

## ALL ARE CHOSEN PEOPLE

IN the *Los Angeles Times* for August 20, Les Payne, a staff writer for *Newsday*, began a story headed "Cape Town: a Glimpse of Horror" by saying:

Seven members of the U.S. Congress, junketing in South Africa last week, got a glimpse of that republic with its Sunday clothes off and its makeup stripped away. The group came upon the aftermath of a police raid on a squatters' camp near Cape Town. The police, with their batons, their guns and their dogs, had destroyed a cluster of squatters' tents fashioned from plastic sheets, scrap wood and poles.

The politicians were kept away from the camp, but they saw the 400 or so Africans milling dejectedly about the sand dunes, bracing themselves against the Atlantic winds snapping across the Cape flats.

"I have never seen such human degradation, despair and disillusionment," said Rep. Shirley Chisolm (D-N.Y.), who reportedly broke down in tears.

Another Congressman, Rep. Howard Wolpe (D-Mich.), who headed the delegation, said that the South African government's "dependence on all-pervasive police power . . . in some ways shocked us more than some of the poverty and economic deprivation which we witnessed." This is the "news" content of Les Payne's article, the rest being a framework of background and some politically oriented comment on past and present policy of the United States in relation to the Union of South Africa. The background is concise and necessary for American readers:

The squatters incident is but a freckle on the cancerous tissue that is apartheid. This South African policy, which segregates all races *de facto* and *de jure*, is supported by about 250 pieces of national legislation. A keystone is the insidious Group Areas Act, which restricts races to specific areas of the country. Under this scheme, only whites and mixed-race "coloreds" are allowed to reside in the Cape Town area. The government lets Africans fill the menial jobs in Cape Town that go begging, but their families are not allowed to join them. The human spirit outweighs such nefarious man-made laws: African wives and children determined to live

near their men, pitch their tin-and-plastic tents outside the city.

The largest such settlement is Crossroads, a sprawling corrugated tin camp of squalor housing about 30,000 Africans. Three years ago the government drew unwanted international attention to itself by bulldozing smaller camps near Crossroads, driving black families out onto the sandy plains. . . .

The horror that members of Congress saw last week was but a grain of sand on the terrible Sahara that the Boers have created, for apartheid is as inseparable from the government as a camel is from its hump.

The South African whites, Payne notes, who are but thirteen per cent of the population, are the only ones with the right to vote. "Outnumbered more than four to one," he says, "the ruling Europeans fear that if Africans were allowed to vote they might throw out the rascals who have stolen their country and run it like a house of detention." The columnist begins his criticism of current American policy by remarking: "About 350 major U.S. corporations have invested billions in South Africa's cheap labor market, which causes extraordinary misery for the African workers but produces sizeable investment returns for the big businesses."

The black Africans, Les Payne believes, are gathering strength to respond to their years of repression. His advice to the present administrators of the U.S. is "to reexamine its South African policy in light of the sweep of history." The counsel is good, the likelihood of it being followed small. Actually, the governments of our time seem far more the prisoners than the makers of history.

Who or what, then, is the maker of history? This is a question beyond the scope of newspaper articles, even good ones, yet it is surely the most important one of all.

In *The Dark Eye in Africa* (Morrow), published in 1955, Laurens van der Post, a South African by birth, endeavors to provide an answer—one with application to the troubles now reported by Les

Payne (which have hardly changed at all). He begins with a general statement of what is going on in Africa—how the relations between the races are deteriorating—and then answers questions put to him by persons attending the meeting out of which his book grew. His ancestors, he said, came to the southern extremity of Africa three centuries ago. However, "the natural defenses of greater Africa did not seriously begin to give way until about a hundred years ago, and only finally crumbled during the nineties of the last century." The European mood of that period, he said, had been set by the materialism of the Industrial Revolution, unfitting the invaders for any understanding of either the land of Africa or its peoples. They rapidly accumulated knowledge of the continent's mineral riches, but of the spirit, minds, and languages of the people they remained almost totally ignorant. He says:

I am certain all this is because European man arrived in Africa already despising Africa and African beings. He arrived there, not for Africa's sake, but for what he could get out of Africa on his own behalf. He arrived as a superior person ready to impose himself and his way of living on Africa, not doubting for a second that his was the better way and that it was all for Africa's good. . . . The missionary either in the van or close behind, came to abolish the black man's spirits, give him a new sense of sin, do away with his practice of religion as base superstition, and win him over to a new and superior white god. The rejection of Africa in all its dimensions was as complete as it could possibly be. In the beginning there was some slight fighting resistance from the African, but looking back on it all now, the wonder to me is that there was so little. I can only put it down to the fact that at first the African took the European at his own estimation of himself. The enormous power the European had over physical things, which you must remember were never merely physical things to the African but containers of all-powerful spirits, convinced him that the European was more than human.

This was a time of wonder and trust for the black man, not unlike the earlier time when Cortez was welcomed by the Aztecs, to their betrayal and sorrow. It was a golden moment for the Europeans, in terms of what they *might* have done. But blinded by the way in which they thought about themselves, they ignored this opportunity and in time destroyed

the Africans' feeling of trust. This alienation became plainly evident after the first world war, and after the second great conflict, in which van der Post took part, it rapidly became worse.

The black African's sense of security and of oneness with life had been shaken in a most profound way, his access to life's inmost meaning rudely barred. The spell of the European over him was not only breaking but his confidence in the European way of life was so shaken that in a desperate effort to avert the disaster and annihilation which now seemed to threaten him from within, he turned back to the angry power of his disregarded, discredited and neglected spirits.

Here van der Post had in mind the Mau-Mau activities in Kenya, then horrifying the Western world.

Only appeasement of these spirits, as he sees it, can prevent him from losing his hurt aboriginal soul forever. For no matter how vicious are the forms wherein it expresses itself, or how effective the economic and materialistic trappings wherein it disguises itself, the conflict in Africa is, at heart, a battle about being and non-being, about having a soul of one's own or not having a soul at all.

In 1955, this white African writer thought there might still be hope for mutual understanding between Europeans and Africans. "I know," he said to his audience, "you may find it hard to believe when you study your latest newspaper, but come with me to rural Africa, away from the few industrial clusters that shine like imitation jewelry on a thread of barbaric copper round the vast body of Africa, and you will be amazed to see how much of it still exists in spite of your history." Some black Africans he talked to in South, Central and East Africa thought that the moment of opportunity had vanished for good, but "very many more said no, said in fact, 'It is not too late yet, but we have no time to lose'."

During the discussion part of the meeting (held in Zurich in 1954) an Englishwoman asked van der Post if she or others like her could do anything to overcome the "awful tensions" in South Africa. He must have paused and searched his mind, since he began his reply: "How can one ever pass on what one imagines to be one's own experience of what is true and helpful to other human beings who are in need of it?"

Then he said:

First, you must not allow yourselves to hate us in Africa. That is important. Slowly but surely people in Britain are beginning to despair and hate the white man and evaluate the black and coloured man in a way that is neither real nor true. You are beginning to believe that in Africa the white man, particularly the Afrikaner, is a new kind of depraved human monster unworthy of sympathy and love. You are beginning to regard the wrong that he does as an unnatural wrong, his sins as sins that are not like those of other men, particularly not like your own and therefore deserving of a severity of judgment and censure which you do not apply in your own affairs. You tend to deny our errors in Africa the excuse of human fallibility and subject my countrymen to inhuman condemnations. You are thereby hastening what is most to be feared: the inhumanization and impersonalization of the problem. It is true that a great many of my countrymen in South Africa are behaving in the most deplorable way, which, if not corrected, will lead them straight to disaster. Yet they are not to be hated for that. The difficulties that beset a minority civilization in such a vast primitive context as Africa are real in a way which Europeans cannot adequately understand. It may be true that power corrupts, but no power corrupts so subtly as civilized power in a helpless, primitive world. . . . The European in Africa cannot be punished or hated into being a better person. . . .

Refuse to work off on Africa the moral ardour which you need for your own lives in Europe. Prevent yourselves from projecting this deep conflict which rages also in the spirit of modern man in Europe onto us in Africa.

An illustration of the meaning and value of this suggestion came when a British miner told van der Post that on a visit to South Africa he found that "white miners there will not allow the black miners into their unions." He added: "I find it very wrong and cannot stomach it." The writer agreed that the situation existed and was indeed wrong, but went on to point out that, despite the grievous shortage of English miners, "your miners in Britain have refused at any price to take in Italian miners to work with them."

To an American who asked a question similar to the Englishwoman's, van der Post said:

All I know of your history suggests to me that unseen in the shadow of your reasoning spirit, the

same sort of dividing mechanism I now know so well in Africa was relentlessly at work setting you and the Red Indian at each other's throats. If that were not so, I believe you would have found a bridge long since over the gulf which divided you so cruelly from the natural children of your great land. I see you consciously maintaining this rejection of primitive America with a rare, frantic, and even heroic stubbornness. . . . in your initial rejection of the primitive and more natural life of America, I see your parallel as very close to ours. But there is something else which brings it closer still. You have in the course of your development taken primitive Africa into your midst. You have added to the diminishing primitive content of your land by borrowing lavishly from the great primitive treasure-house of Africa. As a result today there is a large tract of your spirit which is also African whether you like it or not. I continually hear the great undertones of this other American-Africa in your music and see its rhythms in your dancing and your art. In this process of bringing Africa to America you have run the danger of rejecting and invalidating the primitive a second time, and the factor which creates the prejudices of mind and heart that constitutes that danger, I believe, is the same as ours. The example you set in overcoming these prejudices, therefore, cannot escape having the most resounding consequences in Africa and indeed the rest of the world.

Van der Post told his questioner that he was well aware of America's terrible civil war in behalf of liberating the blacks, but went on to speak of other dimensions—of the need to honor primitive societies and to learn from them.

I wondered if you realized how great a challenge this change of the European into the American threw out to you. I wondered, because if you did, I imagine you would already be following this way; you would be going not in single specialist spies but in battalions to the reserves of your vanishing Indian, to beg his pardon and patiently beseech him to reveal to you the vital pattern that your great and teeming earth has made in his spirit. Yes, you would go to your first authentic and almost vanished American not to teach but to learn, just as we in Africa would go to the Bushmen in the Kalahari and relearn from them this lost language of the spirit, the secret of reconnection with the rejected half of our life and of wholeness with our mother earth, if pride of reason and excess of humanity had not turned our hearts to stone.

That was part of what van der Post said to Americans—and he said it to people, not to their

government. How could a government respond to such an appeal? Its language has little or no meaning in terms of the ways of government, although, here and there, there may be people *in* government who would understand it and would do what they can.

But our initial question—Who or what is the maker of history?—has remained unanswered. The answer that van der Post gives is that humans make history in terms of the myths which animate their lives. The myth of the Boers of South Africa was—and is—the Old Testament search for the promised land.

Three hundred years ago when my people first went there, Africa fitted their Old Testament like a glove. . . . This particular myth of my countrymen presupposed just such a journey as the Great Trek through a great unknown wilderness to a land of promise. It was a necessary and inevitable phase in the development of their myth. But if today this Old Testament myth seems to be perilously receding, it is because it is still confined in its Old Testament context and has never been finally transcended into New Testament teaching and example.

I am sure I need not stress to you that this is exactly what the New Testament did to the Old. It freed the Hebraic myth from racial bondage as the Israelites were freed from Egypt, destroyed its limited meaning and carried it forward into a wider nonracial validity. It opened thereby a whole new continent to the spirit of man and discovered a far greater new world than ever did Columbus or any sailor of the seven seas.

Yet today the rulers and many of the whites of South Africa still cling to "the literal truth of the word and power of the law in utter incomprehension of the alchemy of forgiveness and the quicksilver transcendence of power in love, just as the Jews once clung to their ancient concept of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." The Boers, one might say, were an undiluted expression of the righteousness of the Reformation. They knew no book but the Bible.

They were identified with the movement of man to accept sole responsibility for himself before God and then, the mystery of things full upon him, pledged to make a new being out of his ancient leaden self. The conviction of having been chosen for such a task sustained the individual through the ensuing persecutions and sent him out of his familiar context in the physical world to resume his unfinished

journey. When these people first came to Africa three hundred years ago they were approaching the New Testament transformation of their myth. Yet the God that is worshipped today has declined in stature and become an exacting tribal god, a touchy racial spirit, the terrible and infinitely jealous Jehovah of my Afrikaner people; and when the gods decline nations wither; when they die civilizations die with them. . . .

But van der Post also says:

Nevertheless, I myself do not feel entirely hopeless about it. First, I know the potential heroic capacity of my countrymen as you could not be expected to know it, and I still have faith in the power of the myth which brought my countrymen to Africa and compelled them to set out on their great journey into the interior. . . . The desperate problem there is to reverse, before it is too late, the trend of the basic myth of my people. If instead of believing that they are the *only* chosen people they could believe that we are all chosen people charged in our unique and several ways to bring the journey to its contracted end, our differences honourable, equal in dignity and adding to the variety and wonder of life, then all could be well.

He tells about the son of a former governor-general of South Africa who two years before had defied a police order forbidding demonstration in an African area of Johannesburg. The youth was arrested, tried, and imprisoned. Consider, says van der Post, what he did:

He demonstrated in the unambiguous terms of a living example that the conflict in South Africa is not a conflict between white and black alone but also, and more desperately still, a conflict between white and white. He tried, as it were, to change the gear of the living myth from reverse into forward gear and check its recession. And to check the recession of our myths is, I believe, one of the most urgent tasks of contemporary man, not to do away with them, but to lend them the light of our reason and intellect, for we all need our myths constantly and forever. Does not Cervantes' Don Quixote most movingly symbolize just this truth?

This speaks to all the world—a world everywhere in shackles to outworn myths.

## *REVIEW*

### THE LAWS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

JOHN HOLT'S latest book, *Teach Your Own* (Delacorte, \$13.95), may be the best thing he has done. Not because it is his best book, but because it may do good more widely than his earlier ones. On the other hand, this book became possible because of the widespread interest in *How Children Fail* and *How Children Learn*, the books that made Holt somewhat famous and gained an audience for anything he writes. Those books were about children, making it evident that Holt knows what is good for them and what does them harm. They established his readers as people who feel the same way, many of them now subscribers to his magazine, *Growing Without Schooling*.

*Teach Your Own* is also, of course, about children, but it is equally about parents, and written, like the others for parents. It speaks directly to the adults who care about children and want to protect and nurture them, especially their own. The book is about overt action in behalf of child welfare in the broadest sense. This makes its quality. Holt writes to give heart and know-how to parents who are in the process of deciding to teach their children at home. There are still of course some good schools, but they are so few that Holt has turned his energy to showing how to get along without them. He has been doing this for some years in his magazine, and now the book is a harvest of what he has learned (and what others have done and reported to him) about teaching children at home.

Let us add: *Teach Your Own* is really *more* about parents than about children—about how parents are able to grow up and to do what once was, and now should and can be, natural to them: to bring up, teach, and "educate" their children themselves. For Holt this means discovering how to help the children to do their own learning. Learning, he says and shows, is *discovery*. Every real teacher, from Socrates to John Holt, has known this. Telling is not teaching; it often

defeats the real learning process. Teaching is creating an environment hospitable to discovery by the child. What the child discovers is *his own*, he can rely on it. The rest is hearsay, learned gossip, until the child manages to *make* it his own, and this is often put off or interfered with.

Most schools, to Holt, seem a half-conscious conspiracy to prevent it from happening. He doesn't bother to give much attention to the exceptions, which almost always are owed to exceptional teachers who work against the institutional grain, because he is a talented crusader, a man destined to have impact on history. He knows that *of course* there are fine teachers here and there in the schools around the country—people who, like himself, care about the young and are doing in their way what he is doing in his. But there are not enough of them, and the reform that is needed can't be accomplished by teachers alone, not even if there were a lot more of them. Parents have to do it. But they won't even try unless they believe they can, so Holt sets out to show them why and how they can. This leaves little room for nice qualifications and taking exceptions.

Holt is thus the foster-parent of a movement—the movement to teach your own—but it is not a movement that can be launched with stirring slogans and whipped-up feelings. Its progress depends upon the independent, often unaided efforts of parents to *do* it, and to learn *how* to do it. Socially, then, Holt's book is restorative. It is also a report on what parents have done and are doing around the country. They write to Holt in a muscular and competent prose, telling what they have accomplished for and with their children. They give day-by-day accounts of the friendliness or the unfriendliness of the school authorities, and of the gradual and sometimes sudden salvation of their children. You may say to yourself, these must be exceptional children. Well, they are. Why not? They have exceptional parents. Where else, under the law of averages, would you be likely to find exceptional

children? But they are also all kinds. Holt's theory of growth is both aristocratic and non-aristocratic. It is aristocratic in the Gandhian sense of declaring for human excellence, and non-aristocratic in the Jeffersonian sense of recognizing excellence wherever it is found. The superior man (parent) is one who devotes himself to the good of others. He turns his talents in this direction.

The foundation of civilization is such an aristocracy of character. From Plato to Mosca, every student of society and of the making of a good one has pointed this out. Look at Periclean Athens, the Florence of the Medicis, Elizabethan England, and at that galaxy of men and women filled with the spirit of unpedigreed *noblesse oblige* who brought the American republic into being. As Maslow once remarked, if you want to find out what human beings are capable of, you look at the gold medalists, not an "average" population. In order to achieve excellence, you study excellence and try to isolate its vitamins for educational purposes.

Holt is only one of the numerous authors of this book. The others are parents who are teaching their children at home—dozens of them. Reading their letters is enough to convince you that these people know what they are doing, and that they have become good at it. The contents of this book—filled with countless examples of teaching and coping—would make scores of "Children" articles in MANAS. The editor of that Department could easily retire for a year or two, after marking up the book with instructions to the typesetter.

How does Holt regard his own efforts? He says this at the beginning of chapter three:

When we began to advise people to take their children out of school, and began to publish *Growth Without Schooling* [six issues, \$15.00—729 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass. 02116], we put into practice a nickel and dime theory about social change, which is that important and lasting social change always comes slowly, and only when people change their lives, not just their political beliefs or parties or forms

of government. Real social change is a process that takes place over time, usually quite a long time. At a given moment of history, 99 per cent of a society may think and act one way on a certain matter, and only 1 per cent think and act very differently. In time, that 1 per cent may become 2 per cent, then 5 per cent, then 10, 20, 30 per cent, until finally it becomes the dominant majority, and social change has taken place. When did this social change take place? When did it begin? There is no clear answer, except perhaps that any given social change begins the first time any one person thinks of it.

We who believe that children want to learn about the world, are good at it, and can be trusted to do it with very little adult coercion or interference, are probably no more than one per cent of the population, if that. And we are not likely to become the majority in my lifetime. This doesn't trouble me much any more, as long as this minority keeps growing. My work is to help it grow. If we think of the majority of our society (or world), with respect to children and schooling, as moving in direction X, and our small minority as moving in direction Y, what I want to do is to find ways to help those who *want* to move in direction Y to *move* that way. There's no point in shouting endlessly at the great X-bound majority, "Hey, you guys, stop, turn around, you're going the wrong way!" People don't change their ideas, much less their lives, because someone comes along with a clever argument to show that they're wrong. As a way of making real and deep changes in society, this shouting and arguing is mostly a waste of time.

This psycho-social reality should be declared in letters of fire over the highroads, or even the by-paths, of every movement for reform which involves human attitudes, feelings, and beliefs. Holt recognizes that individuals and small groups, free of the rigidities of institutional forms, have at least the *capacity* to change their lives. So that is where you begin—where you must begin. Even *small* institutions present problems:

In other words, private or small-group actions are political if they have the power to *multiply*. When I used to urge people who did not like their local schools to start schools of their own, this seemed a political act, because it then looked as if almost anyone who wanted to could do the same. But we now know that if by "school" we meant a special learning place, not used for anything else, with full-

time paid teachers to run even a very small school, takes far more money than most people have or can raise. As I write, one of the best alternative schools in this area, after more than ten years of good work, has just closed its doors because it can no longer find the money to keep alive. Such schools have little power to multiply, while home schooling does. No doubt to teach one's own children also takes special qualities. But these are qualities that many more people have, or with a little help, can get.

These qualities themselves can multiply. Though many unschoolers [people who are now teaching their children at home] may not think of themselves this way, they are in the truest sense leaders. Leaders are not what many people think—people with huge crowds following them. Leaders are people who go their own way without caring, or even looking to see whether *anyone* is following them. "Leadership qualities" are not the qualities that enable people to attract followers, but those that enable them to do without them. They include at the very least, courage, endurance, patience, humor, flexibility, resourcefulness, determination, a keen sense of reality, and the ability to keep a cool and clear head even when things are going badly.

You could even say that "leaders" who have the ability to sway the masses to "action" are almost always (there may be exceptions—one or two) dangerous characters. They get people to do things they don't really understand, which leads to troubles they don't know how to handle. Then they either rage or give up—consequences nobody can do anything constructive with.

The leadership Holt is thinking about is quite different. As he says:

This is the opposite of the "charisma" that we hear so much about. Charismatic leaders make us think, "Oh, if only I could do that, be like that." True leaders make us think, "If they can do that, by golly I can too." They do not make people into followers, but into new leaders. The home-schooling movement is full of such people, "ordinary" people doing things that they never would have thought they could do—learning law, questioning the experts, holding their ground against arrogant and threatening authorities, defending themselves and their convictions in the press, on TV, even in court. Seeing them, other ordinary people think they can do the same, and soon they do.

This is why it may be a little misleading to speak of the home-schooling "movement." Most people think of a movement as something like an army, a few generals and a great many buck privates. In the movement for home schooling, everyone is a general.

They are, in their way, citizen-kings who are philosophers, too.

"Agreeing" with Holt is the least important reason for reading this book. He is working toward a society in which disagreement may flourish without doing harm—a way of speaking of a *free* society, which is a society where people have both moral independence and concern that others are able to do what they believe is right. Finally, we'll have better schools as Holt's "movement" grows, which may be a notable canon of judgment in this case.

## *COMMENTARY* **REALLY LISTENING**

IN *Creative Listening*, a brief essay by Rachel Pinney, M.D. and child therapist, prepared for teachers (and everybody else), there is a sample lesson given by the rules of Learner-Directed Learning. The lesson is in playing chess. Players are the teacher and learner.

The beginner can ask any questions he likes and receives my answers, but I never tell him what to do. Only if he is in difficulties because of lack of information—for example, when a pawn reaches the end of a row—will I ask him if he would like that information. The beginner will make moves that are incorrect or bizarre, they are not corrected. If a mistake is made too often and is in danger of becoming a habit, then and only then will I suggest offering him information if he requires it.

At the end of the lesson the audience is invited to ask the three participants [teacher, learner, and a silent observer who knows chess] about their experience.

The pupil usually says, "Marvelous. I could go at my own pace and when I knew there was a simple solution, that normally someone would tell me before I could work it out for myself, I was free to do it wrong as often as I liked. I knew I wouldn't be told till I asked. It was great. I was totally in control of the situation and totally involved for the whole time."

The teacher (myself) says, "I was happy and relaxed. I am a natural over-talker with a powerful 'urge to tell,' but as I had undertaken not to tell until asked, I was totally relaxed. Having switched off my urge to tell before I started, *it did not interfere with the lesson!*"

The observer has been in agony. He says, "When the learner made that stupid move, why didn't you tell him?" He had difficulty in controlling his urge to break his observer role.

The agony of the observer is a measure of the "urge to tell" with which we murder our children educationally. The relaxation of the pupil means that he has learned what he wanted to learn in optimum conditions.

Rachel Pinney's essay, available in a pamphlet (from her at 28 Wallace House, Caledonian Estate, Caledonian Road, London N. 7. U.K., for

about two dollars), has sixteen pages of common-sense illustrations of the art of listening. It sounds easy—until you try it. Yet its value becomes self-evident. The writer has been using and teaching this method for nearly twenty years.



## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves TEACHERS AT WORK

THE real progress in educational theory, it seems, is made by becoming aware of things we all once knew or did by instinct, and pointing out that this works better than any "method." In the May issue of a little paper called *PHP* (apparently concerned with Japanese-American relations), Tom Pendergast, who teaches English at Osaka University, tells what he has found out about learning a foreign language. The best way is *not* to begin with "grammar rules, rote memorization of vocabulary, and translation exercises," a procedure which ignores the neural mechanisms that give psychological reality to grammar—leading to what one linguist (Karl Diller) told about himself:

In the fourth semester of Greek, we "read" some dialogues of Plato's. And I thought that after "reading" (I should say "translating") through this whole book, I would go back and try to *read* it directly and see if I could get the meaning without having to translate into English. I found that I could not. It was impossible for me to look at the Greek sentence and get any meaning directly; I had to translate it into English to understand it.

Diller was the victim of what a language teacher, Harold Palmer, said in 1925 was a "positively vicious" method that students must recover from before they can learn another language. Thinking about his own experience, Pendergast decided:

Some people, consciously or not, know how to face an unknown language and make it their own. If this were the case, then the solution to the problem of language learning lay not in better teaching of the language but in helping the student to know himself as a learning mechanism while he is learning the language, so that his efficiency as a learner could grow and grow exponentially. It was not the language that was difficult, it was the learner who did not know how to proceed.

Realizing this, Pendergast recalled how Socrates helped the slave boy (in the *Meno*)—not

by "teaching" him anything, but by drawing out ("educating") what he knew inside.

I came to the belated conclusion that languages were taught and studied in many ways, but that there was only one *way* to mastery. The *way* is neither technique nor method, for it transcends both and lies within. The baby we all once were knows the *way*, but to its elders it is hidden, forgotten. Like all forgotten things, however, it can be retrieved and resuscitated, to act once more in the service of its possessor. It is the task of the language learner and the language teacher to undertake together the enquiry that will lead to its rediscovery.

It is clear that no baby is born knowing a language. It is equally clear that all normal babies are said to know the language of their environment within a few years. Now this is quite a feat when we consider that not only does the baby not know the language when he starts, he does not know anything outside the womb. Undaunted, the baby sets about his task, which is to make the unknown known, and he usually does this so well that those around him are amazed. They have forgotten that they did the same thing at his age.

Apparently, the baby knows something, if not the language. He knows what he has to do with himself, and he simply (not easily) goes about doing it.

Pendergast draws on a book, *What We Owe Children* by Caleb Gattegno, who calls this "reanimating-the-baby-in-us" method the Silent Way.

One of the advantages of being a Silent Way teacher is that this approach to teaching does not keep him from being very busy teaching, since the main job is to be with the students in their learning. One of the first things that the new Silent Way teacher learns from his observations is that few of the students who are experiencing trouble are finding difficulty with the material (the language) of the study. What they are having is trouble with themselves. They have not yet learned to be free and to be with the task at hand all of the time.

It is the teacher's great responsibility to make them come to terms with themselves, to unblock themselves from their fears and preconceptions, and to find the child in themselves—the same child who was once such an efficient language learner. This is why one can say that, in the Silent Way, the teacher's

most important task is to help the student to help himself gain awareness, not to teach the language.

Well, Mr. Pendergast doesn't tell you just how to do it. Who could reproduce how it feels to rebecome a baby and do what babies do so well! But we have no trouble in agreeing with him.

We turn to *New Directions in Teaching* (Summer, 1981) for a discussion by Lon Felker on what it's like to teach a class of black southern youth. For understanding what he says at the beginning, we need a quotation from Pat Conroy's *The Water Is Wide* in which the author tells what he said to black children in a southern school:

"Anyway," I continued undaunted, "from that day forward, it has been called the Conroy Ocean."

"No," George said.

"How do you know?" I challenged.

"Just ain't. You said it is the Atlantic."

"I'm a liar."

"You's a teacher.

"Teachers lie all the time."

"Oh Gawd," Lincoln said.

So, Lon Felker says:

In teaching at a black University, I was, at times, tempted to employ the "Conrack Solution": e.g., inform my students that teachers always lie and that it was up to them to detect truth from falsehood. Such an exercise in sophistry strikes me as offensive and impractical on a number of levels. For one, it generates mistrust (of which enough exists already), and secondly, it insults my students' intelligence, not to mention my integrity. Perhaps the only favorable outcome of such a tactic is its attention-riveting effect.

Felker's problem was in *overcoming* mistrust on the part of the students. He describes the situation and tells what he did:

I have found that in using or presenting facts to the black students, nothing can be assumed. For example, take census statistics. The Bureau of the Census asserts that approximately 11.9% of the American population is black (1970 estimate). I cited this statistic in a passing reference early in my

teaching career. It created immediate controversy. A female student from a northern city challenged it. She contended that: (1) There were more blacks than that in the United States; (2) Certain blacks were not counted by the census takers, or (3) That the census results were fraudulent because of "political reasons." I countered that, while there may indeed be some justice to points one and two, the degree of underestimation of the size of the black population was probably not as great as she proposed (a whopping twenty-five per cent). Another student, who had returned to college after a lifetime of military service and work, commented that from his travels and observations, he was more inclined to accept the lower figure. This was only one example, however, and it was symptomatic of a wider mistrust than even I, a product of the skeptical sixties, had anticipated. . . .

Confronted with such fundamental distrust, I fell back on the technique of self-validation: If your own experience and observation tells you something is true, then it must be true. The obverse, of course, holds as well. A typical assignment might be the following:

Hypothesis: That increased knowledge of the political system leads to higher levels of political participation.

Assignment: Construct an attitudinal questionnaire eliciting the level of political knowledge of the subject, as well as his/her level of political activity.

Such assignments, Felker points out, teach a lot more than is on the surface. The student is led to think more impersonally. This teacher concludes:

The most important lesson to emerge from my experience was the role of attitude. Mistrust is best overcome by a trusting attitude toward others, a modicum of humor, and the demonstration that an open and inquiring mind—with a readiness to entertain novel ideas and a penchant for eclectic experimentation—is a far more useful tool in the accomplishment of one's goals than a mind closed to all that is different or unsettling.

## FRONTIERS

### Precept or Example?

A READER (who is also an accomplished writer of books on agriculture) raises the question—a very old one—of whether example is more effective than precept or persuasive argument in getting people to take part in activities for constructive change. In his report of Wendell Berry's criticism of the industrial methods of modern agriculture, Jan Wojeik (quoted in *MANAS* for Sept. 2) stressed the importance of Berry's personal example in applying on his farm the principles in which he believes. Commenting, our reader says:

I only agree some. If the good guys are transmitting by example, and the bad guys are transmitting by high-tech TV, mailings, using scenarios developed cynically with power as their goal, "good example" may be the least of many needed methods of stemming the tide. Davids mostly lose to Goliaths, and smart Davids think about how to navigate. Once one is thinking tactically, one's work may far exceed one's goodness, and its influence may far exceed the effectiveness of mere example. Purity of example may help, but, as in Berry's case, showing that "change-in-the-right-direction" also brings practical rewards, over and above the reward of virtue, has its importance.

In other words, fellows who don't do personally all the splendid things that Berry is able to do (and does), if they are effective thinkers and writers, may swell the ranks of the righteous despite their low marks as exemplars. Human-sized messages, our correspondent says, "may be delivered by sundry delivery persons, whether they're possessed of Christly purity, Organic purity, or plain old sullied horse sense."

Well, this seems a way of saying that imperfect humans, if they are articulate in argument, shouldn't keep still. Their voices are needed, and especially needed if they have the skills of making themselves heard and know something about access to forums of opinions and the media. Yet Wojeik's point is not reduced by acceptance of this claim. Wojeik proposed that

Berry's personal practice—for even those in his audience who knew little of his life as a Kentucky farmer—gave (undefinable?) power to what he said. The power in Lincoln's speeches makes a just comparison. (The subjective fruit of a consistent life was in them, intangibly energizing the logic of his utterance.) As Wojeik put it:

The sheer presence a person commands recommends what the person says, however odd it sounds at first. [Berry] probably hadn't convinced anyone in the audience not already convinced about what he had to say, but among even the skeptics he had established for the first time perhaps the credibility of his ideas about farming, publicly, on the strength of his forthright, brainy wit, delivered in a modulated but authentic slow Kentucky drawl.

The point of our correspondent's letter, however, is that the right kind of farming *pays*—pays for the individual and will pay for the country, and that this needs to be said. His point is that the evidence is coming in, now, that you don't lose your shirt if you go organic, even if it takes a few years to make the soil naturally healthy and productive; and also, that in the long run the whole country will benefit by such a change on a large scale.

Perhaps we can say, here, that individuals are moved to change their ways by the appeal of intelligence and moral argument, but that the masses are swayed only by crisis and promises. And we should add that communicators who are able to reach the masses will often promise too much, although with the best of intentions. The personal practice is absent in their lives and they don't really know any better—even though, after all, they are on the Right Side!

This kind of criticism is now appearing with increasing frequency in journals like *Rain* and *Resurgence*. It deserves close attention, especially from writers—like ourselves—who look at the soil and the countryside over the carriage of a typewriter. When one's work "far exceeds one's own goodness," it becomes quite possible for one's words to far exceed the realities of what they tell about. The good writers know this and

exercise care, which is their form of "purity of example."

Who, in the short term, was most useful to the nascent American Republic—Sam or John Adams? They were cousins, as we recall, and didn't get on together. For the short term, the laurels go to Sam. He stirred people up and the Committees of Correspondence helped. But in the long term, John was the more productive man, we might say.

Another example would be Gandhi's lifetime struggle to free India from British rule. He wanted India free so that the people would have a chance to live their lives according to the moral ideas of their ancestors, and not accept the persuasions of European cultural imperialism. He explained this well in his first book, *Hind Swaraj*, back in 1909. As the years went by Gandhi gained a lot of followers who repeated some of what he said. But they were, you could say, in a hurry. Gandhi declared for Constructive Work in the villages, to help the people recover from the decay resulting from outside management. But in the thirties his colleagues in the Indian National Congress objected to all this devoted attention to the villagers. It was, they said, distracting from the high objective of political freedom. They wanted to be politically effective, and Gandhi was talking about sanitation and spinning and basic education. As an Indian contributor to MANAS. Anadi Naik, related in the July 6, 1966 issue:

At that time it was impossible to convince those leaders that the constructive work program was the program that would enable them to achieve their political goal in reality—since political freedom might turn out to be comparatively less important than overcoming the apathy of the people.

So the Sangha [for Constructive Work] was dissolved. But in his address to its last meeting, Gandhi instructed its members to remain active; he said that although the Sangha as a group was dissolved, each worker committed to its cause should stand erect and consider himself a Sangha. Gandhi exhorted them to stay out of power politics and they did so. They carried on their activities in their ashrams (shrines). The masses of India could not see

the meaning of this occurrence, in those days. For the villagers, those who wore homespun and hand-woven clothes were workers in the "Congress Party." But after Gandhi's death, the difference between the people in power and the people who lived in ashrams became obvious.

A lot depends, in all such discussions, on the meaning assigned to "effective."