

## PLATO'S DOCTRINE

A BOOK that we have found a continuous inspiration is *The Human Situation*, first published in 1937 in England. It is made up of the Gifford Lectures given at the University of Glasgow (1935-37) by W. Macneile Dixon, who combined a wonderful propensity for asking questions with an extraordinary command of the English language. He knew the classical literature of Europe, as he showed by quotation, and was quite at home in the philosophy of science, in which he could reason without adopting its assumptions. He said at the beginning:

I propose to speak my mind. I cannot believe you would wish me to say what I did not think, or think what I did not say. Nothing is to be gained by concealment or equivocation. If you find my conclusions unpalatable, you are not without resource. You have only to assure yourselves that I am totally mistaken, which may, indeed, very likely be the truth. And—who knows?—I may learn wisdom, and come to think differently. I would have you regard these occasions as conversations. My views will be at your disposal for consideration, not necessarily for acceptance. If they have no inherent persuasiveness I would not have you accept them. There are in the realm of thought no absolute authorities no dictators. No man, living or dead, can claim oracular powers. Mine is a personal view. All philosophies are in the end personal. You can no more escape your philosophy than you can escape your own shadow, for it also is a reflection of yourself.

With this as introduction, we turn to one of the last chapters (or lectures), the one titled "Ourselves." Here he considers the self—the self-conscious self.

If you begin with the parts you will never reach the genius or spirit of the whole. "Multiplicity does not contain a reason for unity." You can see what the body is, an arrangement of tubes, springs, levers, lungs, heart, muscles. They do not regret lost opportunities, take courage and determine to do better next time. The soul is not individualized by the part of the organism. It provides, not receives, the unity. And though you may after a fashion account for the

body, you cannot account for the "I's" attachment to that particular body. Why should this be my body, this among the ten thousand times ten thousand others? Why, in short should we be ourselves? Why should my ego be in existence in this time or age, and not associated with some other body in the past, or a body to come, not yet born? That "I" should be here now, in this region of time is beyond comprehension.

The "I" is the window through which every man that ever was born looks out upon the scene of existence.

So he goes on:

Let us then stand our ground, and look a little further into these strange matters of consciousness and personal identity. For we may with perfect confidence, and without fear of contradiction, affirm many things. We may say, for example, that the self or subject is the only point of departure for any kind of enquiry, even the most philosophical. Apart from a self you cannot find a mind. You assume it in every debate, for it is the condition of all experience, at the base of all knowing and debating, necessary to their very existence. You assume it even when you deny it. If, as the conclusion of a train of reasoning, I reject the self I am at the same time affirming what I deny in the reasoning of which the self alone is capable. And apart from it there is no such thing as consciousness, which is nowhere else to be found in nature; and without consciousness you could not be aware that there was an argument to ponder or a subject to discuss.

This idea moves Dixon to a flight of rhetoric, yet with precise meaning:

Whatever it be, this entity, this I, this being that cares for truth and beauty, the haughty, exclusive, conscious soul, its sense of personal identity survives all assaults. You may analyze it, with Hume, into a series of disconnected thoughts and feelings, but its unity reasserts itself in reviewing the series into which you have attempted to dissect it. In Hegel's words, "I have many ideas, a wealth of thoughts in me, and yet I remain, in spite of this variety, one." There is then something in us which nature has not given, for she had it not to give. Selfhood is not a contingent entity, but the representative of a

metaphysical and necessary principle of the universe, a part of its essential nature, a constituent of reality, nor without it could the Cosmos have attained to recognition, to full consummation or true being. Experiencing souls were a necessity if a universe in any legitimate sense there was to be. . . .

When you proceed, therefore, as do the naturalists, to explain the self as arising out of the components of the world it reveals, you are saying that the mirror is constructed out of the objects it reflects. You ascribe the origin of consciousness to the elements which it brings to light. You say the knower emerges out of what he knows, the discoverer of the scenery out of the scenery he discovers. And in this case if there were no conscious or observing selves, there' would be in effect no scenery, no world; for the world has no knowledge of itself, and could not without selfhood, without the assistance of watching selves, swim into its own ken.

This is the wonder of the human being, which on occasion Dixon celebrates, but he also contrasts the potentialities of man with erratic and often brutal and destructive arrangements of the world. In some of his chapters he recites at length the almost endless catalog of man's inhumanity to man. Turning to the world of nature, he makes a similar list of the ruthless indifferences of nature to human welfare—the earthquakes, storms, and tidal waves that wipe out hundreds, thousands, and hundreds of thousands in a matter of minutes or hours. If there is any benevolence in nature it is beyond our ken. Dixon reflects:

It may be that, although appearances are against her, nature meant well by us, that her powers were limited. She has done what she could, giving us a "second best," since the best was beyond her. It lay within her strength to confer life, but not to preserve it. Yet one cannot refrain from asking, was it necessary that man's superiority should prove his bane, that his aspirations should end in the grave? To create immortal longings in the ephemeral being of an hour, to implant in him passions never to be gratified, for knowledge never to be attained, for understanding never to be fulfilled to give him imagination, a fatal dowry, since it enables him to contrast his true lot with a better, the poverty of his possessions with the abundance of his cravings—was this necessary?

We have high potentialities, but no certainties. Our being is rooted in our consciousness, in the feeling of having god-like powers, yet we seem not to know what to do with them. We are continually involved in some kind of becoming, most often in enterprises that do not work out.

Face to face with the stupendous fact of existence, our sense of it quickened, we are startled into a recognition of its unsearchable depths and unfathomable significance. Not otherwise, as we have so often said, save for this everlasting Becoming, whose tossing waves and dizzying changes we bemoan, could there be a universe, or creatures like ourselves. . . .

But for Becoming and its imperfections there were nothing in that perfect world we talk of to give meaning to existence. There were neither aspirations nor visions, neither hopes to ponder nor proposals to entertain. This poor earth gives gifts to Heaven, which, destitute of the teeming experiences earth provides, were sunk in poverty. Heaven could make no Don Quixotes or Sancho Panzas, no Hamlets or Falstaffs, no heroes or martyrs, no Stoics or Epicureans, no Sapphos or Shelleys, no jesters or humorists, or indeed anything of interest, without the assistance of this our dear, painful and toiling lower world. A heaven without change without events, neither gods nor men could long endure.

What is Dixon getting at or reaching for? A little later he says:

It is Plato's doctrine, and none more defensible, that the soul before it entered the realm of Becoming existed in the universe of Being. Released from the region of time and space, it returns to its former abode, "the Sabbath, or rest of souls," into communion with itself. After a season of quiet "alone with the Alone," of assimilation of its earthly experiences and memories, refreshed and invigorated, it is seized again by the desire for further trials of strength, further knowledge of the universe, the companionship of former friends, by the desire to keep in step and on the march with the moving world. There it seeks out and once more animates a body, the medium of communication with its fellow travellers, and sails forth in that vessel upon a new venture in the ocean of Becoming.

Many, no doubt, will be its ventures, many its voyages For not until all the possibilities of Being

have been manifested in Becoming, not until all the good, beauty and happiness of which existence allows have, by the wayfaring soul been experienced, not until it has become all that it is capable of becoming—and who can tell to what heights of power and vision it may climb?—is it fitted to choose for itself the state and society which best fits its many requirements, as its natural or enduring habitation.

For souls which pursue such destiny, and for the universe in which they carry out their designs, there are absolute requirements, lying within and beyond atoms and the void. "Mind," according to Professor George Stout, "is not produced at all, but is in some way involved as a primary factor in the creation of the universe." For it is in the mind that all this drama takes place. Erase the mind and you erase the world. There is nothing more to say.

Life and intelligence, then, are present throughout the entire universe, and shared by all the monads in their representative modes, and the world we see is the result of their collective activities. Governed they are, as Empedocles asserted, by sympathies and antipathies, as are the individuals in human society, and may be looked upon as members of one another, as sharers in a common existence—however undeveloped and primitive on its lower levels—in the same confederacy. Nature, we may say, has not given birth to life. She is life. The Universe is not the home of life only because it is itself alive. And the mind, although it has its centers in individuals, develops only in the cooperations and frictions of society. . . . When we have a choice a spacious view is to be preferred, as best in keeping with a Cosmos we know to be spacious. I put to you a question. Are our thoughts too noble, too magnificent for the reality to compass? Are our cheques too large for the bank of the universe to honor? Can the mind, even in imagination, outrun or outrange the whole from which it sprang? For my part, I think not. "The sun," said Anaxagoras, "is larger than the Peloponnesus," and people wondered at his saying. For my part I think the universe is wider and larger than the wisest even of the philosophers have ever conceived. Let us then think imperially, for the more magnificent our thoughts the nearer the truth.

For Dixon the self and its conscious awareness of being a self is the primary reality. The reduction of the human being to his body

leads him only to consider how prone to misconception is the mind, to note that the denial of the reflecting, choosing, and acting self may under another generation of assumptions and influences make an entirely contrary decision. He sees that the same mind which proclaims visions and announces hopes may in other circumstances relapse into pessimism and thoughts of suicide. Yet the reality of the mind and its alternations of opinions remains. As he says:

Though surrounded by and embedded in the world, this awareness, this unique appanage or endowment of the individual self, marks its absolute separation from the rest of creation. Through this selfhood of unknown origin we become full citizens of the commonwealth in which all living things have their status. It is I myself, opposing myself to the not-self, affirming and at the same time resisting the whole, in my resolution to be and continue to be what I am, thinking and willing for myself, viewing myself and expressing myself from a standpoint not to be identified with any other throughout the past or present history of the universe, lonely and unrepeatable, it is this I, this breakwater against which the waves of denial burst in vain.

Dixon's book is a contest with the deniers. They, he maintains and shows, do not know how to think.

Evolution is a Becoming, a chain in which we must believe, but it appears to be a chain which consists chiefly of missing links. There is a curious absence of the immediate parents of the existing species, and where in plants are these transitional forms to be found?

For a layman it is all very confusing. I have been unable to discover any accepted view of the origin of species. There are Darwinians and Neo-Darwinians and Neo-Lamarckians. Agreed they are that evolution must have taken place, but how? Transformation remains a dark secret. You would think that if the Darwinians believed in the doctrine for the right reasons, the Lamarckians believed in it for the wrong, yet both are staunch believers. But any reasons are good enough for a foregone conclusion. . .

The origin of species, the history of life, is one thing, but what is life itself, the breath of existence, in which all are sharers? . . . This current, this indefinable energy, emerged apparently from nowhere, and for no ascertainable cause. . . . Deriving

strength from a source not its own, it proceeded to adapt itself to the conditions, to filter into crevices, to grow, to reproduce itself, a very clever trick, and gave rise to innumerable forms, patterns and novelties unknown in the previous history of the universe. One is lost in admiration of this novice's performances. Its inherent powers of adaptation are extraordinary. That simplest of creatures, the single-celled amoeba, can by degrees accommodate itself to life either in fresh or salt water. Animals can become habituated to deadly poisons, men, as we know, to breathing at altitudes they could not at first endure and live. . . . Whatever be the truth, the term evolution is but a mask for our ignorance.

"What can be made of this heterogeneous mob of individuals," asks Dixon, "this riotous confusion of events we call history?" He adds: "Logic demands the universal, and nature supplies nothing but the particular." The particulars are individuals, human monads. Their goal may be to unite in fraternity, yet they must exist as they are before they can unite. And how can their existence be pursued, unless they have more than one life—many more? This was the conclusion Dixon reached in his last chapter. He asked:

How many modes of existence are there? I cannot tell you but I should imagine them to be very numerous. And what kind of immortality is at all conceivable? Of all doctrines of a future life palingenesis or rebirth, which carries with it the idea of pre-existence, is by far the most ancient and most widely held, "the only system to which," as said Hurne, "philosophy can hearken." "The soul is eternal and migratory, say the Egyptians," reports Laertius. In its existence birth and death are events. And though this doctrine has for European thought a strangeness, it is in fact the most natural and easily imagined, since what has been can be again. This belief, taught by Pythagoras, to which Plato and Plotinus were attached, has been held by Christian fathers as well as by many philosophers since the dawn of civilization. It "has made the tour of the world," and seems, indeed, to be in accordance with nature's own favorite way of thought, of which she so insistently reminds us, in her rhythms and recurrences, her cycles and revolving seasons. "It presents itself," wrote Schopenhauer, "as the natural conviction of man whenever he reflects at all in an unprejudiced manner."

According to Plato's theory of reminiscence, our present knowledge is a recollection of what was learnt or known in a previous state. You will say, it has no knowledge of its previous lives. But what man remembers every day of his life? And lost memories, as the psychologists will tell you, are recoverable. For the memory appears to be a palimpsest, from which nothing is ever obliterated. If we have forgotten most days and incidents of our present lives it is natural that memories of previous lives should fail us. Yet from infancy every forgotten day and hour has added to our experiences, to our growth and capacity. All that a child was and did, though unremembered, is still a part of him and is knit up into his present nature. Every day and hour had its value; and made its contribution to the mind and soul. So it may be with former lives, each of them but a day in our past history.

We have, after all, new brains, unmarked by what has been printed in former lives on brains long since disintegrated and returned to earth. Yet our heritage from the past has not been lost, for in the immortal part of us, within and beyond the body, our character has been shaped by what we have learned as souls in other lives. We bring forward with us talents that no one can explain away, abilities which come so easily our parents are amazed and delighted, while at the same time there may be opacities that are a frustration to all.

The content of a human being remains mysterious except as a formation from many lives in the past. So, at any rate, has been the conviction of teachers and philosophers almost without number. As Dixon declared at the end of his book, "The present life is incredible, a future credible." And he added: "Not to be twice-born, but once-born is wonderful."

## *REVIEW*

### A LONELY HERO

WE have been reading in *Companion to A Sand County Almanac*, a study of Aldo Leopold's classic and the life of the author—as pleasurable an experience as one can imagine. The book is made up of essays about Leopold and his major work, edited by J. Baird Callicott, and the publisher is the University of Wisconsin Press, price in paperback, \$12.95.

Leopold was born in the Mississippi river town of Burlington, Iowa, in 1887, raised by his exceptional parents as a lover of the out-of-doors and a natural woodsman. He died in 1948 while fighting a forest fire which overtook a neighbor's land in the sandy central part of Wisconsin, of either exposure to the fire or a coronary, according to the doctors. A year later *A Sand County Almanac* was published by the Oxford University Press, with a foreword written a month before his death. In 1970 Ballantine issued an enlarged edition of the book. In its various editions, Leopold's classic has sold more than a million copies.

As a youth Leopold went to Yale, taking a B.S. and a master's degree in forestry in the Yale Forest School which had been established with funds by the family of Gifford Pinchot. Upon graduating, he went to work for the U.S. Forest Service, being sent to the high country of the Apache National Forest in the Arizona Territory, locating on the southern rim of the Colorado plateau.

It was wild country, barely settled, imposing, diverse, a true wilderness of high alpine meadows; wolves, grizzly bears, and deer; great stands of pine and folded recesses of tangled, semi-arid canyons. Leopold arrived on the stage out of Holbrook, bought himself a horse and a complete cowboy outfit, and set about lightening his deep eastern shade of green.

Despite some mistakes Leopold advanced rapidly in the Forest Service, coming to realize that the region was being ruined by over-grazing. Leopold was now deputy supervisor of the Carson

National Forest (as of 1913 he became supervisor) and learned the details of range management and range politics.

Long before "multiple use" became the byword in forestry, Leopold endeavored to take a total view of the forest and to gauge policy accordingly. By the time he left the Southwest, he was increasingly disturbed by the manner in which raw utilitarian motives—"economic determinism" he called it—were coming to dominate development in an environment that was intrinsically sensitive to exploitation and susceptible to damage.

In 1924 he was transferred to the U.S. Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin, where he did technical work of little interest to him, but gave him the time to write on wilderness preservation and game management. Meanwhile he had married a member of the celebrated Mexican Luna family and his fifth child arrived in 1927. He took up the hobby of archery and his wife, Estella, became Wisconsin's women's champion for five years running. Meanwhile he left the Forest Service to work for a sporting arms institute and gathered information on game management. This involved travel across nine states. From this travel he learned a great deal.

First, although game populations were suffering from over-hunting, a far more important factor was the destruction of habitat. The ideal of "clean farming" wreaked havoc not only with the farm economy (and, as would soon become clear, with the soil itself), but destroyed the coverts that small and upland game needed. Second, Leopold was now convinced that predators played only a minor role in game depletion. His views on predators had changed drastically since his varmint-control days in the Southwest. In the mid-twenties, he had begun to admit their value to science. By 1930, he was beginning to appreciate their ecological value, having been shaken by the tragic fiasco of deer overpopulation following predator extirpation on the Kaibab Plateau in Arizona. Finally, and most significantly, the game survey convinced Leopold that the most effective agent of game conservation was, and had to be, the landowner, the farmer. This became one of the pillars of Leopold's philosophy. He would always remain skeptical of large-scale government efforts to solve widely dispersed conservation problems, not as a consequence of any

strong ideological opinion, but as a matter of practicality.

His *Game Management* was published in 1933, becoming the profession's standard text. Meanwhile under the New Deal, he returned to the Forest Service as a consultant to supervise the work of the Civilian Conservation Corps in the Southwest. He then joined the University of Wisconsin, where he would remain for the remaining fifteen years of his life, as a teacher.

There is no "Sand County" in Wisconsin, rather a large sandy area in the center of the state. In the summer of 1934 Aldo and his brother Carl were returning from a fishing trip in this area where they found an abandoned farm where the house had burned down, with only a shack still standing. Aldo acquired the old farm and rebuilt the shack, gaining a refuge for himself and his family.

The shack was a family enterprise to which each member contributed: cutting and splitting wood, building birdhouse for martins, screechowls, and wood ducks, planting prairie grasse and wildflowers, shrubs and trees. From April to October scarcely a day went by that someone did not plant or transplant something—butterfly weed, tamarack, wahoo and oak, June-grass and sideoats, penstemon and puccoon, pipsissewa and pasques. All five Leopold children pitched in. . . .

A wilderness purist might let the trees fight it out among themselves. But the shack was not pure wilderness, nor was Leopold merely a spectator. The land had been heedlessly ravaged by men who regarded it as a commodity to be used and then abandoned. Leopold, by contrast, regarded himself as a participating citizen of the land community, seeking to restore it to ecological integrity, and he would not shirk the ethical decisions this entailed.

What can be said of the book itself? One contributor declares:

On the one hand, it flows smoothly and effortlessly. Each word drops into place with that sense of inevitability that Dylan Thomas said he found in all good poetry. The narrator's manner is confident and relaxed; his tone, though earnest, is rather light and conversational. He prefers a limpid, everyday vocabulary; avoiding jargon, scientific

names, and verbal pyrotechnics. His words, in short, do not call attention to themselves. Nevertheless, one senses that each word carries a great deal of meaning, as if chosen with the utmost care. The smoothness and transparency of Leopold's prose belies its density. Like hand-rubbed wood, its surface conceals its craft.

...

To call it a classic, however, is not to say it is perfect, merely that it endures. It rewards rereading with increased delight and deeper, more personal instruction. Like Keats's Grecian urn, it works to tease us out of thought and into imagination, not by virtue of its contents, but of the manner in which they are conveyed. That Leopold had a rare literary gift cannot be doubted, and one wonders what more he might have written if he had lived longer. But what can one add to the distilled wisdom of a lifetime? The gospels, too, are brief, challenging, and wonderfully durable. We could ask the same question of them: not, what more do we want, but what else do we need?

Still another contributor, writing on "The Land Ethic," says toward his conclusion:

"The Land Ethic" is the climax of *A Sand County Almanac*; this paragraph is the climax of "The Land Ethic":

"The 'key-log' which must be moved to release the evotinary process for an ethic is simply this: quit thinking about decent land-use as solely an economic problem." Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

Leopold wrote several forewords to his book, since it was rejected by other publishers. One of these forewords he had planned to revise as an appendix for the manuscript that was accepted by the Oxford University Press, but he died before the revision was made. The foreword written in 1947 has autobiographical material which shows the relation between the events of his life and his thought. The foreword dated July 31, 1947 says:

We regard land as an economic resource, and science as a tool for extracting bigger and better livings from it. Both are obvious facts, but they are not truths, because they tell only half the story.

There is a basic distinction between the fact that land yields us a living, and the inference that it exists for this purpose. The latter is about as true as to infer that I fathered three sons in order to replenish the woodpile. . . .

One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds. Much of the damage inflicted on land is quite invisible to laymen. An ecologist must either harden his shell and make believe that the consequences of science are none of his business, or he must be the doctor who sees the marks of death in a community that believes itself well, and does not want to be told otherwise. One sometimes envies the ignorance of those who rhapsodize about a lovely countryside in process of losing its topsoil, or afflicted with some degenerative disease of its water system, fauna, or flora. . . .

Whatever the philosophic import, or lack of it, in these sketches, it remains a fact that few writers have dealt with the drama of wild things since our principal instruments for understanding them have come into being. Thoreau, Muir, Burroughs, Hudson, and Seton wrote before ecology had a name, before the science of animal behavior had been born, and before the survival and faunas and floras had become a desperate problem. . . . At the end of the volume I try to sum up, in more coherent form, the basic logic of the ecological concept of land.

## COMMENTARY

### ANOTHER LEOPOLD BOOK

To go with *Companion to a Sand County Almanac*, discussed in this week's Review, it should be noted that the Oxford University Press in 1987 issued a commemorative edition of *A Sand County Almanac* (the author, Aldo Leopold, was born in 1887) with a small amount of additional material. Both this book and another, *Aldo Leopold: The Man and His Legacy*, by Thomas Tanner, with a foreword by Stewart Udall, are reviewed in the Summer 1988 *Land Stewardship Letter* by John Rylander.

In one place the reviewer says:

In October of 1986 the Aldo Leopold Centennial Celebration was held at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. *Aldo Leopold: The Man and His Legacy* is an outgrowth of that celebration. Much of the material in this volume was first presented there.

While some of the authors represented here are the same, and some of the material is similar to what appears in *Companion*, the material in this volume reflects the man and his life more personally. The last chapter, "Reflections and Recollections," contains a series of short remembrances of Leopold by his children and his brother Frederic. As we might expect, the shared memories are warm and affectionate, seeing to enhance the portrait of the man that emerges in *A Sand County Almanac*.

Both the *Companion* and the *Legacy* volume, the reviewer says, will serve the reader to develop a deeper insight and greater sensitivity to Leopold's writings. Of *Legacy*, he says:

As might be assumed from the title, *Aldo Leopold: The Man and His Legacy*, one of the clearest intents of this volume is to establish the place of Aldo Leopold as forester, biologist, wildlife expert, environmental philosopher, conservationist, and literary artist in American culture, as the positions of Thoreau, Audubon, and Muir have been established. . . . We can hope that future presidents of the United States as well as world leaders everywhere will be influenced by these magnificent, life-giving and life-sustaining ideas, and by the life of their author, Aldo Leopold.

Elsewhere in the *Land Stewardship Letter*, Ron Kroese, executive director of the Land

Stewardship Project, summarizes some of the reasons that farmers do not embrace sustainable techniques in agriculture. Drawing on a paper by Steven J. Taff, an agricultural economist of the University of Minnesota, he points to government policies which make it seem not in the farmer's interest to change his ways. First of all, the government insures crop risk but not income risk. There is no guarantee of a minimum income for farmers. For this reason many farmers are unwilling to adopt crops and techniques not backed by government programs. A second reason, according to Dr. Taff, is that U.S. law affords the farmers "the right to pollute." If farmers were obliged to internalize the costs of pollution, "they would be more likely to use environmentally sound farming practices." Finally, the government subsidizes crop production and not farming per se. Dr. Taff notes that "government supports provide enormous incentives to produce a handful of crops at output levels exceeding what they would be without this form of government intervention in output markets." This program works against a wide-scale adoption of sustainable agriculture techniques, since "new systems would require a change in crop selection or crop rotation."

Dr. Taff emphasizes what has been a sore point for many years for farmers endeavoring to practice sustainable methods—that "government policies have overwhelmingly tended to reward operators who push for full production at all costs, while ignoring, or even economically penalizing, farmers who seek to farm at a modest scale and in an environmentally sound manner. Fortunately, Kroese says, times are changing and for several reasons conventional farmers are now being pressured by circumstances to take sustainable farming methods seriously. The Land Stewardship Project wants to hear from farmers who have suggestions to make on government policy. "We will do our best," Kroese says, "to get your ideas to policy makers in Washington."

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### WHAT IS THE SUN MADE OF?

A MOTHER in California wrote to No. 62 of *Growing Without Schooling*:

Our children have taught themselves so many things. Jeremy (10) takes three or four encyclopedias on his bed during our "quiet or nap time" (for my sanity we have quiet time every day from 1 to 3 pm). He enjoys history and pursues it on his own.

As a child I did not enjoy arts and crafts because I hated cleaning up. I still have trouble folding or cutting anything straight. Steysi (8) manages to make many interesting things without any encouragement from me. She has put together her own book of riddles (some original) and has made a math chart to reward herself for doing math every day (her idea—I don't require math to be done every day). Kellen (5) wanted to learn to read when he was 3 so we started a phonics program. He didn't seem to grasp it so we put it away. Two weeks later he brought me the phonics book and said, "I'm ready to read now." I didn't believe him, but we tried it anyway and he did it. Kellen is a child who needs to know what the sun is made of, if it's made of fire then where is the smoke, which way is north and those kinds of things. He asks questions that need looking up and that is fine with me. Joshua (3) has a wild imagination and plays a lot by himself.

I think I'd die before I'd send him to a nursery school to "learn" things—he's so great at figuring them out by himself. Last week when I was hurriedly helping him take off his sweatshirt he said to me, "Mom, sometimes you have to let people do things by themselves. I can do this myself. I can't do it fast, but I can do it slow." I am being homeschooled by my children and I wouldn't change places with anyone!

Another letter from a mother in New York:

Out of the blue, no fanfare, no fireworks, and just three months short of her fifth birthday, Lena began to read. I was sitting in my chair one night, my husband was sitting in his, we were both reading and I thought Lena was drawing. Then out of the corner of my eye I saw my husband waving his arm at me, and when I looked up he was pointing at Lena. There she was with her copy of *Little Bear*, moving her finger along the lines, her mouth moving too. I

was so excited, but I kept quiet, didn't even move, and just snuck a look every few seconds to see how long she'd keep at it. She made it through four pages, closed book, walked over to my chair and said, "Listen to this!" and proceeded to read the whole first chapter, non-stop. It was real reading, too, not memorization, because I hadn't read the book to her in over six months.

She has since completed the whole book. I see that she had been leading up to reading in her own way, asking what various interesting words said, picking out words she recognized during story time at night, writing little letters after asking me how to spell half the words, etc. But how she put it all together and then had the courage to "show-off"—she usually likes to have things totally right before she goes public—is something of a mystery. One thing I now recall is that when she became interested in the alphabet several years ago, it wasn't to learn the song or to recite the letters. She wanted to learn the sounds of the letters *as* she was learning the letters sequentially. Her reading, more than any other single achievement, has been a truly solitary endeavor, which is why I can't be more informative about her methods.

An eleven-year-old in Massachusetts wrote in to say:

Every once in a while I see *GWS* (*Growing Without Schooling*) lying on the hassock and I pick it up and read it. Some of the people who write in I feel are analyzing kids. They're watching them closely and writing in what their behavior is. I feel like *GWS* is half lab report. It makes me feel like a guinea pig. It's like if kids analyzed grownups and whether or not they went to work, and analyzed their behavior and wrote it down and sent it in to a newsletter. I think it's even worse than that because the parents have power over the kids.

I don't like the way it makes me feel. It especially seems wrong for parents to write things about their kids without the kids knowing or realizing what they're writing. It's like talking about someone behind their back.

I hereby invite any children to send me an analysis of their parents and whether or not they're doing a good job. I don't want to be nasty, but that's the way it makes me feel.

After a thoughtful letter of comment from the editor of *GWS*, Susannah Sheffer, this girl replied:

I realized after reading your letter that none of us really knows what the motives are of the people who write into *GWS*, or if they get permission from their kids beforehand to write about them. What I was really angry about is that my mother has written into *GWS* things about our family without any of us knowing about it. I only found out when I read it in the magazine. When I read it I felt like I was a guinea pig, and that my mother was always secretly watching me to see if I was making progress or learning something she really wanted me to learn. I don't like the way it makes me feel. I don't feel free to do things I want to do because I think she might be watching and recording what my interests and activities are.

I guess I wanted to express this and to let other parents know that their kids might feel the same way. . . . Thank you for your letter. It helped me to see that my real anger was toward my own mother.

Susannah wrote this girl another good letter, which helped, and her mother then contributed a communication too long to reprint but in some respects remarkable. She said:

I have painfully come to see that the true motive behind my mothering was to turn out kids I could be proud of, and thereby authenticate that I was a good mother. My kids having true awareness, could sense the hidden ambitions in my actions and resisted being used.

She concluded:

I wish this whole area wasn't so nebulous and subjective but I know that parents and children who have these problems and want to get beyond them will recognize what I am describing. Recognition, regret (repentance), and honest openness seem to be the best cures. You have to want to see that perhaps, you, the parent, are the source of the problem before you can get to the bottom of it.

Here is an interesting letter from Minnesota:

My husband and I are both blind and the parents of one fully sighted 7-year-old son whom we are homeschooling. I have heard rumors that there are other blind parents homeschooling, but to date have not been able to substantiate that fact. However, there are many blind teachers in this country teaching at all levels and in all fields. I feel that if blind teachers can teach many children, I can handle one.

We live in an area where there are no services for the blind that amount to much. I have always been amused by the fact that states will assist blind clients to receive high school, college and technical training, but will not continue the aid when the person gets into the real world.

As you can imagine, my biggest obstacle has been having materials read or brailled. It is suggested that homeschoolers be prepared from one year to the next. I really have to do this since I must think of what curriculum I will use and how I will get it put into braille or on cassette. There are many high tech pieces of equipment which would help us, but which we cannot afford. . . . If you know of any sources that might help in the purchase of this equipment, please let us know. Other items I could use are cassettes, old reference books, picture books and magazines and other teaching tools that others may not want. . . . I would be glad to share my experiences with other blind parents, or with sighted parents homeschooling a blind child.

Susannah Sheffer gives this mother's name and address: Linda Iverson, 1314 17th St. South, Moorhead, Minn. 56560. One way to help her would be to read *GWS* and other homeschooling publications onto cassettes. Linda says she would like best the whole publication read—ads and all—so that she can browse through it as a sighted person can, making her own selections as to what is valuable.

## *FRONTIERS*

### Unity within Diversity

A GOOD thing to do in these days of the rapid transformation of the population of the United States—involving the assimilation of Asian, Black, and Latin and other racial groups—is to dip into the writing of the more articulate members of these groups as a way of recognizing what they have gone and are going through to become citizens of the United States and members of the North American community. We have a copy of the *Amerasia Journal*, 1986-87, as one means of this experience, issued twice a year by the Asian American Studies Center, 3932 Campbell Hall, University of California, Los Angeles, Calif. 90024.

The lead article in this issue of *Amerasia* is "Growing Up in Central California," by Yori Wada, who is now a Regent of the University of California. This writer was born in the San Joaquin Valley in 1916. His father was janitor in a Japanese hospital and his mother operated a confectionery store selling ice cream and soda and Japanese goodies in the town where they lived, Hanford.

Speaking of the twenties and thirties, Wada recalls:

We were a poor family working hard to survive each passing day. And yet I cannot remember my mother complaining to us children about the harshness of raising four children. Perhaps this was because many other families also worked hard during the years of the Great Depression that was later written about by John Steinbeck and Carey McWilliams.

In the context of those times, how significant were the heritage and the cultural practices and values carried from that land across the Pacific Ocean in the sustenance and nurture of the Issei [Japan-born]—and of us their Nisei [American-born] children?

Or was it that poverty is no big thing if many other families of the community are in the same circumstances, and if work, however low-paying, hard, and back-breaking, is available to sustain the

body, and the family and your neighbors are there to nourish the soul?

What was different, what was the same for other families of Hanford and Kings County during the lean years? How was it for the Chicanos, the Blacks, the Chinese, the Italians, the Dutch, the Portuguese, the Caucasians?

In their own ways, they, too, survived. What were the strengths of their cultural backgrounds that helped to keep them going? Although our social relationships with them were largely in the school and work settings, there was no overt hostility or racism among the poor and struggling. It is difficult for me to recall the social environment of that time and place in a small country town, but it seemed to me that we got along. Live and let live seemed to be the norm, although I never knew, in depth, how the other ethnics lived.

Yet it was hard for Wada to be refused use of Hanford's public swimming pool and of the bowling alley. His older sister worked for the family of the man who managed the water department and the swimming pool, doing the washing, cleaning and cooking for the family, and Wada mowed the lawn and looked after the garden, but neither he nor his sister could swim in the public pool. "There seemed to be an unwritten rule that Japanese Americans could not get jobs other than in Japan-town stores, and that we would not be welcome in restaurants other than in Chinese and Japanese eating places."

In those days, the Issei could work or share-crop agricultural land, but could not purchase their own land in their own names. "Aliens ineligible for citizenship" was the classification placed by law upon our parents by the government. City Hall was a remote place to visit, only when absolutely necessary, and it did not seem to matter that we Nisei didn't register to vote when we came of age. On Saturdays—the time to shop, to eat out, to drink, to relax and to socialize—we minorities stayed in the east-side of Hanford and the Whites stayed in the western part of town. Would you like to guess which was "the better part" of Hanford? . . .

The school buses passed through the middle-class white sections of Hanford—we minorities and the poor Whites were expected to walk to school. As we walked to school separated by ethnicity, the Chinese Americans talked in Cantonese while we

Japanese Americans talked to one another in English. I hesitate to comment on the significance of that, perhaps it was the Nisei's subconscious way toward assimilation. Or was it that we weren't fluent in Japanese? But I do remember, with deep affection, some of the Caucasian teachers who counseled and motivated me and other minority students to learn well and to set our sights for higher education.

Well, Wada studied hard, entered the University of California, became a research assistant to a professor, worked for the Post Office, graduated, then served in the army, and while in the service visited his family, then in a relocation camp in Arkansas.

It's hard to describe with words the emotions of that moment—the face-to-face meeting of soldier and his family within the confines of barbed wires and guard towers—an indescribable mixture of happiness, of shame and embarrassment, of unshed tears, or restraint, of sadness and joy and suppressed anger.

He was discharged from the army in 1946 and settled in San Francisco with his wife. He enrolled in courses in the Extension Center of the University of California and began a career of social work with children and youth.

Toward the end of these recollections he says:

We have tilled America's soil and harvested the crops, helped to build the railroads, invented and created, cleaned her buildings, toiled in the fish canneries, enriched her culture with literature, music and dance and art, faithfully attending the schools. We were farm workers and doctors dish-washers and small entrepreneurs, laborers and hotel operators, housewives and aspiring engineers working as vegetable stand clerks, preachers and janitors and nursery men. We were also drunkards and con artists and exploiters of our own people.

In short, they became Americans.

This seems a good place to add some of the thinking of Louis Adamic, the Yugoslav immigrant writer. This summary of his views is provided by Yuji Ichioka:

Adamic rejected the old notion of an American melting pot which required all new immigrant groups to discard their old world traits and to recast

themselves in the mold of Anglo-Saxon Americans. He believed that every immigrant group had something valuable to contribute to American society "Americanism" was not the monopoly of old-stock Americans, but "an expanding concept" which embraced all Americans, old and new, who still were in the process of "becoming" by contributing towards the creation of "a universal or pan-human culture." "Anti-alienism" and "racism" had bred intolerance and hatred among Americans, putting new immigrants and racial minorities "on the defensive" and crippling their capacity to function as full human beings. Americanism involved the "acceptance" of cultural and racial differences, and the future of America, to Adamic, lay in a "unity within diversity."

With this as his ideal, in 1940 Adamic published *From Many Lands*, telling the story of different emigrant groups, including the Nisei, to promote understanding of Americans with different backgrounds.