction that is never reached, nor is it desirable to reach it, since that would stultify the process of expansion.

This theory of progress is of course at odds with any serious account of the moral life, as distinguished from the "good" life. Such discontinuity between prevailing economic doctrine concerning the acquisitive, technological society, and intelligent morality no doubt accounts for the extraordinary popularity of Norman Vincent Peale and others of his general persuasion, who are able to preserve their "sincerity" in the face of gross contradictions.

What form does the Institutional Crisis take? The major institutions of the time have come to be symbols of all human good, with the result that whatever they require defines the rules of necessary behavior. The deceptions and devices of marketing employed to maintain the expanding economy eventually pervert nearly all cultural standards, driving those who resist into a hinterland of alienation. Now and then we are presented with dramatic evidence of this perversion, as when it affects White House officials, the proud members of famous literary families, and other popular idols.

We are continually told over every medium of communication that can be invented that the good things of life are bought in stores. Every distinction we tend to honor is associated with some product or service that someone is offering for sale. People who are finally persuaded of this idea will be found doing *anything* for money. When they are caught doing the "anything," we are shocked, perhaps, but not really very much. We have a tendency to believe what they believe, too. Charles Van Doren is a young man of an illustrious line of educators and writers who let himself be used to convince the public that a phenomenal memory is the same as knowledge and that anyone who has such a memory can make

large sums of money. That is the educative influence of the "quiz" programs. If large sums of money are what everyone should be after—if with money you can get everything else—why not get it the way he got it? You can hardly lend yourself to this process of "public education" without yourself becoming a convert.

In the Middle Ages they used to break people's bones on the wheel, to make them conform. Now they break up the values of human life on the sales promotional wheel, and the people conform of their own inclination. What alternatives are offered to them?

The institutions which are precipitating the institutional crisis are interested in their own self-perpetuation and growth, not that of human beings. *People* are important to institutions only because people can be persuaded to support them. The various institutions set up spheres of influence in our lives. Eventually they dominate and shape our lives until there is very little left to ourselves. Erich Kahler has described this process in *The Tower and the Abyss:*

> When a man comes home from his working day, he is of course unable to enjoy true leisure for which he has lost all inner disposition. You cannot expect somebody suddenly to shift from the tempo and turmoil of a modern working day, from the incessant external demands besieging his fleeting consciousness to the calm and composure in which alone real leisure can grow. You cannot expect a man, after having served as a function for eight hours, to turn into a complete and personal human being in an hour or so. So he turns from his working function to his home functions, from his machines to his gadgets. As soon as he leaves his shop or office he is awaited by other abstract, mechanical devices, functions answering his own functions, again appealing to his functional skill and susceptibility. He drives a car, he turns switches, and not only is he served by machines, but here again he is induced to serve them in turn, to accommodate himself to the machines. . . .

There was a striking illustration of this sort of thing in a suburb of Los Angeles recently. During the Christmas season, for several days before the holiday, one heard the peal of fine voices carolling. But the sound was from a tape-recorder in an automobile, slowly moving up one street and down another. On one occasion little children rang door-bells as the car passed, soliciting contributions for a religious institution. The sound was distantly euphonious, but, when one considered the old custom of carolling as a personal expression, it was also outrageous.

Back to Mr. Kahler:

> For entertainment the man turns on his radio or his TV, he goes to the movies where again, for the most part, he is served specialized, functionalized events, attitudes, feelings—attitudes and feelings which are utterly untrue in a human sense, but are shaped according to what Hollywood considers the desires, the predilections, the notions of the masses. Now it can hardly be denied that the masses of people do relish a beautiful car, a gorgeous estate, a sweet romance, and the thrill of a juicy crime; they are certainly longing to satisfy vicariously their sadistic drives and their gambling itches, and finally, after all these gratifications have been amply indulged in, they still want to see justice triumph. And while these are doubtless popular wishes which the entertainment industry feels it must satisfy, the film and TV producers' usual response is to *outdo* such attitudes and responses in a particular direction. They isolate them, take them out of their human context and texture, decentralize, dehumanize, functionalize them, reduce them to bare effects; so that we see a crime as such, a romance as such, and the characters are treated as mere appendages, as mannequins specially adjusted to their prefabricated experiences. These typified experiences seem to have emerged from sectionalized subject files which are labeled according to collectively functional attitudes. As a consequence the most mysterious, intimate phases of life are turned in the minds of people into labeled stereotypes. A little boy, . . . in a *New Yorker* cartoon, reveals the situation in a flash. Walking through Central Park with his mother, he points at a loving couple sitting on a bench. "Look, Mummy, movies!" An elementary human situation comes to the mind first as a collective cliché.

> It is just that which is most harmfully consequential: the reflexive effect of this stereotyping. The dehumanized stereotypes, supposedly representing people's genuine concepts of life, act upon their imagination in such a manner as to *make* them into what they were expected to be from the

start; people come to behave and react, to feel and experience like the suggested stereotypes. In this way, Hollywood, as well as magazine and best-seller fiction, actually shape people's characters. A person cannot be persistently and helplessly exposed to such crude influences without gradually succumbing to them.

Along with Kahler, some reference should be made to Roderick Seidenberg's *Posthistoric Man* and Jack Jones's *To the End of Thought.* These works deal with the consequences of rationalization; Seidenberg is concerned with the rationalization which results from applied science in technology, Jones with political rationalization. Both conclude that the rationalizing process, as it is perfected, closes out human freedom. That is, the institutions whose operations are perfected in terms of rational process are fulfilling ends which are quite different from the ends of individual man as a freedom-seeking and freedom-exercising agent. (Here we might recall Friedrich Georg Juenger's volume, *The Failure of Technology,* which deals with similar material, although from another point of view. Juenger endeavors to show that the technological process always defeats itself, so far as human values are concerned.)

Add to the technological aspect of acquisitive institutions its connection with the military institution, including the increasing dependence of the national economy upon armaments production, with all that this implies, and there is sufficient reason for saying that an institutional crisis exists—that is, the demands of institutions upon the human individual justify the expression.

One more account of what is wrong with our times might be noted—the account of the Zen Buddhists, although what they have to say is more a comment on the eternal human situation than an analysis of the present age. The Zennists suggest that man is forever mistaking the unreal for the real—that his life is filled with idle longings and false objectives. They say that complete understanding of what actually *is* should represent the limit of human aspiration: the idea of "becoming" is illusory, since what becomes is

never the real. The real only *is,* and to seek it in becoming is to pursue false lights. One might say that the becoming is the outward bark of the inward realizing, but the Zennists probably wouldn't tolerate even this. What is interesting, here, is the fact that Zen Buddhists can hardly concern themselves with historical analysis, since history, if it has any meaning, is an account of some kind of *becoming.* If becoming is without meaning, then history is without meaning, and there is no point in trying to understand it.

We mention Zen ideas since Zen is one of the few representatives of a transcendental ideal, on the contemporary scene. But the application of Zen principles, it seems to us, implies a total disengagement from the temporal process and a deliberate disregard of the various phases of the temporal process. It is not a disengagement from life, but, quite obviously, an attempt to participate in life as an *eternal* process, and that with full intensity. Zen, therefore, attracts attention for reasons similar to those which gain followers for Anarchism. Both abandon the difficult task of dealing with relativities—the relativities of metaphysics, the delusions of name and form—the relativities of government and regulation and social control and administration. Both say, these relativities are not the real thing; they say, they are sources of confusion, self-deception, deception of one another, of crime, injustice, and self-righteousness and cruelty, and all the ills to which both the flesh and the spirit are heir, and they, they say, will have nothing to do with them.

And so, while the spiritual idealists will have nothing to do with mundane problems, insisting that they do not exist except as forms of delusion, and while the humanitarian idealists will have nothing to do with institutional problems, since institutions are the root of all evil—while these men who have some truth, and are not afraid to declare it, are refusing to be compromised, the world goes on from betraying compromise to betraying compromise, until, finally, there is nothing left but naked men and naked power, with

nothing between to shield human beings from either the power or the fear and anger of each other.

This brings us at last to the definition of the crisis that we have to propose. The crisis is made by the confining, distorting and maiming effects of the wrong kind of institutions we have built and allowed to grow up around us. We shall probably need economic and political institutions of one sort or another, but these should always be secondary institutions and never allowed to become anything else.

We need to make for ourselves primary institutions—that is, institutions which grow up, almost by accident, or naturally—which result from doing things that are good to do for their own sake: things which are good to do by ourselves, or good to do together.

The great and powerful institutions which now threaten us are great and powerful only because we have endowed them with reality. They are shadows of human acts of the imagination. We need to begin imagining other things as real. We need to save our love for things that are worth loving. We can refuse our association with groups that are without dignity and refuse our strength to causes which are no longer causes and not worth defending.

We can choose ways to make a living which do not involve us directly—or involve us less directly—in the wanton use of words. We can build houses or raise food or seek employ in some activity which makes something that people really do need. Nobody will be able to find a job that is wholly without corruption; nobody will locate associates without blemishes of character; no product can be made, these days, without having on it somewhere the mark of Cain; but everybody can try.

We are not much good to ourselves or anybody else, when we are all alone. And we are worse than no good—we are a positive menace when collected all together in a mass as a "nation"

or a "race." What we need are loose, friendly formations that will, in time, create new ways of life, imply new standards of value, and slowly develop simple institutions which make it easier to do what we see to be good to do.

If we want to live lives of voluntary behavior, we shall have to do it together. If we want to be free, we shall have to make the space in which to be free. This requires people who adopt the habits of living in a certain way and who raise their children within the dimensions established by those habits.

At some point during this development, it may be possible to recapture some of the old institutions and reform them into good institutions—institutions that reflect human ends. But the real beginnings of a new sort of society will never grow out of tinkering and patching activities. The old institutions have brought a crisis upon the life of the human individual because they were brought into being to serve less-than-human or anti-human purposes. A human purpose is a purpose of the intelligence. It is more, much more, than a need for shoes or shirts or Cadillacs. A human purpose can be concerned with nothing less than meanings. If ever a secondary institution—concerned with bodily needs—gets to behaving like a primary institution, it must be destroyed at once. Not a wall should be left standing. Not one of its bureaucrats should remain employed. And its priests, sacred or secular, should be whipped from the temple and made to lay bricks for a period corresponding to the strength of their desire to pretend that merchandise of any sort has anything to do with human values.

It may take a long time to bring about this transformation, but there is nothing else to do.

REVIEW
A FIELD OF BROKEN STONES

THERE are three books about prison, or related to prisons, which your reviewer will probably never forget: *Great Prisoners* (Dutton, 1946), edited by Isadore Abramowitz, being the writings of men in prison, from Socrates to Sacco and Vanzetti; Edwin M. Borchard's *Convicting the Innocent* (Garden City, 1932); and now, Lowell Naeve's A *Field of Broken Stones.* The Naeve book was first published in 1950 by the Libertarian Press, and is now available in a quality paperback edition by Alan Swallow, Denver ($1.65).

Lowell Naeve was (is) a conscientious objector to war who refused to register in the draft for World War II, and who served two terms in prison for this offense. His book is an unadorned, factual account of the prison experience.

There are many ways to react to such a book, but a response which is almost inescapable lies in recognition of how different a man like Naeve is from the other prisoners, and, on the other hand, how very much the same he is. Naeve was different from the other prisoners in that he was in prison because he refused to commit himself to actions which would harm other men; the other prisoners (except for other conscientious objectors) were there because of some offense. But he was like the other men in his suffering of confinement. This is a sense in which all prisoners are the same. They are sorely afflicted human beings. Their lives are distorted; they are made to feel the settled indifference and contempt of their fellows. The method of administration of a prison turns all but the proudest and the strongest into bargainers for privilege. In such a situation, a man finds it difficult to maintain his self-respect except by rebellion. What is done to him has no dignity, so that conformity must appear to him as weakness.

The rebellion of Naeve and his companions, however, was not merely personal. They rejected as well as they could the *typical* injustices of prison, as for example the treatment of Negroes, who were usually given the worst jobs and made to eat separately from the white prisoners. By the time Naeve was serving his second term in Danbury federal prison, there were two hundred C.O.'s incarcerated there—enough to organize a work strike against racial segregation. The eighteen men who participated in the strike were put in solitary confinement in a separate cell block. There they remained for 144 days, until, finally, the warden promised to end the segregation in the mess hall if these men would stop their strike before Christmas! The men were overjoyed:

> . . . amid wild excitement and unbelief that the strike had actually come to an end, we voted to go off strike. Our action, a few newspaper stories to back our point of view, had forced the Bureau of Prisons to back down. "It's over, it's over, we've smashed em,' Jim Peck exuberantly exclaimed. The strike was over. The strike had been a success.

When Naeve first went to prison, he decided to refuse to work. After nearly five days of pick-and-shovel made-work, he stopped. He explained to the warden that he was a painter and he wanted to do his own kind of work. The warden was obliging. He got some painting materials for Naeve and provided him with a place to work. After a few days the following incident occurred:

> One afternoon I was painting in "the studio." Warden Gerlach came to visit. We began talking about an idea I had for a mural based on Van Loon's book, *The Story of Mankind*. It ended up with Mr. Gerlach telling me that there was some decorating he would like me to do in his home. He hinted that he wanted a portrait of one of his children—and later possibly one of himself. The other prisoners had warned me this would happen. So I explained the procedure I had in mind.
>
> I told him I believed in equality. Prisoners had also asked me to do portraits. I suggested that we might put cards for the prisoners and others interested, in a hat. We could draw a card— whoever's card it was, I'd paint his portrait first.
>
> The warden seemed taken aback a little by his request having to await its democratic turn.

Permission to continue with his painting was not withdrawn, however, until several days later, after the Warden had asked Naeve to paint some posters for him and Naeve said to him calmly, "I don't think I'll do it."

His refusal to "cooperate" brought close-custody confinement for Naeve. Much of his time in prison was spent in "segregation"—a private cell with meals in the cell and no opportunity to move about the prison.

The cycle of events which brought Naeve to prison a second time began when a town marshal in Kansas found that he had no draft card. He explained that he did not carry a card—that he had done a year in prison for refusing to cooperate with the draft. He was brought to New York for his second trial and again, in the West Street Jail, he encountered Louis Lepke, now scheduled for the electric chair. Naeve had talked briefly with Lepke during his first time in jail. On this occasion:

> Lepke, the short stolid-faced boss of Murder, Inc., motioned me over to his adjoining cell. In a curious, soft-spoken, considerate manner he asked: "You're one of those fellows who's going to object to the war when it comes?"
>
> Somewhere in the conversation we got around to the fact that I was in jail because I refused to kill people. The Murder, Inc., boss, who was headed for the electric chair, said: "It don't seem to me to make much sense to put a man in jail for that."
>
> We just looked at each other. There we were, both sitting in the same prison. The law covered both ends—one in for killing, the other for refusing to kill.

There are two reasons for reading this book. First, people need to know what prison is like from the *inside*. An observer like Naeve makes a better witness, usually, than a man who is put there for some crime, or better than a penologist who habitually "looks down" on the men in prison. One need not become sentimental about recidivists or any sort of criminal in order to conclude that prison is no solution for problems of this kind. Men who break the law have just as much need to recover their dignity as anyone else—perhaps a greater need, since they were warped to begin with—warped, or just weak and not very clever. Antisocial people may need to be restrained, but prisons are surely not the most intelligent means of restraint. They are filled with irrational measures against human beings, and these measures do no good for anyone, least of all for "society."

The second value of the book is in its unpretentious portrait of a man determined to live his own life—in this case a constructive life. Now and then you come across a person like this—one who is constitutionally incapable of doing what seems to him wrong, stupid, or unjust. Naeve is quite clearly not the exhibitionist type of demonstrator against "authority." He is simply a man who has to live according to his own ideas of decency and right.

Police, district attorneys, prison administrators all found this out. They could throw Naeve in a cell, put him in a strait-jacket, force-feed him when he refused to eat, but they couldn't *make* him do what he did not believe in doing. What a lot of bother these people went to, not to make Naeve into a "better man," but to prove that he ought to obey them! They failed, of course, as social madness ought always to fail in the attempt to coërce individual sanity.

We should call Naeve an artist and an individual rather than an "individualist"—the term is rapidly becoming an epithet. Like some other men who also resisted prison customs, Naeve seems to be personally a gentle human being of rare sensibility. His drawings, also published by Alan Swallow *(The Phantasies of a Prisoner,* 1958—reviewed in MANAS for Feb. 4, 1959), are evidence enough of his insight and professional capacities.

A reading of *A Field of Broken Stones* is likely to make one long for more people of Naeve's stamp. Not just as brave resisters—although this may be important—but as people with such positive convictions about what is important to do, that through their intensity of life they impart to the common life a greater sense of orientation and purpose. The world owes such men a debt of gratitude, simply because they insist, in the face of incredible pressure to do otherwise, on behaving like human beings.

COMMENTARY
THE NEED FOR PATIENCE

EVER since the Sampsons of science, technology, agnosticism and Freudian psychoanalysis, shook down the walls of the temple, the modern world has been without a workable faith. Science provided a faith, but only for its own sort of research. The faith of technology applies to the technological process, but not elsewhere. Agnosticism and analysis give stances for criticism, making men intelligently wary of all the positive faiths of the past, but they offer little to replace the old convictions. A perceptive paragraph by Gabriel Vahanian in the *Nation* for Dec. 12 puts the matter briefly:

> We are living in a post-Christian era when Christianity sinks into religiosity. When this is the case, no longer can Christianity vitally define itself in terms of biblical faith. Instead, it acquires the attributes of moralism, or those of a psychological and emotional welfare-state. Further, we live in a post-Christian era because modern culture is gradually losing the marks of that Christianity which brought it into being and shaped it.

The processes of the invasion of the subdivided individuals of our era are clearly described in this week's leading article. Man, in short, is overtaken by the partisanships of a number of sub-human and anti-human operations, and finds himself unable to make a defense against this erosion of his being.

The problem is to acquire a new faith—a faith that has the strength to resist these processes and supplies an understanding of their nature sufficient to turn them into processes consistent with human ends.

That is the problem—the project, the program—and it is going to take some time to work it out.

Meanwhile, we must expect all sorts of half-baked and inadequate rebellions, based upon new faiths which are strong only with the wild energy of desperation, which provide an understanding which ignores large areas of human need. As these rebellions come, it may be more important to recognize what is good about them than to condemn them out of hand. It is so easy to point to the follies and irresponsibilities of the acts of desperate men, and so easy to discount the sensibility which made them become desperate a few years before their fellows. The people who dare to attempt to put a new faith into practice, and who therefore make mistakes which seem obvious and almost ridiculous to soberer and more cautious souls, may be undertaking for all of us the indispensable task of clarifying the alternatives which lie ahead. This calls for patience and a decent humility on the part of people whose valor, these days, still resides in an indecisive discretion.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

WE have received a letter which might be called an "impressionistic" account of one reader's experience of transition from urban to country living. This letter is of interest for several reasons. First, no matter what the subject—from philosophy to the question of foreign versus domestic cars—there is always a great deal to be learned from observation of contrast. Perhaps dyed-in-the-wool urbanites should take a sabbatical year in that other world of the remotely situated agricultural area—and, perhaps, also, a sabbatical should work the other way, too. Like foreign travel—and that the urban-rural contrast may often be something like foreign travel is emphasized in the letter—when we cross a border we have to try out all our habitual responses in a new context for evaluation.

Second, our subscriber seems to feel that an existence in more primitive surroundings, against the unchanging backdrop of "nature," reduces the need for psychotherapy, especially among children.

Third, and connected with the foregoing conditions in what may be a causal relation, friendships for both young and old are more easily invited, and more likely to be maintained, outside the areas of keen competition among the city dwellers who make up the "lonely crowd."

Here is the letter.

———————

We always assume that MANAS readers are mainly urban and suburban dwellers. We have recently changed from city to an extremely rural habitat. We feel something ought to be said about the cause and meaning of the difference between country and city people.

City people and suburbanites believe in improvement. They continually improve their homes, their schools, their churches, their towns, their minds, their bodies, their children, their friends. This strong belief that any aspect of life can be made better is the cause of both the admiration and the scorn other nations manifest for Americans. Obsession with improvements merely technical has invited scorn. Yet the vitality and implied faith behind this obsession is admirable.

Our rural county is characterized by imperviousness to change. When you cross our state border you will see no more highway advertisements. Even the largest roads have not been improved by straightening the curves. Natives are not interested in the concept of a straight line being the shortest distance between two points. Concepts are unnecessary to them and they do not grasp them as well as city people do. Concepts are the tools of people who want something done. Were you to enter a local home of this region, you might find four rocking chairs in the living room and two in the kitchen. If you sit down you will find rocking nearly as soothing as smoking. The kitchen of this house may have thousands of dollars worth of cooking and washing equipment. This same house has no indoor bathroom. Pragmatic interest in food supersedes theories of "house and back yard beautiful."

The lady of the house has little time for theories. Old fashioned houses contain a lot of rooms to clean. Everyone cans basements full of produce, and the rags on every wash line prove homemade cottage cheese a staple. Even within village limits most people keep chickens, hogs, goats, rabbits, or a cow, and do their own butchering. Most men hunt—for sport, and because cash is always tight and wages low. These are all activities which make one feel one has accomplished something worth while by oneself. The average person who is contented with himself has little urge to think.

The lack of desire for improvement is most evident in the schools where the master plan calls for uniformity. The pages studied by one fifth

grade today will be under the nose of every fifth-grader in the county, if not today, then tomorrow. Children who fail to obey are paddled. No one seems to have heard of child psychology. One principal says of the local private mental health clinic: "We don't need to use them." Slow children are left back. Many classrooms have several children three to five years older than their classmates. All children play hard and work hard. They seem to lack the hostilities with which city psychologists endow everyone; or rather, the hostilities are mild.

In one class there was a child who cried, tore her hair, and ripped her face with her nails. Her teacher, an excellent woman with no notions about psychology, furiously told the child to never dare do that. Subsequent to this incident the child has had no nervous symptoms for months. In more modern surroundings, this child would have regular psychiatric appointments. Allowance of individual license in conduct can snatch the only steadying code children have, good manners.

We have no axe to grind for either country or city dweller. We wondered what kept country people from being boring chaps and soon came to believe it was alertness to nature. Show a child a small weed and he will tell you where he has seen it and how it looks in different seasons. A man asked us whether we had noticed the mountain yesterday. We wondered why that mountain is always important to him. That mountain is to him what our dreams of improvement are to us, but we have a notion that in a great man contentment with life and the desire for improvement in all things must somehow dwell together. We look back at the city where people make friends so cautiously. We think of our country friends who have accepted our little family so readily in their homes and activities, and we know the hope of improvement has lost its touch with "the nature of things."

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To round out the picture, of course, we have to be aware of the various kinds of provincialism which often stifle youngsters in their teens and send them off to "adventure" far from home.

True communication between rural and urban areas—something which might be attained through ideally oriented newspapers or periodicals—requires a special sort of literacy, only a part of which MANAS can hope to help provide.

FRONTIERS
A Gandhian Ideal

IT is often said that Gandhian principles of reform and reconstruction may be fine for India, but that they can hardly be applied in an advanced industrial society. There is so much plain fact in this judgment that it may lead to a neglect of the less obvious ways in which Gandhian thinking might be rendered into terms practical for Western use.

Take for example the problem of class distinctions—a situation no Western revolution has been able to overcome. While the distinctions of heredity and family persist only in certain European countries, these have been elsewhere replaced—most noticeably in the United States— by the distinctions of income. In countries where the State has become all-powerful, the ruling class is made up of the bureaucracy. The important thing, in all these instances, is not the type of distinction, but the fact that the distinction exists, creating barriers between classes of human beings.

How would Gandhi attack this problem? A series of articles in a small Indian magazine, *Sarvodaya,* devoted to continuance of the Gandhian tradition and the work of Vinoba Bhave, examines the philosophy of *Sampattidan,* meaning "Gift of Wealth." The articles are renderings into English of chapters in a book written in Hindi by the late Srikrishnadas Jaju. Under the heading, "The propriety of using brain for amassing wealth," this author says:

> This is a fundamental and profound question— whether it is proper to employ learning for earning money. It is as clear as daylight that such use of the intelligence is one of the main reasons for economic inequality. That is also the cause of exploitation. Many attempts have been made and theories put forward to remove discontent born out of socio-economic inequalities and exploitation. Some of them are also being put into actual practice. But if this complicated issue is to be tackled by non-violence, we have to follow Gandhiji's solution, which runs thus:

> "The needs of the body must be met by bodily labour and the needs of the mind to be satisfied by acquiring knowledge. The social order must be such that everybody should do physical labour for four hours and mental work also for an equal duration. And four hours' bodily work must earn for him or her as much as is required for living."

One point, here, is that no price should be put upon the work of the mind. Intellectual work is of another order of value than the measurable goods of economic production. Exploitation, it might be urged, has its root in the capacity of some men to turn their intellectual skill—their ability to devise high-sounding theories which work to their personal benefit—into personal economic advantage. The works of the mind, from this point of view, should be regarded as far too valuable to be perverted by sale in the open market. All creative acts, in short, should be *amateur*—labors of love.

Apart from the difficulties in instituting such a "system," let us look at the advantages it would bring. First of all, it would close the abyss between the intellectuals and the working classes. Wherever this abyss exists, powerful antagonisms and defense mechanisms develop. The intellectual is shamed by the practical skills and know-how of the mechanic. The working man, in turn, is likely to be awed by the vocabulary of the intellectual. In self-defense, both devise reasons for being contemptuous of each other. The intellectuals take pride in their isolated coteries, often offering an almost cultist justification of their obscurantism. The working men, when they bother to notice the intellectuals at all, usually dismiss them as "egg-heads."

We are not suggesting that the differences can or ought to be entirely erased. We are suggesting that the division between these different sorts of men is much greater than it need be. We are suggesting that the intellectuals could go a great distance toward winning the respect of working men by becoming some kind of working men, themselves. Gandhi's four hours a day sounds reasonable, since technology will probably

reduce the work-day to something like this, before too long.

It hardly needs pointing out that some kind of manual work would unquestionably provide intellectuals with a stabilizing foundation for their personal lives, which now tend, somewhat notoriously, to neurotic patterns. Most important of all, it would free the mind of any economic compulsions. No one would feel obliged to say what he does not believe on the ground that he cannot make a living any other way. The rule would be, instead, that he cannot make a living *that* way.

If it be argued that a writer needs more time than he would have leisure left to write, the answer might be that there are too many books, anyway. Let him write fewer, but better, books.

We haven't tried to work out the details of this system. Obviously, it is not a system at all, but a proposal for voluntary action. No system like this could be "enforced." It would be followed, rather, because it is seen to promise the recapture of integrity. It represents a spirit or attitude of mind, rather than a formula to be adopted without making any exceptions.

There will be those, of course, who will feel that this proposal amounts to a threat to their status as members of the elite. This cannot be helped. But it is not really a threat. The only threat in this idea is the possibility that one will be converted to it.

How would such a program work at the beginning? It is already working in the lives of a few. Scott Nearing for twenty years ran a maple syrup farm in Vermont, working four hours a day and writing the other four. He and Mrs. Nearing made as much of a living as they needed to stay healthy and comfortable. We can think of two other men who have balanced their lives with part-time activities for economic purposes, leaving them free to do things which are ends-in-themselves the rest of the time.

In an industrial society, the Gandhian idea can be put to work only by means of free invention. But if the objective is to bring to birth a society that has space for human freedom, then a full use of what freedom we already have is the way to begin.