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HOW OPINIONS ARE FORMED

PEOPLE seldom give much attention to the mystery of—which is it, human nature, or something more reliable? Human nature is always with us, and seems to require no study, yet in these days of anxiety and uncertainty we often wonder what is the shaping factor in the formation of opinion. Habit of course plays a part, but this is in the maintenance of opinion rather than in its formation. Tradition is obviously a source of belief, but traditions, as they grow old, often become superstitions, which means that people have lost all track of why they believe them.

Now and then a writer comes along—someone like Tom Paine—who sees the value in helping his countrymen to throw off an inherited faith or sense of obligation, who startles them with the realization of how ridiculous it is. This was the emotional power of *Common Sense*, which brought a great many of the colonists to the kind of self-reliant maturity which winning the war for independence required. Martin Luther accomplished something similar in the history of religion, and there have been others to use the strength of an idea "whose time has come" to release whole populations from outworn beliefs.

Historians sometimes take notice of these far-reaching changes. Henry T. Buckle is one of these, and in the first volume of his *History of Civilization* he wrote:

> Owing to circumstances still unknown there appear from time to time great thinkers, who, devoting their lives to a single purpose, are able to anticipate the progress of mankind, and to produce a religion or a philosophy by which important effects are eventually brought about. But if we look into history we shall clearly see that, although the origin of a new opinion may be thus due to a single man, the result which the new opinion produces will depend on the condition of the people among whom it is propagated. If either a religion or a philosophy is too much in advance of a nation it can do no present service but must bide its time until the minds of men are ripe for its reception. . . . Every science, every creed has had its martyrs. According to the ordinary course of affairs, a few generations pass away, and then there comes a period when these very truths are looked upon as commonplace facts, and a little later there comes another period in which they are declared to be necessary and even the dullest intellect wonders how they could ever have been denied.

Another distinguished nineteenth-century historian, W. E. H. Lecky, wrote in a similar vein. In his *History of the Rise of Rationalism in Europe*, he proposed that "the success of any opinion depended much less upon the force of its arguments, or upon the ability of its advocates, than upon the predisposition of society to receive it, and that that predisposition resulted from the intellectual type of the age."

> As men advance from an imperfect to a higher civilization, they gradually sublimate and refine their creed. Their imaginations insensibly detach themselves from those grosser conceptions and doctrines that were formerly most powerful, and they sooner or later reduce all their opinions into conformity with the moral and intellectual standards which the new civilization produces. Thus long before the Reformation, the tendencies of the Reformation were manifest. The revival of Grecian learning, the development of art, the reaction against the schoolmen, had raised society to an elevation in which a more refined and less oppressive creed was absolutely essential to its well-being. Luther and Calvin only represented the prevailing wants, and embodied them in a definite form. The pressure of the general intellectual influences of the time determines the predispositions which ultimately regulate the details of belief; and though all men do not yield to that pressure with the same facility, all large bodies are at last controlled. A change of speculative opinion does not imply an increase of the data upon which those opinions rest, but a change of the habits of thought and mind which they reflect.

Here Lecky seems to minimize or neglect the actual capacity of the thought and persuasion of

strong individuals to affect opinion, despite the truth in what he says, which applies largely to the opinions of those who think little or not at all. But what sets the tone, standard of belief, and habit of thought of which he speaks? He says:

> Those who contribute most largely to its formation are, I believe, the philosophers. Men like Bacon, Descartes, and Locke have probably done more than any others to set the current of their age. They have formed a certain cast and tone of mind. They have introduced peculiar habits of thought, new modes of reasoning, new tendencies of enquiry. The impulse they have given to the higher literature, has been by that literature communicated to the more popular writers; and the impress of these master-minds is clearly visible in the writings of multitudes who are totally unacquainted with their works.

How can we get a little closer to understanding the origin of the opinion-shapers here referred to? After all, Buckle's only comment on this question is in the first sentence we have quoted—"Owing to circumstances still unknown"—and we have made no notable progress in the inquiry since his time. We should add, however, that such individuals are by no means always philosophers, although they may certainly have a philosophic impact in setting a level of thought. This is true of great dramatists, and true also of novelists such as Dostoevsky, and in some measure Herman Melville. Does biography afford any clues—not answers, but clues? We need to find strong-minded, independent people and have a look at their lives, early and late. Having lately given attention in Review to Madeleine Slade—"Mirabehn" in India, as Gandhi named her—we turn to her autobiography, and find her saying, in the first few pages:

> While I was still very small, five or six years old, in spite of the happy and loving surroundings in which I lived, my mind began to search in the region of the *unknowable* and was stricken with awe. . . . In the same way I dared not think about eternity, and used to dread being taken to church, where I should have to listen to things like the repetition of the prayer termination: "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end—Amen." People seemed to repeat these sorts of phrases quite glibly, and I felt it was useless to say anything of what troubled me. The church attitude about Heaven and Hell also worried me a lot. How could people be fixed up for eternity as the fruits of one short life, especially as no two people had the same opportunities for winning through? What about people who died young, and what about poor colored people, who, I heard, were all heathens? Obviously something was wrong. It was an impossible puzzle. I could not make it out, and would again seek escape in the happy life around me.
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> But there was something which every now and then waited me far away. It would come at quiet moments, and always through the voice of Nature—the singing of a bird, the sound of the wind in the trees. Though this was the voice of the unknown, I felt no fear, only an infinite joy.

These childhood—but not childish—wonderings help us to understand the life of this extraordinary woman.

Another great woman, Madame Roland, born in 1754, her life ended by the guillotine as a Girondist condemned by the Jacobins in 1793, showed similar independence of mind at an early age. In an essay concerned with her letters (in *Every Man his own Historian*), Carl Becker, giving passages from her memoirs, tells us that at nine years of age she carried Plutarch to church with her, instead of a prayer book. "She," Becker says, "communed familiarly with the saints and sages of the world." And another revolutionist, half a century later, who fully grasped the shortcomings of the French Revolution—its focus on Rights instead of Responsibilities—was Joseph Mazzini. He was born in 1805, in Genoa, and in school, in a period of severe repression, studied Cato and other ancient spokesmen for free institutions. This was the foundation of his political education. He was both one of the papacy's most insistent critics and a meticulous observer of religious freedom during a brief interlude of power. Mazzini's love of freedom showed itself as soon as he began to think for himself, which was when he began to think at all. He refused confession to a priest as soon as he understood the meaning of the act, and would not

attend any compulsory religious observances. He was a natural literary critic but the Italian revolution claimed his energies. He was its firebrand and in his eyes its failure broke his heart. In one of his essays, he said:

> Ought man, gifted with progressive activity, to remain quiescent like an emancipated slave, satisfied with his solitary liberty? . . . Because man, consecrated by the power of thought, king of the earth, has burst the bonds of a worn-out religious form that imprisoned and restrained his activity and independence, are we to have no new bond of universal fraternity? No religion? no recognized and accepted conception of a general and providential law?

It seems a prevailing characteristic of great men and women, when they turn their energies to programs of social reform, to set their sights upon goals which go beyond what the people they hope to influence are capable of. So it was with Mazzini, who dreamed of a society founded on the best qualities of human beings, triumphing over weakness and self-interest. His was a generous-hearted vision. Looking back to the revolution of the previous century, he declared that Rousseau "had no conception of the collective life of humanity, of its tradition, of the law of progress appointed for the generations, of a common end towards which we ought to strive, of association that can alone attain it step by step." Mazzini based his faith upon the instinct of universal brotherhood which was as yet but a germ hardly developed in the mass of humanity. With Rousseau as the target of his criticism, he said:

> Starting from the philosophy of the *ego* and of individual liberty, he robbed that principle of fruit by basing it . . . on a simple convention, avowed or understood. . . .
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> Right is the faith of the individual. Duty is the common collective faith. Right can but organize resistance; it may destroy, it cannot found. Duty builds up, associates, and unites; it is derived from a general law, whereas Right is derived only from human will. There is nothing therefore to forbid a struggle against Right: any individual may rebel against any right in another which is injurious to him; and the sole judge left between the adversaries is Force; and such, in fact, has frequently been the answer which societies based upon right have given their opponents.

Mazzini, it seems clear, under-estimated the power of convention, the ruling principle of establishment authority, the opinion-making force of yesterday's forgotten and naturalized inspiration, to which Lecky gave so much attention. Mazzini based his hopes on the primary feeling of fellowship out of which, in later years, conventions are made which both consolidate and contract the original inspiration. But that feeling had not yet expanded to the point where it would give its character to a nineteenth-century revolution; nor has its renewal by the Gandhian inspiration of the twentieth century yet gained the dimensions required, although some fulfillment seems increasingly on the way.

Another sort of insight into the motivations and decisions of extraordinary individuals is obtained from the detailed life of Simone Weil (1909-1943), by Simone Petrément, her lifelong friend. Simone Weil was a teacher of philosophy, but she took time off from teaching in order to work in factories, to experience first-hand the life of the worker in an industrial society. In 1933, when she was twenty-four, after the school year was over she obtained a job with a company that built electrical machinery, in Paris. She wrote to a friend about what it was like:

> "It is inhuman. . . . One's attention has nothing worthy to engage it, but on the contrary is constrained to fix itself, second by second, upon the same trivial problem, with only such variants as speeding up your output from 6 minutes to 5 for 50 pieces, or something of that sort. . . . But what I ask myself is how all this can be humanized; because if the separate processes were not paid by the piece, the boredom they engender would inhibit attention and slow down the work considerably, and produce a lot of spoiled pieces. . . . Only when I think that the great Bolshevik leaders proposed to *create* a free working class and that doubtless none of them—certainly not Trotsky, and I don't think Lenin either—had ever set foot inside a factory, so that they hadn't the faintest idea of the real conditions that make for servitude or

freedom for the workers—well, politics appears to me a sinister force."

Shortly after, in another letter to a friend, she wrote:

"I forgot to tell you, in connection with my factory, that since I have been here not *one single time* have I heard anyone talk about social problems, neither about the trade unions nor the parties. In the canteen, where I eat sometimes I have seen only a few newspapers, all bourgeois. And yet it seems to me the management is very liberal. Only once was there a small incident: someone at the factory door had handed out some leaflets about the Citröen affair signed 'The trade union section of the factory.' All of the women and most of the men took these leaflets with visible satisfaction, the satisfaction that slaves always get from a piece of bravado without any risks. . . . I asked a worker if there really was a trade union section in the factory; all I got in reply was a shrug of his shoulders and a knowing smile. They complain about the fixed rates, the lack of work, and many other things; but these are complaints, and that is all. As for the idea of resistance, no matter how faint, that never occurs to anyone. Yet, as regards the fixed rates, there should be some way of defending oneself to some small degree, even without the trade union, just with a little cunning and above all solidarity: but solidarity is largely lacking. . . ."

Her measured reflections, born of this experience, were recorded in an essay, "Sketches of Contemporary Life," in which toward the end she said:

The present social system provides no means of action other than machines for crushing humanity; whatever may be the intentions of those who use them, these machines crush and will continue to crush as long as they exist. With industrial convict prisons constituted by the big factories, one can only produce slaves and not free workers, still less workers who would form a dominant class. With guns, aeroplanes, bombs, you can spread death, terror, oppression, but not life and liberty. . . .

The only possibility of salvation would lie in a methodical cooperation between all, strong and weak, with a view to accomplishing a progressive decentralization of social life; but the absurdity of such an idea strikes one immediately. Such a form of cooperation is impossible to imagine, even in dreams, in a civilization that is based on competition, on struggle, on war. . . . To sum up, it seems reasonable to suppose that the generations which will have to face the difficulties brought about by the collapse of the present system have yet to be born. As for the generations now living, they are perhaps, of all those that have followed each other in the course of human history, the ones which will have had to shoulder the maximum of imaginary responsibilities and the minimum of real ones. Once this situation is fully realized, it leaves a marvellous freedom of mind. . . .

If, in the course of the last twenty years, the machine tool has become more and more automatic in its functioning, if the work carried out, even on machines of relatively ancient design, has become more and more mechanical, the reason lies in the ever-increasing concentration of the economy. Who knows whether an industry split up into innumerable small undertakings would not bring about an inverse development of the machine-tool, and, at the same time, types of work calling for a yet greater consciousness and ingenuity than the most highly skilled work in modern factories? We are all the more justified in entertaining such hopes in that electricity supplies the form of energy suitable for such a type of industrial organization.

Then, in London, in 1943, the year of her death, she wrote:

Today, after being bemused for several centuries with pride in technical achievement, we have forgotten the existence of a divine order of the universe.

If the humiliation produced by unhappiness were to arouse us, if we were to rediscover this great truth, we should be able to put an end to what constitutes the scandal of modern thought, the hostility between religion and science.

What we find, in all these cases of individuals who have actually affected their times, deepening the understanding of the human situation, adding to the store of intuitive perception, enriching the conceptual vocabulary of the age, preparing others, if only a little, for the changes that must be recognized by all who think and act—what we find in them is independence of mind from an early age. If they have any common attributes, it is this.

Where do they come from—those truly individual souls? What chemistry of metaphysical emancipation did its work in them before they were born? We do not know. We know only that

in a given population, some of them exist, and will doubtless continue to come into being. It is a more than ordinary mystery, arising, as Buckle said, from "circumstances still unknown." However, there have been a few guesses, and one of these—more than a guess, perhaps—was provided by Synesius, the Neoplatonist who became a Christian bishop of Ptolemais in about 410 A.D. In a book which collected some of his writings, he said:

> For there is indeed in the terrestrial abode the sacred tribe of heroes who pay attention to mankind, and who are able to give them assistance even in the smallest concerns. . . . This heroic tribe is, as it were, a colony from the gods established here in order that this terrene abode may not be left destitute of a better nature. But when matter excites her own proper blossoms to war against the soul, the resistance made by these heroic tribes is small when the gods are absent; for everything is strong only in its appropriate place and time. . . .

REVIEW
ARTLESS ART

BOOKS by Sally Carrighar about nature and wild creatures began coming out in 1944. We have only one of them—*Wild Heritage*, Houghton Mifflin—which appeared in 1965, which is so good that we take space here to keep it from being forgotten. The theme of this book is the qualities we have in common with animals. They seem mostly good qualities, and animals seem to have them in a kind of purity seldom found among human beings. Much of Miss Carrighar's writing is based on her own observations—she was born in Ohio but has lived in many other places, including Alaska, and studied the lives and behavior of many kinds of creatures. She has also read a lot in books by scientific observers.

One of the delightful sections of *Wild Heritage* is about fishes and birds and other animals that *dance.*

> Sometimes as one sites in a boat on a quiet lake and looks down into the sun-lighted depths, one discovers a truly aesthetic performance there. Dozens or hundreds of fish translucently green, are moving about in the water as if they were one single organism. They are moving as gracefully as the flow of water itself, and for a moment they may be mistaken for reeds in a current. Watch them turn, compressing the form of the group on the inner side, widening on the other side. See how they all surge ahead with one purpose, or slackening speed, become quiet. This is not a follow-the-leader game; no one fish is guiding the others; the fishes' motions are not identical, not mechanical, but are synchronized into a lovely design. How do they do it, by what means of communication? There have been guesses but no explanation is explanation is widely accepted. The current word for that kind of behavior is "allelomimetic," from two Greek words meaning mutual mimicry, although it is admitted that the fish do not really imitate one another. Their actions are simultaneous.

By what seemed extraordinary coincidence, then and now, your reviewer once watched such a dance of fishes. He was a small boy wandering through the New York Aquarium when all at once a group of fish in a large tank captured his attention. There were a dozen or more of them—fish about eight or ten inches long. They were swimming about, more or less together, when suddenly they seemed to separate into two groups and to swim, one at a time, like partners in a square dance, toward the glass, then turn, one to the right, the other to the left, and then go back, repeating the figure with variations, but always in harmony with the motions of the other group. When you see something like this, there is no possibility of looking away. One watches and watches, in wonder and awe, as the fishes performed their ballet. It was a sight never to be forgotten, vividly preserved in memory. We had never come across an account of anything like that until reading it in Sally Carrighar. She then recalls a parallel in her own life:

> I once was a member of a group that performed Laban dances, that type of allelomimetic dancing which was developed in Germany after the First World War as a means of helping shell-shocked veterans to relate themselves emotionally to others. Our group, organized in San Francisco, danced only for pleasure: twelve men and girls, with a director who did little more than beat a gong and suggest a general form that a dance might take. It could be "campers discovering a forest fire and fleeing from it," or, "a Chinese funeral procession climbing a hill"; we never knew in advance what would be proposed. And we made no plan, and yet there was always an astonishing degree of organization in the dances as they developed. Some onlookers called them beautiful, but I don't believe we were striving very consciously for an aesthetic effect. The unit of twelve seemed to have its own purpose, unspoken yet vividly felt; an impulse to carry out a group movement simply took hold of the dancers. I can only describe the experience subjectively and say that it gave one a sense of liberation. Members of jazz groups, improvising together, must feel the same thing. Groups playing chamber music don't improvise but their interpretation is a mutual expression; and on a purely intellectual plane, it may be that the joint work of teams of experimenting scientists provides a widening out of self that adds something to the satisfaction of an individual working alone. Common sense suggests that the schooling fish and the wheeling birds carry out those complex kinds of group play because the creatures enjoy them in much

> the same way that human being do their own allelomimetic games.

Another fascinating passage, one on "ape art," notes that zoo animals, when given pencil and a sheet of paper, with, say, a square drawn on it—if the square was off-center, would place a balancing form of their own on the opposite side, revealing a sense of composition. She goes on:

> Upon to 1961 twenty-three chimpanzees, three orangutans, two gorillas, and four Capuchin monkeys have made drawings which have been studied by scientists, either casually or intensively. The paintings, the productions in color, have only been recent. The first were finger-paintings, but those have been largely abandoned, in part because the tactile sensation of paint on their hands distracted the animals; they were inclined to suck it or wipe it off. But finger-paintings were the ones that first attracted the unexpected public attention. In the winter of 1957-58 an exhibition of "ape art" was held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. It was a showing of finger-paintings by the chimpanzee Betsy, of the Baltimore Zoo, and by the Long Zoo's Congo. A serious study of Congo's artistic development was already under way and the zoo wished to keep his paintings as part of a series. Very high prices therefore were placed on the twenty-four shown in the exhibition, but "to our consternation," says Desmond Morris, nearly all of the paintings sold, as did many of Betsy's. The new fad was on: ape art, profitable to several zoos, had taken the fancy of many collectors.
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> It is easy to say that the people who bought the paintings were the affluent and fashionable who wanted something new for themselves and their guests to talk about. Some no doubt did buy the paintings because ape art seemed amusing, such would not be the reason why they were acquired by some very discriminating collectors, by Picasso and the great critic Sir Herbert Read.

But the fact is, Miss Carrighar says, that some of the paintings are beautiful. "They seem to express a striking sense of release, which is communicable." What part did the zoo trainers play in getting going the art activities of the apes?

> No part at all, other than placing a pencil in the animal's hand and putting it down on a piece of paper. As soon as the ape discovered that pencils make marks, his impulse to draw was born.

Animals dance and draw, it seems. What about singing?

The writer says:

> Anyone who has heard a chorus of wolves, gathered on some moonlight night to sing from the top of a tundra knoll (not a love call, since this is group singing), will be haunted for life by the thrilling wild harmonies. When my part-wolf Husky, Bobo, sang, he seemed plainly to try for a certain effect, particularly for one high, clear, ringing note almost on perfect pitch. His most familiar song rose by a quick succession of notes to that climax and then slid away in a series of undulating falls, and if he could not reach the high note the first time, he made the attempt again and again before he finished the song. Earlier, in I947, I had made an experiment with a Norwegian elkhound that belonged to the naturalist brothers, Olaus and Adolph Muriel Being alone with the dog on their ranch one day, I played on the piano a dozen or more selections of varying mood to see if the dog would respond to them. The dog, Chimo, wailed with seemingly deep distress during Tschaikovsky's "None but the Lonely Heart"; he frisked around during a Spanish dance, and during some short selections by Mozart and Bach he lay down near the piano but with his head up alertly and his ears turned toward the sound. One sometimes hears people say that dogs howl when they listen to human music because the sounds hurt their ears. Perhaps their howling seems to them like reciprocal singing-—or maybe they simply dislike the selections.

In any event, no human will dislike *Wild Heritage.* It should not be too difficult to find a copy, since it was a "Book-of-the-Month Club" selection.

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A New Earth—The Jamaican Sugar Workers Cooperatives 1975-1981 (University Press of America, 1984), by Monica Frölander-Ulf and Frank Lindenfeld, is the story of the struggle, over many years, of the black population of the island of Jamaica to achieve self-government and self-sufficiency. Jamaica is one of three islands—Cuba, Jamaica, and Haiti—grouped together in the Caribbean. It was colonized by the Spanish in 1509, and the original inhabitants, the Arawak, were practically gone within a century. In 1517

the first African slaves were brought to the island. The British displaced the Spanish in 1655 and profited extensively from the slave trade. By 1690 blacks outnumbered the whites by four to one, and twelve to one by 1780. By then, the Jamaica plantations were producing 50,000 tons of sugar a year, and in 1815 the 300,000 slaves working the plantations were more than 85 per cent of the population, with only 15,000 whites. "The slaves were worked from before dawn to dusk, six days a week." Their treatment was unspeakably cruel and punishment was by torture. Revolts were brutally put down, although some slaves escaped to live in gangs in mountainous regions. In 1838 slavery was abolished, but without great change in the lives of the blacks. By 1910 the United Fruit Co. had come to the island and dominated banana production, while other large companies were buying the sugar-producing estates, growing the cane. Britain granted independence to Jamaica in 1962, and meanwhile a rising political movement began to seek justice for the people. Sugar cane agriculture was now in the hands of large land-owners—West Indies Sugar Company (British) and the United Fruit Company (American). However, as profits declined they were glad to sell the plantations to the now independent Jamaican government, whose prime minister, Michael Manley, was socialist. He decided to make the cane farms into cooperatives, although the staffs of these enterprises remained persons of the upper Jamaican class. This transfer to the cooperative organizations took place in the early 1970s. The workers wanted control of their newly acquired property, but the staff was opposed to any change, fearing for their jobs. Now began the struggle which is the subject of *A New Earth.* It lasted until 1981, when the government decided to dissolve the co-ops and return the estates to government control. The authors regard this action only a "temporary set-back," since the workers have won "a vastly increased consciousness of what they may be able to do." They write movingly about the effort of the sugar cane workers to improve their own lives and to create a democratic society.

COMMENTARY
MORE MUSINGS

A WHILE back we asked a well-known writer with a Ph.D. in history what he thought about the nineteenth-century historians such as Buckle and Lecky. He said that they had never been assigned reading in any of the courses he took, although he had looked at their work anyhow. They were, one supposes, "too philosophical" for the scientific scholars of our time. We decided that that is why they were worth reading over and over again. The sampling of them in this issue seems sufficient supporting evidence.

Are there any such scholars writing today or yesterday? Mumford and Roszak, perhaps, but hardly anyone else. Although we might add William Appleman Williams. Why are writers who look for actual *meanings* in history so few? Perhaps because meaning as a goal of reading seems of recent origin for us. But today the quest for meaning is becoming really urgent.

Simone Weil should be added, too. She looked for meaning with every breath she drew. This is a hunger which gives immortal life to prose. Without it there is nothing that can be called literature.

Sally Carrighar has the same quality. She cares little for the latest word, but much for what seems timeless in the world of nature . . . and in ourselves. What can we do with knowledge of that sort? Well, when it is really knowledge it helps us to become ourselves, with or without permission from fashionable scholars and journalists.

In a few years more, as we become increasingly aware of how journalists manipulate our minds—often without meaning to, but simply through the selection of stories their editors want, and what most easily gets public attention—we may discover how much healthier we become when we "ignore" the hot news of the day, which has turned out to be warmed-up monotony. See Thoreau's "Life Without Principle."

Yet there is great value in dancing fish and singing wolves, as Sally Carrighar reports these things. And in the Christensen's account of how abused hill land recovers from abuse (see Frontiers). And in Wes Jackson's distinction between folk knowledge of the land and farming and what can be learned in ag school. These are all elements in the healthy self-consciousness we naturally long for but hardly know how to acquire. These writers do us the inestimable service of drawing our attention to where it may be found.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
MUSINGS

THERE are occasions when one is driven to long thoughts about the management of other people's lives—one's children, for example. Parents are naturally hopeful for their children, wanting, if possible, to give them "a good start." Sometimes they are even ambitious for their children, but this is almost certainly a presumption, an interference, and may lead to terrible mistakes, although, on the other hand, sometimes it may seem to work out quite well. The best thing a parent can do is to set a good example, but what is that? How many parents would agree that Thoreau, had he had children, set a "good example"?

In these matters we are up against the conventional wisdom, and conventional wisdom is the practical sense of conventional people. Do we want our children to add to the number of conventional people? Or do we have the right to assume that the youngsters, because they are ours, will *not* be conventional people?

Years ago, as the result of being in the printing business that we operated for some twenty years, because we wanted a plant that was large enough to print MANAS, we became acquainted and friends with a commercial artist who was one of the best graphics designers we encountered over the years. We retained him to design most of the work we did at that level of production. He was a professional, but not a hack. Asked for his opinion, he would tell the truth, so that you always got his best judgment, and his best judgment was very good. He was a commercial artist, but his honesty wasn't commercial. It would sometimes lose him a job. At other times he would simply avoid giving an opinion, but he would never lie. He attracted the kind of clients that saw how good he was, wanted his help, and usually took his advice. The more people trusted him and gave him a free hand, the better he was able to do for them. He was far from rich, but he maintained his family in reasonable comfort. Yet sometimes he would express regret that he couldn't do more for his children. His daughter, for one thing, wanted riding lessons and he couldn't afford that. He belabored himself because he didn't have the money for it. Here was a man, although, obviously he never thought of himself in this way, who day in day out was an example to his children of a man of integrity. What did a few riding lessons amount to compared to that? And his daughter turned out rather well. The conventional wisdom seldom mentions matters of this sort, and for him it would have been embarrassing.

Well, the conventional wisdom says that you send your children to a good school—a good public school if you are liberal, and can find one; or if you are elitist, a private school, if you can afford it. Then what? College, of course. In college one meets the right people. In college, whether you learn anything or not, you acquire the reputation of having been educated. Young people who want to be academics usually want to go on to graduate school. A master's degree used to count for something, but now, without a Ph.D., you have a hard time getting a good teaching job. And so on. Of course, Robert Hutchins at the University of Chicago hired good people, not good degrees, but how many university presidents are like that now? It's easy to find out what the conventional wisdom says, and then you plan for your son or daughter right up to the $43,000-a-year starting salary, as business manager, or whatever the figure is now.

But there are young people who would rather be sent to Devil's Island than the course through prep school, college, and university. They prefer to be dropouts and wander through their teen and early years, following their interests. As Dorothy Samuel put it in an eloquent passage years ago:

> On every college campus will be found unfashionably clad students lolling in cheap rooms, reading inexpensive paperbacks, or second-hand editions of great books. . . . They browse among the courses and the disciplines. If a book speaks to their condition, they may skip a few weeks' required work to peruse everything the author wrote. When the grade card reflects what they did not learn rather than what they did learn, they couldn't care less. Top grades are meaningful only to employers; these students have not seen any jobs worth doing. . . . And

> so, the exodus has begun. In ones and twos, undramatically, thoughtful lads and lasses are dropping out of college, at least off and on, so they will have time to think.
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> They are, in short, philosophic in an age which seems to offer no forum for discussion of principles and values and verities. . . . They would be Emersons and Thoreaus in a day when journals and podiums seem open only to statisticians and reporters.

Do children ever reveal what they will be like in later years? Sometimes they do. The question recalls the autobiography of Madeleine Slade, born in 1892, daughter of an admiral in the British navy, and brought up with what now seems great understanding. As a child she lived at the family farm of her mother. She couldn't stand the thought of school—its hubbub and noise, so she was taught at home by tutors. Her parents never compelled her to do anything. She tells about her childhood.

> Out of doors the twenty acres were a whole world for adventurous exploration. I got to know every nook and corner, and from the beginning I had a feeling of fellowship with the trees and plants. There were some trees for which I had a special affection and some I was not very fond of, but one and all were for me personalities. Later on, as a young girl, I can remember throwing my arms around trees and embracing them, and to this day that feeling remains.

She wrote this story of her life when she was sixty-eight and it was published with the title *The Spirit's Pilgrimage* by Great Ocean Publishers. Continuing with her childhood on the farm, she says:

> I did not care much for toys, and as for dolls, I could not bear them. But I had two special playthings—a little monkey made of hairy leather filled with stuffing, and a little squirrel of the same material. I called them Nippy and Squilly, and got Bertha [the housemaid whom they all loved] to make clothes for them.

The time came when Madeleine was called upon to be a bridesmaid at a family wedding, but she insisted upon taking Nippy and Squilly, so her mother happily stowed the pair within the basket of flowers the girl was to carry. On the farm she learned the use of all familiar tools, to ride horses and care for the animals.

As a young woman, there came to be two passions in her life—the music of Beethoven and the work of M. K. Gandhi. Because Romain Rolland had written a brief life of Beethoven, she went to see him in France but he talked only of the book he had just finished, *Mahatma Gandhi*, and of the man it was about. She picked up the book in Naples, and from that day on she knew what she must do—go to India and work with Gandhi. But before setting out for India, she trained herself to live a self-denying life, mastering spinning and weaving, so that she would be of help. Gandhi wholly approved this plan, and she left for India in October, 1925. Slowly, living and working in the Ashram, she grew into a helper and assistant on whom Gandhi was able to rely. He named her Mirabehn. After his death, she stayed on, working in India for ten years, then came to a town close to Vienna where she resumed her study of Beethoven's life and work. She died there in 1982, in her ninetieth year.

The thing to take note of is that in the life of Madeleine Slade, in a society of Victorian habits in which conformity was strong and demanding, her parents gave her very close to complete freedom. Far from understanding her decisions, from childhood on, they nonetheless helped her to carry them out. They had of course the material means to do so. But financial security was by no means an avenue to freedom for a child and young woman of those days. They understood her need for freedom and honored it, as parents with limited means might or might not have done. They saw, perhaps, that she understood the responsibilities of freedom and helped her to make herself ready to go to India, even to adopting a vegetarian diet, sleeping on the floor, and learning to speak *Urdu*, which turned out to be the wrong language, as Gandhi's native language was Gujarati! She could have undertaken, as her sister did, to live a conventional upper-class English life, but she chose a radically different course, and either way, she would have had the complete support of her parents. They were sometimes puzzled, but they gave her support without anxiety. This is within the capacity of all mothers and fathers.

FRONTIERS

Ways of Teaching

IN 1954, two families, the Christensens and the Bradleys, acquired thirty acres of bluffs and canyons at the edge of the Platte River flood plain south of Columbus, Nebraska. It was an over-grazed area, scarred with gullies, and nobody wanted it. They named it PaWiTo, made from the letters which began their children's names. What could they do with that worn-out land? In last summer's *Land Report* (issued by the Land Institute, Salina, Kansas), Mary Bruns tells what they did with it. Today—

> PaWiTo is dense with wild plum, dogwood, mulberry, hackberry, willow, and maple. This special place abounds with hundreds of different species of plants, many of them put into place and cared for by a Columbus man known throughout Nebraska, Emiel Christensen. . . . Shortly after the Bradley and Christensen families acquired the land, they lost six hundred of the evergreens they had planted there. The evergreens had died for lack of water, so the families put in a well to water new plants. Eventually the land became cloaked with vegetation and began to retain rainfall. Watering became unnecessary.

Fifteen years later, in 1969, Emiel and Mary Christensen wrote an explanation which they titled *A 30-Acre Tract Dedicated to the Creative Use of Leisure Time*, saying:

> When this tract was closed to grazing and cultivation fifteen years ago we were pleasantly surprised to note how quickly the scars of land abuse began healing. Birds and animals bring in plants almost as rapidly as we do. . . . Although plant life on much of the 30-acre tract has been allowed to seed and spread according to its nature, we have inserted trees, shrubs and vines here and there to determine what species thrive or survive. . . . We have found that wild fruits and nuts do very well in these rough areas and that they add much to the recreational and educational value. Walnuts, filberts, chestnuts, wild gooseberries, chokecherries, raspberries, grapes, mulberries and plums all thrive here.

Then, in 1983, Emiel, who is now ninety, wrote some more:

> Now, almost thirty years later, signs of erosion have largely healed. A hurried plant inventory reveals sixty species of trees, thirty species of shrubs, fifteen species of vines and uncounted numbers of grasses and forbs, all vying for space, sunlight and moisture. Complementing this array of plant life are mammals, from shrews to deer, and insects almost beyond description.
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> All in all this small tract of once abused land has, in thirty years, shown an amazing capacity for recovery of its life support powers. And thereby, demonstrates mankind's opportunities to seek understanding, and ways of cooperating with, the Earth's creative potentials.

Today the thirty-acre area has a network of trails, footbridges, and earthen shelters. The hiking trails follow the natural contours of the ridges and canyons. All his life an architect, Emiel blended these additions into the landscape and put the shelters underground. Service in Europe in the army in World War I convinced him that humans had taken a wrong turn toward species destruction and for the rest of his life worked toward the encouragement of cooperation. In the behavior of wildlife he recognized natural forms of cooperation. Mary Bruns relates:

> Emiel believes that a human being can only reach his or her potential as part of a healthy community, which should be intimately integrated with its physical environment. The community should teach its members how to interact in a creative way with each other and with nature. "Communities are the seedbed of personal character," Emiel has said. Thus his personal and professional life has revolved around community planning.

The 30-acre area, PaWiTo, was a sort of course in community life in nature, to be visited and enjoyed. Those who would like to see it should contact him at his home in Columbus, Nebraska.

In the same issue of *Land Report,* Wes Jackson, founder of the Land Institute, also expresses concern about the decline in community, especially in rural community. He notes, to begin with, that we are now losing species at the rate of a thousand a year, especially

in the tropics, which is a major loss of biological information. Then he says:

> Species extinction and genetic narrowing of the major crops aside, there is reason to believe that the loss of cultural information due to the depopulation of our rural areas is far greater than all the information accumulated by science and technology in the same period. Farm families who left the land, people who practiced the traditions associated with planting, tending, harvesting and storing the produce of the agricultural landscape, gathered information, much of it unconsciously, from the time they were infants: in the farm household, the farm community, and in the barns and fields. . . . Much of that kind of information has already disappeared and continues to disappear as farmers leave the land. It is the kind of information that has been hard won over the millennia, from the time agriculture began. It is valuable because much of it is tuned to the harvest of contemporary sunlight, the kind of information we need now and in the future on the land. . . .
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> The culture seems to believe we are in the midst of an information *explosion* because of the status granted the knowledge accumulated through formal scientific methods. In contrast, knowledge accumulated through tradition, daily experience, and stories, mostly in an informal setting, has little status. We have taken this "folk knowledge" for granted, I suspect, for however *complex* it might be, it was not all that *complicated* to internalize. It was achieved second nature, woven in with the rural setting, the daily work, the values and moral code. It is more the legacy of the dead than the living. The more respected body of knowledge, learned through formal discovery or revelation of discovery in class rooms and textbooks, is of a different order. More discipline is involved in both the discovery and in learning about the discovery. And though most of this information is not all that complex, it is more complicated for us to learn and internalize. Maybe this is the reason we assign such knowledge greater value than that which we picked up through tradition. There has been an explosion of the formal knowledge. But what was necessary to make it accumulate so fast led to a destruction of the other older, less formal knowledge. We have cut the sacred grove to build temples.

This is the sort of thinking you find in every issue of *Land Report.* The paper has 36 pages and comes out three times a year, subscription $5.00. The address is the Land Institute, Route 3, Salina, Kans. 67401.