

THE STRUGGLE IS ENOUGH

THE myth of Sisyphus, given new currency by a brief (four-page) essay by Camus, seems a fitting tract for our times. If one is convinced that many or most of the problems of modern man could be met by the adoption of appropriate technology, with all that this implies, and wonders why so obvious a truth is not more widely accepted, the plight of Sisyphus may illuminate this difficult question. The light here proposed, we should admit, is largely due to the insight of Camus, even as he is indebted to the Greek genius which originated so formidable an account of the human condition. As he says in his essay:

Myths are made for the imagination to breathe life into them. As for this myth, one sees merely the whole effort of a body straining to raise the huge stone, to roll it and push it up a slope a hundred times over; one sees the face screwed up, the cheek tight against the stone, the shoulder bracing the clay-covered mass, the foot wedging it, the fresh start with arms outstretched, the wholly human security of two earth-clotted hands. At the very end of his long effort measured by skyless space and time without depth, the purpose is achieved. Then Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments toward that lower world whence he will have to push it up again toward the summit. He goes back down to the plain.

Now Camus is ready to say what he wants to say:

It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself! I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour like a breathing space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock.

If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would this torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him? The workman of today works every day of his life at the

same tasks, and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious. Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition: it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory.

We leave Camus' stoic resolution to draw a parallel. If we are able to conceive the meaning of the common human life in mythic terms—and there may be no other way to comprehend it—there is a sense in which we are now reaching a moment of consciousness in our Sisyphusian labors. The rock of our ingenious, not to say Faustian, cycle of technological progress is sliding down, down, down. Those with sufficient imagination already see it at the bottom of the decline and write vividly about the forces which are accelerating the descent. The very skills developed to accomplish the long mechanical climb upward become the tools of factual analysis and devastating criticism. Schumacher was an economist, Lovins is a physicist, and Berry is a farmer. But they are economist, physicist, and farmer who are doing things differently. There may be a sense in which the spark of the Promethean fire inspires them to declare another way of raising the rock, and of finding for it a location where stabilizing laws of equilibrium prevail. But meanwhile our consciousness of the futility of both past objectives and the methods of reaching them is upon us. Such consciousness is tragic, yet Camus finds in it a kind of hope:

These are our nights of Gethsemane. But crushing truths perish from being acknowledged. Thus Oedipus at the outset obeys fate without knowing it. But from the moment he knows, his tragedy begins. Yet at the same moment, blind and desperate, he realizes that the only bond linking him to the world is the cool hand of a girl. Then a tremendous remark rings out: "Despite so many ordeals, my

advanced age and the nobility of my soul make me conclude that all is well."

Nobility of soul! What has that to do with the matter? This is a question that may acquire increasing relevance as the years go by. Only the wear of time and the barbs of pain brought Œdipus to this conclusion. For us—or most of us—full recognition of our Sisyphean situation is only on the way. But that it is on the way is evident from books which keep coming out. *The Growth of Hunger* (Marion Boyars, 1980, \$7.95), a book inspired by Rene Dumont and written by Nicholas Cohen, suggested the parallel between the technological approach to food supply and the trials of Sisyphus. This is a book which, like some others, makes us aware that more of what we are now doing will not work. It will worsen, not improve, the conditions Nicholas Cohen describes in his first chapter:

Those who live in industrialized societies can manage to ignore for a good deal of the time their dependence on agriculture. They are insulated by the machinery which surrounds them and by the supplies of conveniently processed food to which access is allowed virtually *ad libitum*. The majority of such populations eat more food than is needed to maintain their health, indeed their over-eating actually predisposes them to new epidemics of diseases such as heart attacks and diabetes. Only the very poorest members of such societies have insufficient resources to provide for their needs of food. Yet, despite such a concentration on the pre-eminence of industrial man, three-quarters of the population of the world still depend upon the products of their own fields and agricultural labor to feed and provide for themselves. It is these rural families who, together with the growing masses of unemployed and landless in the towns of India, Africa and South America, mostly lack the soil, the water, the fertilizer the economic and political power to obtain adequate diets.

The book is a study of how these conditions came to prevail, an analysis of the futility of present methods of improving the plight of the hungry and malnourished, ending with some proposals of what ought to be done. A chapter, "Failed Technological Solutions," details the results of the Green Revolution and examines the far-reaching effects of farming with chemicals.

The point of the criticism of the Green Revolution—which introduced high-yield varieties of cereals—is that it requires bigness of operation and drives the small farmers from the land. There is also reduction of the land available for growing vegetables for local consumption. Mr. Cohen concludes:

The technology of the Green Revolution must take responsibility also for many detrimental, and probably irreversible, social changes. Illegal, or barely legal, takeover of land has been common. The extension of a money economy and the consequent redefinition of relationships between rural employer and employee, has created a new proletariat.

The section on chemical fertilizer and pesticides verifies the prophetic statement by Rachel Carson in *Silent Spring* (1962): "What we have to face is not an occasional dose of poison which has accidentally got into some article of food, but a persistent and continuous poisoning of the whole human environment." There is now some practical awareness of this effect. The author writes:

The US Congress is putting through legislation which will remove some of the most obvious dangers, such as totally inadequate handling instructions, but there is a strong parallel with pharmaceutical production in which unwanted drugs with dangerous side-effects have been dumped in the poorer countries whose protective legislation is less vigilant. This is something the less-industrialized countries will have to put right for themselves.

In his final chapter, devoted to another sort of agriculture for the future, Mr. Cohen sums up his criticism:

Despite all the possible improvement predicted as a result of current agricultural policies, a large part of the world's population can anticipate continuing shortages of food—a growing problem of hunger. The present state of destructively anarchic agricultural development, divorced from the meaningful participation of those who actually work on the land, is therefore full of threats for the future. Since the industrial era is dependent itself upon a diminishing supply of non-renewable raw materials (fossil fuels, base metals, chemical fertilizer, etc.), this condition implies the development of an alternative strategy for an agriculture, freed, in the

largest manner possible, from such constraints. What could be termed a non-violent agriculture.

The recommendations of this writer are consistent with other of Gandhi's objectives. Mr. Cohen says:

In the first place, there is need for counterbalancing rural-based power groups to take charge not only of the means of agricultural production—land, livestock and machinery—but also the handling of trade arrangements to the advantage of the producers. Small rural communities, based on agriculture but with supporting light industries, could free themselves from many of the existing principles of hierarchical control. Such organizations could isolate the established strata of privilege and power, though certainly not without some conflict. On an international scale, those countries whose systems of agricultural production are now exploited by richer countries should establish more powerful linking syndicates in order to reduce their dependence upon countries with surpluses of staple foods such as cereals, expand their internal markets and encourage food and agricultural exchanges among themselves. The debts accumulated over the past generations will have to be set aside (as much between members of the same village as between nations), so that the enormous inequalities of income and opportunity between richer and poorer can be reduced.

Last but not least is education:

A major step towards the transformation of agriculture will be a parallel remodelling of systems of education bringing with it a diffusion of literacy into the most remote communities. An important aspect of such a programme must be political and, given this perspective, Paulo Freire has shown in Brazil that provided the motivation is sufficient, adults can become literate in about six weeks. Subsequently, there is the potential for progression to the formation of village-controlled cooperatives, local unions of those who work the land, and emancipation from domination by the interests of urban government.

Since Nicholas Cohen calls for a non-violent agriculture, what sort of education is in key with this idea? Gandhi called his idea of *Nai Talim* (New Education) his last best gift to India. In this education books are secondary and the distinction between work and knowledge is made to disappear. Vinoba Bhave, the chief exemplar of

Gandhi's ideas after his death, has a book on this kind of teaching—*Thoughts on Education*, translated by Marjorie Sykes and published by Sarva Seva Sangh, in Varanasi, in 1964. In one chapter, apparently written in 1951, Vinoba says:

The time has come for this Nai Talim to stand up and summon the nation like a trumpet call. It puzzles and saddens me that three years should have gone by since we gained our independence, yet we have not found the courage to take a decision about this. What clearer proof could there be of our failure to understand essentials than that the very system of education which was in use before independence as a means to keep people in subjection, should be allowed to continue after independence has been won? . . . If we are content that the atmosphere, the mental attitudes, which now prevail in our towns should continue, India will have no peace. The town must interest itself in the service of the villages on whose support it stands, and must educate its children with this view. It will not do to bring up village children to serve their country while town children are brought up to loot their country! . . .

I wish now to utter a word of warning about some of the dangers which confront us. Many people nowadays think of Basic Education [as *Nai Talim* came to be called] as a new kind of system, method or technique of teaching, on a par with various other teaching "methods" which have had their vogue in the past. This is a mistaken view. I am very much afraid of systems, especially in educational work; a system can make an end of all education. What a student receives from a Nai Talim centre such as Sevagram is not a system to be practiced but a compass to show him the direction.

In Basic Education the operations of the local economy become the foundation for practical learning. The beginnings of all the sciences are in such work. Literature is also a foundation:

It is good that the exalted experiences which are recorded in our literature should be stored in our minds. Our traditions in this matter differ from those of the West. The point of view of Western scholars is analytical, they break up the world into fragments and divide it into various "branches" for study; but we look upon the world as one, and study it as an integral whole. In this our approach differs from theirs, and for this reason there is in our tradition a place for the learning of great passages of literature.

When a friend remarked that he saw no relation between such conceptions and the practice of crafts, Vinoba said with characteristic simplicity:

Man has a soul, and it is only when the soul of man is strong that the nation can be strong. Strength is not merely of the body, a body without a soul is not a body but a corpse. . . . It is only when the body is informed by a soul that it has the strength for action. In my opinion, the learning of great passages of literature is a necessary aid to the maturing of the soul.

He goes on to explain:

I have described this incident because so many people are trying to turn Nai Talim into a system; and if this idea gets imprisoned in a system, it will be killed. If that should happen there will be no room for initiative, and people will spend their time contriving how this piece of knowledge can be correlated with that activity. We must steer clear of that kind of thing. Nai Talim is a philosophy of living, it is an attitude to life that we have to bring to all our work.

Vinoba is saying that no system will lead to the formation of character. This brings us to the heart of the matter, for to think initially and primarily about the formation of character would constitute a great change in the outlook of the West, and indeed of all the world. It was through character that Oedipus found himself ready, though old and blind, to accept the reality that was before him—what he had then to do—and to conclude that "all is well." A similar recognition lies before the world today, since only through the formation of character can the changes required of us be recognized and adopted. Vinoba, spokesman for the verities known to an ancient civilization, gives the cream of its maturity—so sadly neglected in the India of today—in language we may have difficulty in accepting:

People talk of the growth of population in India, and there is no doubt that this is a serious problem and one that demands attention. But for my part I do not so much fear the growth of population as the growth of an unmanly population. If our people are manly, hard-working and skillful, I feel confident that this earth will be able to bear their weight. But

because we lack the spirit of self-discipline, an unmanly and spiritless population is increasing in numbers. The books that are being written, the cinemas and so on, are tending completely to unman the spirit of India. . . .

Skill without self-control can lead a man to disaster; it cannot profit humanity. Strength by itself is vain; skill by itself is vain, they have value only when they are used for human welfare. Not enough attention is being given to this aspect of education. When people discuss Basic Education they simply recite this slogan of "education through craft" as if that one phrase described it completely. This is an entirely false idea.

There is a sense in which Vinoba is calling for a change in *taste* on the part of the Indian people. So far, a few have responded—as many, perhaps, as can—but not enough to make a noticeable dent in the affairs of the country. The change of taste, to be significant, may take longer than we think. In India they are still trying to roll the rock up the wrong hill, and the rest of the world is doing the same thing.

Here in the United States a unique opportunity for a widespread change of taste began about twenty years ago—in the early 1960s—sparked in part by the Civil Rights movement in the South, and by the communitarian spirit which animated the New Left in its early days (as shown by the Port Huron statement), but most of all by a generation of the young that was quite evidently nauseated by the showy affluence in which their parents were involved. It began as a kind of children's crusade, and like that other crusade of the young so long ago, it ended in disaster. There was no place in our society for them to apply their rampant energies, no way they could work off steam. There was a change of taste that was denied all wholesome nourishment by this civilization. Yet a current of change was begun, as Roszak shows in *The Making of a Counter Culture*, and at least a foothold on another sort of future has been obtained.

It is likely that we cannot borrow wholesale from Vinoba and Gandhi the ideas of Basic Education. Our heritage erects barriers and our

words have a different feeling-tone. India never had the dead weight of the Jehovah religion to recover from, nor a French revolution, nor angry Marxian materialism followed by existentialist despair. The West must evolve its own conceptions of character and develop its own language of moral excellence, free from the taint of bitterly resented deceptions and the perversions of the religious impulse. Yet the realities of character and decency and unselfishness and love of one's fellows are the same all over the world. It is just that they cannot be made captive by any system—as both Gandhi knew and Vinoba knows so well. And what systems cannot accomplish, people must do for themselves, although obtaining help from many sources.

If this realization is able to give an increasing number of people a new center of gravity in their efforts toward change, we may be able to understand the last sentences of Camus' essay: "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy."

REVIEW ON THE BEAUTIFUL

A REVIEW department is supposed to give attention to works of literature, along with related undertakings. But what qualifies as "literature"? Literature, we might say, is that body of writings which came into being as an end in itself—a good not in the service of any established institution such as science or religion, which brings us the "surprise of joy." But this phrase of Wordsworth's, while suggestive, is as ambiguous as the "pursuit of happiness."

From these inconclusive thoughts we move to another question: Who have been the most undisputed contributors to literature? Well, considering novelists and poets, let us say that any such list would have to include both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky among Europeans, and Melville and Twain among Americans. Poets such as Blake, Coleridge, Shelley, Whitman, and Yeats might be named. Of these we may say that they all knew sharp pain at first hand, and that some of them wrestled all their lives with dragons. Their literary art had roots which go deeper than "literature." Biography might help us here, but would no doubt bring us to other mysteries.

Yet it is not pointless to encounter mysteries. This is the true calling, one might say, of the artist. He does not deal with "public truth," but with those things one finds out only for oneself. Our work is enriched by art—but to be moved by art the work we do must be spontaneous, and therefore free. Joy is of this character—a sign, one could say, that we are on the right track—but then the question arises: Why should this be? What is the beautiful, which gives joy, and what makes joy enjoyable?

The best use of literature, then, may be as the means of learning to enjoy the right things. If we are not enjoying the right things, then our literature may be seriously at fault, our writers accountable, along with ourselves.

An article by Kathleen Raine, "An Essay on the Beautiful," in the *Southern Review* for the Summer of 1979, comes to grips with such questions. Plotinus, Thomas Taylor, and William Blake figure prominently in the discussion. The writer's justification for launching an unembarrassed account of what Plotinus has written about the Beautiful is the manifest distortion of our lives through devotion to works and stimuli which are the very opposite of the beautiful. The question which Kathleen Raine obliges us to ask is: Can and ought corrections be made in our idea of what is beautiful, and how is this related to what is good, or what we think is good? Where, on the gamut of feeling, are we "surprised by joy"? Can thinking alter this response? Does literature lead to elevation without the drag of moralizing which never lifted anyone? Is this why we stand in awe of great artists?

In any event, criticism should take into account the joy that Kathleen Raine, scholar and poet, found in writing what she did, and note the intellectual dignities and noetic reachings with which the joy is associated. She writes:

Conditioned as we are by the voice of popular opinion, through the press and the mass media, to believe in material causes, an all too democratic popular cosmology from which any scale of values, any mention of "lower" and "higher" is precluded, it comes with a shock—a shock of delight—to find in Plotinus' serene discourse the re-establishment of a hierarchy of values, a scale of perfection upon which the highest is reflected down, in the form of beauty, to the lowest place in the universe, the material world. And upon that same ladder we may ascend, through a perception of the beautiful in sensible things, to a discovery of the source of beauty in the soul and at last a contemplation of what Plotinus, following Plato, calls "the beautiful itself"—in Intellect, the divine source, the One, or as it is translated by both Taylor and MacKenna, "the Alone."

What have we done to ourselves, Kathleen Raine asks, by forgetting all this?

Beauty was a word that disappeared from works of literary criticism of the 1920s and 1930s and was not to reappear for many years; from poetry also, in a

society no longer grounded in that sense of "the real" of which beauty is an aspect. Not, as I was to discover so slowly and belatedly, because trees and nightingales had become extinct yet, though of course what is extinguished in the imagination is in danger of also becoming extinguished in nature—but because the concept of "the beautiful" belongs to a vision of reality, a philosophy of the nature of the cosmos we inhabit, that our society has discarded. Those who wish to re-experience what the poets have named "the beautiful" must in their turn discard the materialist ideology which precludes it and once more discover "the beautiful" at its source.

For those Romantic poets from whom I had learned a way to experience beauty but not a way to defend it had themselves been learned in the Platonic philosophy. Because so grounded they could both speak of beauty and create it.

She says in effect that to know—to feel—the Platonic philosophy is to make one's expressions beautiful. English literature therefore has a great debt to Thomas Taylor, the translator from the Greek who was so much more than a scholar that the disdain for what he accomplished needs explanation. Kathleen Raine says:

In fact, no writer of his time has been so often and so uncompromisingly or at such length and with so much passion consigned to oblivion as Taylor the Platonist, which reveals a passionate wish of his opponents to get rid of him, together with the philosophy whose interpreter he was. And yet, if we take the trouble to compare Stephen Mackenna's beautiful literary translation of Plotinus, made in this century, with Taylor's, it will often be found that, though less elegant, Taylor is more finely exact in his understanding of the philosophy. He was himself a philosopher within the tradition of those whose works he studied. But few care for such things, and do we not get not only the rulers but also the philosophers, the poets, painters, musicians, and architects we deserve?

Yet Taylor found readers such as Blake—who was his friend—and Shelley, and others of great influence. If, as Kathleen Raine says, his readers were few, "they were also among the best minds of their age; and Taylor's contribution to the Romantic movement is incalculable, but certainly very great." (It is appropriate here to recall Theodore Roszak's championship of the

Romantic poets, and the reasons he gives for defending them.) Miss Raine adds that in his later years Taylor "seems not to have known wild counter-culture people like William Blake and Mary Wollstonecraft, but to have retired into his own world, rather out of touch perhaps with the New Age he had, as a young man, done so much to call into existence." Emerson, it should be noted, collected him.

Kathleen Raine chooses one work by Taylor to celebrate, making it the foundation of her essay:

I shall take only one example—a little book which was probably read by most of the Romantic poets, certainly by Blake. It was probably from this book that Keats learned that "beauty is truth, truth beauty." In 1792 you might have bought, for the price of two shillings and sixpence (boards), a book of forty-seven pages, with another twenty pages of introduction, *An Essay on the Beautiful from the Greek of Plotinus*. You would have done well to buy it, for in those few pages lies the essence of the aesthetics of the Platonic tradition. And it was the Platonic philosophers who gave to the concept of "the beautiful" that profound meaning and moral value that have inspired the poetry of Coleridge and Wordsworth, of Keats and Shelley, the paintings of Blake and Palmer and Calvert. In writing of the Greek revival in England it has for some reason never seemed to art historians or literary critics necessary to go beyond the influence of the Parthenon frieze and the Portland vase and other objects of visual art brought into England at that time; but a renewed knowledge of Greek philosophy, through Taylor's works, was no less significant. It was Taylor's expositions of the myths underlying the Greek Mysteries that gave to the Romantic poets an understanding of the symbolism long absent from English poetry; and in translating Plotinus's *On the Beautiful* he put into their hands the whole Platonic doctrine on the arts, and the relation of the arts to virtue.

Virtue is certainly something we need, but hardly know how to get, or even to talk about. Maslow did yeoman service in providing a pragmatic sort of vocabulary for looking for the roots of virtue, and Schumacher, by-passing the thickets of modern skepticism and ignoring the desperations of the existentialists, was forthright

in returning to Christianity for terms of reference. We are shy about revivals of "virtue" in familiar language because there have been so many dreadful pretensions in its name, yet the hunger to rediscover a principle of order for our lives persists.

Taylor, to get to the point, held with Plotinus that it is the "perception of the beautiful itself, even while connected with a corporeal nature, which must be the great end of all true philosophy." Miss Raine comments:

Hardly a definition that would find acceptance among the philosophic claimants of 1979. But it was the light from this remote source, mirrored in the poetry of the Romantics, that my generation was still able remotely to receive. It is tragic that at the present time there are so many young people receiving an education which does little or nothing to raise their minds to that perception; and which rather extinguishes the innate sense of beauty which is in every child. For the perception of the Beautiful is also self-knowledge, and knowledge of the divine—as Plotinus leads us to understand.

Humans are mixtures—mixtures of the Good with distractions from it—and the joy we take in the perception of Beauty is the response of the good—one might even say, the perfect—in ourselves to the projections in other forms around us of that same Good—the beauty in nature, as we say.

Beauty, according to Plotinus, is first apprehended through the senses, and recognized as a harmony.

Plotinus goes on to say that "rising from the senses into the regions of soul," we shall there discover even greater beauties: "as bodies appear fair to the sight, sounds beautiful to the ear so are knowledge and virtue lovely to the mind". . . . he sets out to show that the essence of beauty is always itself, that the beauty we perceive through the senses is the same as the beauty of the mind. Therefore if we can discover what it is that "seizes the spectator with rapturous delight . . . we may perhaps use it as a ladder, enabling us to ascend into the region of beauty, and survey its immeasurable extent."

Finding our own words for such realities might help to lay a foundation for an ecology of mind.

Taylor's rendition of Plotinus' *On the Beautiful* is not likely to be in print, but a translation by Elmer O'Brien is available in a Mentor edition, *The Essential Plotinus* (1964).

COMMENTARY

THE ONLY HOPE

GANDHI VIGYAN is a quarterly journal published by the Academy of Gandhian Studies, a group of voluntary workers whose objectives are "to carry out and facilitate study and research on the teaching and practice of Gandhian ideas and action with a view to influencing the thought and action of the people and helping them to maintain peaceful, harmonious and happy relationships among themselves: to promote the Gandhian way of life based on the values of Truth and non-violence and to propagate their use in national and international affairs: to provide guidance and consultation to the organizations engaged in rural development, and conduct training programs and seminars." Single copies are \$1.35, a year's subscription \$4.00. The address is 2-2-1133/5/5 New Nallakunta, Hyderabad-44, India.

In *Gandhi Vigyan* for last October, the editor, K. S. Acharlu, writes about the role and responsibility of the teacher in a way that amplifies the meaning of the quotation from Vinoba's *Thoughts on Education* (see page 2). Drawing on India's cultural past, Mr. Acharlu says:

Indian tradition holds the teacher, the torch-bearer of knowledge, in high esteem. The teacher was called an *acharya*, i.e., one who practices in his life what he preaches and is a model of conduct. A beautiful word that is used for the teacher in the Vedas, says Acharya Vinoba, is *gatuvit*, pathfinder, one who shows the path. The teacher as the repository of knowledge in moral, philosophical and social matters held an esteemed place in ancient kingdoms. . . . It is teachers of this category who played a significant part in building and creating a social and cultural revolution in our land. . . . They educated the common mass of the people through talks, conversations, recitals, and above all, by the eloquence of their personal character.

The transformation of society was the silent work of these acharyas, and the monarchs had no influence on social reform or social structure. Monarchs came and monarchs went but the social structure and ethical *mores* formulated by these acharyas remained unmolested. The greatness and

permanence of Indian culture is so well-founded by these seers who lived a life of renunciation that the basic values of dharma remain rooted in the veins of the people even after centuries.

Speaking of the present, Mr. Acharlu says: "The tragedy of education and of the life of the teacher lies in the fact that the entire system of education lies in the hands of the State." This is the key to a great many modern problems, in India and the rest of the world. Hope lies only in succeeding generations of independent teachers, who can and want to teach, and similar generations of students who want to learn. As this editor says: "Education is vision and lies beyond the radius of administrative control. The reconstruction of society along healthy lines is too important a matter to be turned over to the narrow intelligence of specialists and the superior airs of administrators."

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

PROBABLY VERY GOOD

PEOPLE who keep track of children's books probably know about Eleanor Clymer—what she has written, when it came out, and who did the illustrations—but for us the four of her books we have from the library are a first encounter. There seems a sense in which they aren't children's books at all. That is, instead of wondering whether they are good books for children to read or have read to them, we've been enjoying the stories. The author doesn't write down. She isn't waiting for the youngsters to grow up so she can make herself properly understood. She is quite comfortable writing about four-year-olds and thirteen-year-olds. Each age, she seems to think, has its own perfection, and when a thing is perfect in its own way, you don't try to make it hurry up and change. This, at any rate, is what you may think about the way Eleanor Clymer writes for children, if you are obliged, as we are, to be analytical about her work.

One of the four, *The Big Pile of Dirt*, which came out in 1968, begins:

On our street there was an empty lot. It was small, but it was full of junk. There was an armchair with the stuffing coming out. There was an old mattress. There were bottles and automobile tires and other things that people didn't want. And in the middle was a big pile of dirt. But I better not start telling you about that yet. First I will tell you how we got started with the lot. It was like this.

See, we live in this old building. There's me. My name is Mike. I'm the oldest in my family. I have a sister Arleen, and two brothers, twins, five years old. Their names are Billy and Sam. After school Arleen minds them, when my mother is working. I have to help her sometimes, when they act up.

I have some friends that live in the building. My two best friends are Joe and Russ. We go to school together and we're on the basketball team. After school we go someplace and play.

Well, that's the plot—there isn't any place to play. When bulldozers pushed over the building on the lot, leaving it a disreputable area covered with junk, the children delighted in this man-made wilderness—the first wholly spontaneous disorder they had ever seen. Why a wilderness? Well, a wilderness is a place which is left alone, and that lot was left strictly alone for a while. It was a place which accumulated things nobody cared about. Except the children.

Every day my friends and I would go and see what was there. We used to look for treasure, and we found some good things. I found a hammer that the men had left. And Johnny was lucky, he found an old baby carriage with four good wheels. He made a scooter with the wheels, and the girls played with the carriage.

Then a couple of respectable ladies noticed the lot and complained to the Mayor, who came around and agreed to do something about the awful mess. The children were worried. They heard the grown-ups talking about "cleaning everything up." But what happened was that a dump truck came and unloaded the big pile of dirt the story is about. No one who remembers his childhood will have to have explained all the things you can do with a pile of dirt—with it and on top of it and even underneath it. For the children it was a heavenly place. But after a while the ladies came back and complained again to the Mayor. And when he came to see the lot again, they told him the place was "dangerous." At first only one spunky youngster—the one who tells the story—speaks up. "This is our pile of dirt. We play here. Don't take it away." This is the climax of the story. The neighbors overhear him and join in. For months the children haven't been upsetting them by playing in the wrong places—on the busy street, on the roof, around the furnace in the basement—and annoying eccentric old women who like quiet and to be left alone.

Mrs. Giotto said, "Nobody got hurt here yet. These kids have no place to play. You should leave them alone."

Suddenly we heard another voice. "Yes, she's right. The children need a place to play." It was

Mrs. Casey from 4D. . . . Then the super came out. He said, "Since they have that dirt they don't bother anybody. It's a good thing for them."

Faced by a popular uprising, the Mayor got a bright idea. "We'll make a park here for kids," he said. Everybody agreed but the children. "What about our pile of dirt?" one of them asked.

There really isn't any good solution and Mrs. Clymer won't pretend there is. Mike calls the result of the intervention a "very good park," and the people in the neighborhood help to keep it clean.

But sometimes I go there by myself, real early in the morning, or when it has just rained, or in the winter, because that's when there aren't so many other people around. And I make believe. I pretend it's the way it used to be, just a big pile of dirt in the middle of an empty lot.

Another of Mrs. Clymer's books is about a fat, sassy, egotistical (all cats are egotistical!) male cat who disdains the companionship of other animals until he is adopted by two kittens lost in a butcher shop who insist on moving in with him. Drama untold results. Title, *Horatio*. Then there is one called *We Lived in the ALMONT*, about the children of a super who can't keep the house going properly because the owner won't give him the necessary repair materials and tools. This story has wonderful moments. One comes when the super's daughter who longs for a guitar—and finds one stored in the basement—is confronted by its owner.

I almost died. I said, Miss Clark, I told Mama you lent me this guitar and now I'm giving it back.

My throat hurt so I could hardly talk.

I held it out to her and said, Thank you.

I waited for her to say, Well, I never lent it to you. I thought it was down in the storeroom. But she didn't. She just stood there as if she was trying to remember something.

Then she said, Why, Linda, you misunderstood me. I didn't lend it to you. I gave it to you. It's yours.

The way she said it, nobody would think about how she looked, or that her house was a mess. She

was so dignified and calm, and she seemed to get taller, somehow.

I almost couldn't breathe. I held out the guitar and said, No, it isn't mine.

She said, Yes it is. I want you to have it. It will be a remembrance from me. . . . Good-by, dear.

And she leaned forward and kissed me on the cheek. Then she patted the guitar case as if she was saying good-by to it too. And Mama and I went out and she shut the door. Mama gave me a funny look but didn't say anything.

I was like in a dream. I couldn't believe it. I felt so ashamed. But at the same time I felt relieved. It wasn't just that I could keep the guitar. It was that she was telling me she liked me.

Then I said to Mama, What did she mean by good-by? Is she moving? Did she find a place?

Mama said, She has to go to a home. She can't live alone any more, and besides she can't pay the rent. She hasn't paid in months.

A little later Linda gets a chance to see the apartment before it is cleaned up for the next tenant.

And on the floor I saw some sheets of paper with typing on them. I picked them up and they were covered with poetry. So I took them home and put them in a box. I couldn't bear to read them right then. But later I did. Some of them were beautiful, and awfully sad. And some I couldn't understand. . . .

And I have this guitar. I couldn't look at it for a while. I had to tell Pop how I got it, and he didn't say much but the way he looked at me, I wouldn't want that to happen again. But now I'm playing pretty well. And when I play it I think of Miss Clark and wonder where she is. She didn't want an awful lot, but she didn't even get that. I wonder if she remembers me.

The fourth book by Eleanor Clymer is *My Brother Stevie*, which looks promising.

FRONTIERS A Good Example

IN the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* for January several contributors consider "Nuclear Power in 1980." Victor Gillinsky, a Commissioner with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Service, notes that three months before the accident at Three Mile Island, *Business Week* had observed: "One by one the lights are going out for the U.S. nuclear power industry. Reactor orders have plummeted from a high of 41 to zero this year." After commenting disparagingly on the wild optimism of early estimates of the energy to be obtained from nuclear installations, Mr. Gillinsky says:

The size of nuclear plants increased so rapidly in the early 1970s that designers and operators outran their experience base. Government safety reviewers were thrown off balance by the large number of license applications for these new increasingly complex plants. The size and sophistication of the construction projects taxed some utilities beyond their competence. Design and building problems multiplied in direct proportion, and construction times stretched out beyond reasonable limits. To make matters worse, the government failed to develop a firm approach to waste disposal and allowed uncertainty about radioactive spent fuel to run in circles for 20 years, one scheme replacing another without resolution.

Then came the Three Mile Island accident, in which both men and machines failed, rocking both the industry and the regulatory agency. Although many deficiencies, Gillinsky says, can be corrected, much remains to be done, and he remarks that while we can live without nuclear power, an alternative energy source would be good to have. Then he asks:

Can we live *with* nuclear power? The answer is again yes. But only if we are willing to pay the price of living with dangerous high technologies. That price is extraordinary care, discipline and superior craftsmanship. On the question of whether this would be too much for us, the jury is still out.

Some of the members of the National Academy of Science's Committee on Nuclear and

Alternative Energy Systems, whose 783-page report has just been published, regard nuclear power as a "necessary evil" acceptable only as a "transitional energy source" (*Science*, Jan. 25). John P. Holdren, who heads the energy and resources program at the University of California at Berkeley, "took exception to the majority's view that the prospect for continued development of coal and nuclear fission was more favorable than the prospect for a large development of solar over the next three decades." In a dissenting footnote Mr. Holdren said that the obstacles which confront solar development were no more formidable than the environmental and socio-political obstacles faced by development of coal and nuclear energy. In his *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* article (January), noting that the accident at Three Mile Island had stirred apprehensions going beyond questions of technical and managerial failure, Holdren spells out this response in some detail:

I need hardly belabor here the message from Three Mile Island that rightly has received the most attention in almost every post mortem: Beware of human frailties. These frailties include design error, regulatory laxity, utility complacency, and poor operator judgment under stress. What has been insufficiently emphasized is that, beyond the context of Three Mile Island, this catalog of frailties must include misguided and malicious intent: purposeful use of commercial nuclear power technology by governments to secure nuclear weaponry; misuse of nuclear materials by subnational groups for blackmail, terrorism, or sabotage; and sabotage of nuclear facilities.

After detailing such ugly possibilities, Mr. Holdren asks what seems to him the central question: Are we justified in accepting all these threatening "uncertainties" as "a reasonable trade for the benefits of nuclear power"? He concludes:

Quite possibly the most salutary effect of Three Mile Island will not be the specific improvements in technology and management, as they relate to reactor safety, but rather the resulting renewed attention to the general difficulties that human shortcomings pose when coupled to technologies whose "worst case" mishaps are so severe that a significant chance of

even one occurrence may be judged too high a price for society to pay. This predicament is so much more acute when the possibility of malign intent is admitted that is, in the cases of proliferation of nuclear weapons among nations, acquisition of nuclear bombs by subnational groups, and sabotage—that one must hope the issues of vulnerability and uncertainty so starkly underlined by Three Mile Island will be fully explored in public debate that takes in the full range of environmental liabilities of nuclear power, not reactor accidents alone.

The report of the National Academy of Science's Energy committee stresses the importance of conservation, declaring that within thirty or forty years efficiency measures alone "could reduce by half the present ratio of energy consumption to Gross National Product (GNP)." Conservation has the distinctive virtue of being a policy on which practically all the experts agree, and Amory Lovins, leading champion of the soft path—away from nuclear sources, toward solar and related solutions—has given a good example of what conservation means. In an interview appearing in *New Roots* for last September, he said:

Let's take your refrigerator as a text. Around the end of World War II, refrigerators had efficient motors that were mounted on top. Now they have inefficient motors mounted underneath. The heat comes up where the food is, and your refrigerator probably spends half its effort taking away the heat of its own motor. Then manufacturers began skimping on the insulation so the heat comes right through the walls. Because of that, and because it is so badly designed that when you open the door the cold air falls out, it frosts up inside, so you have probably several hundred watts of electric heaters to keep it from frosting. Then you have more heaters around the door to keep the gasket from sticking because they haven't bothered to use a Teflon coating. The radiator on the back is probably pressed right into the thin insulation to help the heat get back inside, and then the refrigerator is probably installed next to a stove or a dishwasher to heat it up some more. When you get through fixing all these points, you have a refrigerator that does the same job with about a sixth as much electricity. You recover its small extra capital costs in only a few years.

Appropriate technology people, Lovins says, "should spread themselves through the wider community, rather like spreading spores, and interact with a lot of people instead of clumping together in little clusters where they are talking with each other."