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ON BOOKS WORTH REREADING

THERE are certain books which, during intervals of famine in ideas, one goes back to again and again, finding that they help to restore the feeling of vital participation in the life of the mind. What, one wonders, gives those books that quality? What do they invite the reader to? Examination of some passages in them may bring something of an answer to these questions.

One book that we have been going back to lately is *In Ghostly Japan* by Lafcadio Hearn, which was first brought out by Little, Brown in 1899. Other books by Hearn serve the same purpose, but this one is freshly familiar by reason of recent reading. Hearn was fascinated by Japanese culture and tradition. He lived, taught, and married in Japan, absorbing as much as he could of the habits, thought, and ways of the people, and writing about them for American readers. The Japanese people, whom he came to love, accepted him as one of their own and his many books about Japan show his appreciation and gratitude. He has somehow the power to generate for the reader a remarkably full sense of how the people think and feel, of their art and their poetry, and of their delicate sensibilities. In a section entitled "Bits of poetry," he points out that in the Japan of that day, very nearly everyone wrote poetry. He says:

> The first curious fact is that, from very ancient times, the writing of short poems has been practiced in Japan even more as a moral duty than as a mere literary art. The old ethical teaching was something like this:—"Are you very angry?—Do not say anything unkind, but compose a poem. Is your best-loved dead?—do not yield to useless grief, but try to calm your mind by making a poem. Are you troubled because you are about to die, leaving so many things unfinished?—be brave, and write a poem on death! Whatever injustice or misfortune disturbs you, put aside your resentment or your sorrow as soon as possible, and write a few lines of sober and elegant verse for a moral exercise. Accordingly, in the old days, every form of trouble was encountered with a poem. . . . I have frequently known poems to be written under the most trying circumstances of misery or suffering,—nay, even upon a bed of death;—and if the verses did not display any extraordinary talent, they at least afforded extraordinary proof of self-mastery under pain. . . . Surely this fact of composition as ethical practice has larger interest than all the treatises ever written about the rules of Japanese prosody.

How did they write?

> By the use of a few chosen words the composer of a short poem endeavors to do exactly what the painter endeavors to do with a few strokes of the brush,—to evoke an image or a mood,—to revive a sensation or an emotion. And the accomplishment of this purpose,—by poet or picture-maker,—depends altogether upon capacity to suggest, and only to suggest. A Japanese artist would be condemned for attempting elaboration of detail in a sketch intended to recreate the memory of some landscape seen through the blue haze of a spring morning, or under the great blond light of an autumn afternoon. Not only would he be false to the traditions of his art: he would necessarily defeat his own end thereby. In the same way a poet would be condemned for attempting any *completeness* of utterance in a very short poem: his object should be only to stir the imagination without satisfying it.

Hearn now proceeds to examples, offering one which in Japanese has four lines:

> *Oh, body-piercing wind!*
> *that work of little fingers*
> *in the shoji!*

> What does this mean? It means the sorrowing of a mother for her dead child. *Shoji* is the name given to those light white-paper screens which in a Japanese house serve both as windows and doors,—admitting plenty of light, but concealing, like frosted glass, the interior from outer observation, and excluding the wind. Infants delight to break these by poking their fingers through the soft paper: then the wind blows through the holes. In this case the wind blows very cold indeed,—into the mother's very heart;—for it comes through the little holes that were made by the fingers of her dead child.

In a section on Buddhist proverbs—old Japan was saturated with Buddhist teachings—Hearn gives

one: "The shop-boy in front of the temple gate repeats the sutra which he never learned." Explaining, he says:

> Kozo means "acolyte" as well as "shop-boy," "errandboy," or "apprentice"; but in this case it refers to a boy employed in a shop situated near or before the gate of a Buddhist temple. By constantly hearing the sutra chanted in the temple, the boy learns to repeat the words. A proverb of kindred meaning is "The sparrows of Kangaku-In (an ancient seat of learning) chirp the Mogyu,"—a Chinese text formerly taught to young students. The teaching of either proverb is excellently expressed by a third: "Rather than study (an art), get accustomed to it," that is to say, "keep constantly in contact with it." Observation and practice is better than study.

Another proverb: (First) see the person, (then) preach the doctrine," which means:

> The teaching of Buddhist doctrine should always be adapted to the intelligence of the person to be instructed There is another proverb of the same kind,—"According to the understanding (of the person to be taught), preach the Law."

Did Hearn become a Buddhist? As a thinking intelligence, Hearn was unable to become anything but more of himself, but he was attracted to and absorbed by whatever good ideas he came across, and Buddhist conceptions, which are rich in meaning, pervaded his later life quite naturally. He is better to read on them than most treatises of instruction for this reason. He saw the beneficent effects of Buddhist teaching all around him in Japan and was able to recreate its atmosphere for readers in his countless sketches of Japanese life. He mourned the gradual decline in Japanese culture he saw going on because of Western influence and treasured his acquaintanceship with older friends in Japan who were preserving it in their life and habits. By the power of his imagination he created for his readers the world in which he lived—an ideal world far more real to him than many of the ordinary circumstances of "real" life. That, more than anything else, seems the source of the power of his prose. In reading him, we seem to acquire a little of that power, and it delights the soul.

Another writer who has this power, to whom we often go back, is Wendell Berry. But he recreates for the reader, in his essays and novels, a smaller community, the farmers and farmland of the part of Kentucky where he was born and where he has lived for most of his life, along the shores of the Kentucky River. His latest book, *The Wild Birds* (North Point Press, 1986, $13.95), is a collection of six stories about that region and its people and their natural integrities. You get to know these people, most of whom have appeared in earlier stories and novels, and soon are wishing that there were places like that still left in the country, much as Hearn longed to live as long as he could in the old Japan. These people were far from flawless, but they were no pretenders to virtue and took responsibility, soon or late, for what they did. They come to life in Berry's stories because he has drawn them from life, just giving them fictional names and made-up but typical doings. In the title story the scene opens on a Saturday afternoon in a lawyer's office in the small town. The attorney, Wheeler Catlett, now getting elderly, sits musing in his office when he sees through the window three visitors coming, Burley Coulter and his nephew Nathan Coulter and his wife, all of whom are friends he has known for years. If he has read elsewhere in Berry, the reader may feel that he knows them too, since they have appeared in other books.

Burley announces that he has come to arrange for the making of his will. He explains to Wheeler that he wants to leave his farm to his illegitimate son, Danny Branch, who now lives with him. Wheeler, the lawyer, thinks this is not a really orderly thing to do and gives his reasons. The rest of the story, you could say, is the argument between these two old friends, Wheeler objecting and Burley explaining, until Wheeler is finally convinced that Burley is right. But the charm and splendor of this story lie in the level of their argument—in how Burley meets Wheeler's objections, in the kind of love Burley felt for the boy's mother and the strength in his sense of obligation. Wheeler's reflections come at the end of the story.

> Danny, Wheeler would bet, is not as smart as Burley, but he does look like him in a way; he has Burley's way of looking at you and grinning and nodding his head once before saying what he has to say—a fact that Wheeler now allows to underwrite

Burley's supposition and his intent. He allows Burley's argument to make sense—not all the sense there is, but enough.

And so with Wheeler's consent Danny comes into their membership and also is one there with them, Wheeler already supposing that Nathan will not be the only one who will stick to Danny, and looking forward to the possibility of his own usefulness to that young man.

As often, the defeat of his better judgment has left him only with a job to do, a job he *can* do, and he feels a sudden infusion of good humor. If Danny is Burley's son and heir, and if that is less than might have been hoped, it is what they are left with, what they have, and Wheeler will be glad as the rest of them to make the most of it.

He tells Burley that only a few words will be required for such a will and to come in Monday to sign it. Then Burley, not quite ready to leave, says:

"Wheeler, do you know why we've been friends?"

"I've thought so," Wheeler says. He has thought so because of that company of friends to which they both belong, which has been so largely the pleasure and meaning of both of their lives. "But why?"

"Because we ain't brothers."

"What are you talking about?" Wheeler says.

But he is afraid he knows, and his discomfort is apparent to them all. Nathan and Hannah obviously feel it too, and are as surprised as he is.

"If we'd been brothers, you wouldn't have put up with me. Or anyhow you partly wouldn't have, because a lot of my doings haven't been your kind of doings. As it was, they could be tolerable or even funny to you because they wasn't done close enough to you to matter. You could laugh."

Wheeler sits forward now, comfortless, straight up in his chair, openly bearing the difficulty he knows it is useless to hide. Though this has never occurred to him before, because nobody has said it to him before, he knows with a seizure of conviction that Burley is right. He knows they all know, and again under his breastbone he feels the pain of a change that he thought completed, but is not completed yet. . . . As it is he does not know how. He sits as if paralyzed in his loss, without a word to his name, as if suddenly pushed stark naked into a courtroom, history and attainment stripped from him, become as a little child.

But Burley is smiling, and not with the vengeful pleasure that Wheeler feared, but with understanding. He knows what he has given Wheeler is pain, his to give, but Wheeler's own. He sees.

"Wheeler, if we're going to get this will made out, not to mention all else we've got to do while there's breath in us, I think you've got to forgive me as if I was a brother to you." He laughs, asserting for the last time the seniority now indisputably his, and casting it aside. "And I reckon I've got to forgive you for taking so long to do it."

Burley, Wheeler realizes, has closed the gap between them.

And then he reaches out and grips Burley's shoulder recognizing almost by surprise, with relief, the familiar flesh and bone. "Burley, it's all right."

And Burley lays his own hand on Wheeler's shoulder. "Thank you, Wheeler. Shore it is."

There are a few words more, but that is the end of the story.

There are passages like that in nearly everything Berry has written, which is why we keep going back to him. Become what you are, taught Pindar, and someone else, possibly Blake, said, Become what you imagine. Both counsels are needed, since self-realization is indeed the project before us, yet by the imagination we learn to particularize the task from day to day. Writers like Hearn and Berry seem to illustrate how this is done.

There are other approaches to the mystery of the self and of human nature. While there are heavy courses in anthropology in the universities, filled with the details of the structures of theories about the origin of man, they leave many questions unanswered, although, once the mind has absorbed all the details there is a tendency to forget these questions and another tendency to assume that the available theories represent truth in the process of becoming. This latter tendency is what makes great scientific revolutions necessary from time to time. So one great task is to keep the mind open to neglected possibilities and reasonable alternatives that have been ignored. Another book, then, that we go back to is W. Macneile Dixon's *The Human Situation*, which we read in regularly for a number of reasons, one of which is its continual reminder of

how little we actually know about matters commonly taken for granted. An example is the subject of evolution, what it means and how it works and whether or not its theories have actually instructed us in self-knowledge.

After some discussion of the inadequacy of Darwinism, Dixon writes:

> Man's ancestry then is not so simple and blunt a matter as it was in Darwin's or Haeckel's day, and the tree of life tends in the pictures rather to resemble an open long-handled fan, or a pollarded willow, whose many branches spring direct from the main trunk. So stern is now the task of the evolutionist that some thinkers have been forced back to the conclusion that not only does no theory so far presented fit the facts, but that evolution means nothing more than a gradual unfolding of what was present from the first, the unrolling of a scroll, or a picture, of which the parts appear as they are successively illuminated. If that were so, then evolution would be so diluted as to differ little from creation. A factor essential to the solution of the problem appears to be missing, or it may be that a wholly new conception is needed to unify our knowledge and illumine our darkness, a conception the future may supply. When I remember how in physics the old firmly established views on gravitation and causality have gone by the board, I pause, I reflect, I withhold my decision.
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> Evolution theory is a grand, even an inspired conjecture, yet it wears an unfinished air. And behind all this play of arguments and counter arguments stand the great unknowables, time, space, substance, change, causation, smiling ironically down upon the to-and-fro excursions of our minds. With a great show of wisdom we are telling ourselves little, with profound learning exploring fathomless depths, where all soundings fail. Not at one stride, *non uno itinere*, as we fondly fancy, shall we reach the truth.
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> We know what we knew at the beginning, that in respect of his physical structure man is part of the animal kingdom. Detach or disentangle ourselves from the rest of the organic world we cannot. It seems probable, indeed, that the human race is immeasurably older than we were originally told, and that before us were sub-men, not monkeys. It seems probable, too, that in bygone ages there were not only many races but several varieties of men, to whom the different types in the modern world, red men and yellow, black men and white, owe their respective origins. If we seek for ourselves an incommensurable rank, matchless, incomparable, if we claim a standing all our own, it must be looked for in the region of mind, associated, we know not how, with an animal organism, the body. . . .
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> Whatever be the truth, the term evolution is but a mask for our ignorance. No cause can be assigned for nature's rhythms, her spurts of activity and repose, save that it is her way, the essential character of her operations from everlasting to everlasting. And had we vision we should foresee summers of the mind, and winters yet to come, cycles without end. Nature has, like ourselves, her day, and nights, and months and years, her seasons of rising sap and flowery spring, of autumnal withdrawals and slumber before another dawn. Man is a microcosm of the macrocosm. We have not found the measure of nature's cycles, and can fix no dates for her recurrences. They are too vast for our scale. Death will overtake her, say our modern instructors, and doubtless they are right. But her death will be but a sleep. Refreshed, she will shake her hyacinthine locks, and rising get to her task again.

Then, elsewhere in this book, Dixon says of man, of ourselves:

> The astonishing thing about the human being is not so much his intellect and bodily structure, profoundly mysterious as they are. The astonishing and least comprehensible thing about him is his range of vision; his gaze into the infinite distance; his lonely passion for ideas and ideals, far removed from his material surroundings and animal activities, and in no way suggested by them, yet for which, such is his affection, he is willing to endure toils and privations, to sacrifice pleasures, to disdain griefs and frustrations, for which, rating them in value above his own life, he will stand till he dies, the profound conviction he entertains that if nothing be worth dying for nothing is worth living for.
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> The inner truth is that every man is himself a creator, by birth and nature, an artist, an architect and fashioner of worlds. If this be madness—and if the universe be the machine some think it, a very ecstacy of madness it most manifestly is—none the less it is the lunacy in which consists the romance of life, in which lies our chief glory and our only hope.

What if there were no such books to read and go back to, and no one to write them and no one to love them?

REVIEW
WILLIAM GODWIN

THE debt of the modern world of thought to anarchist thinkers is immense, but hardly recognized. The failure to recognize this obligation seems largely due to popular fear of a society in which no political authority exists, and partly to the tendency on the part of some anarchists early in this century to commit violent acts in order to draw attention to the unbearable injustices for which they held the State and the ruling class responsible. The oppressions and crimes of government have always been known, of course, from the days of Socrates on, but conventional modern thought regards the revolutions of the eighteenth century as having put an end to the arbitrary offenses of kings and feudal class distinctions. Only during the twentieth century has there been increasing awareness of the shortcomings of political or ideological solutions for social injustice and exploitation. As a result, anarchist thinking, while widely regarded as "utopian," is slowly regaining favor among thoughtful people.

Thoreau's essay, "Civil Disobedience," first published in 1849, was a tocsin which made the first principle of the anarchists the keynote of his common sense, and his "Life without Principle," which came out in 1863, developed the theme. He began "Civil Disobedience" by saying:

> I heartily accept the motto,—"That government is best which governs least"; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe,—"That government is best which governs not at all"; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have.

Hardly anyone of sensibility and a moderate acquaintance with history will now disagree with Thoreau. We hear a great deal today about terrorists and their unpredictable crimes, but the worst terrorists are the biggest nations with the most powerful governments, which have obsessed the world with fear of nuclear war. But people, when confronted with the arguments of the anarchists, are likely to claim, "Thoreau may be right in principle, but no one really knows when the people are 'prepared for' living without government." While the anarchists have books—good ones—which endeavor to answer this question, they are still a small minority, although there is great power in their arguments, and some of the best reformers of our time, whether or not they have read the anarchists—they seldom use the term—regard the reduction of government as not only common sense but absolutely necessary to constructive change.

The anarchists, meanwhile, keep plugging away at their themes, keeping the literature of distinguished anarchist thinkers in print and carrying on polemical debate with their critics. An anarchist classic which became available this year is *The Anarchist Writings of William Godwin*, edited, with a valuable sketch of Godwin's life and an interpretation of his work, by Peter Marshall. The publisher is Freedom Press (Angel Alley, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX U.K. The price is £3.50.)

Godwin, Marshall tells us, was born in 1756, and was to live for eighty years, throughout a time of violent change, including the French Revolution. His parents were Dissenters who rejected the Church of England and his education was both Liberal and Calvinist. He was weaned of his Calvinism, however, at twenty-six, when he read "the works of D'Holbach, Helvetius and Rousseau, the most subversive philosophers of the French Enlightenment whose banned works were causing an uproar on the other side of the Channel."

> Godwin read in Rousseau that man is naturally good but corrupted by institutions, that the foundation of private property was the beginning of the downfall of humanity, and that man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains. From Helvetius and D'Holbach, he learned that all men are equal and society should be formed for human happiness. When he closed the covers of their books, his whole world view had changed. They immediately undermined his Calvinist view of man, although for

> the time being he became a follower of Socinus (who denied the divinity of Christ and original sin) rather than an atheist. Realizing that he was not cut out to be a minister, Godwin decided to go to London and try to earn his living by teaching and writing.

Needless to say, he had a hard time. He did a biography, three novels, and some political pamphlets, predicted the outbreak of the French Revolution. He met Tom Paine and helped him to publish the first part of the *Rights of Man* (1791). Marshall says:

> The experience of the French Revolution had already persuaded him of the desirableness of a government of the simplest construction but his bold reasoning led him to realize that humanity could be enlightened and free only with its utter annihilation. Godwin thus set out very close to the English Jacobin like Paine only to finish a convinced and outspoken anarchist—the first great exponent of society without government.

Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, the first great feminist, were attracted to each other, and against his principles he finally married her to save her from the penalties of public disapproval and because she asked him to.

He believed that complete freedom would naturally put an end to all evil. Marshall says, quoting his daughter Mary, who married Percy Shelley, a devoted admirer of her father:

> As his daughter Mary later observed, Godwin's belief that "no vice could exist with perfect freedom" was "the very basis of his system, the very keystone of the arch of justice, by which he desired to knit together the whole human family."
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> Burke's reactionary *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1791) had triggered off a pamphlet war, but Godwin decided to rise above the controversies of the day and write a work which would place "the principles of politics on an immoveable basis." As a philosopher, he wanted to treat universal principles, not practical details. He therefore tried to condense and develop whatever was best and most liberal in political theory. He carefully marshalled his arguments and wrote in a clear and precise style. The result was *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (1793).

This work, Marshall says, had "an immediate and tremendous success," although its sudden popularity could not last because of the reaction of the period and his uncompromising further writing.

In his preface Marshall explains that while Godwin's *Inquiry Concerning Political Justice* made him famous, he was the writer of some fifty works. The editor has made extracts from *Enquiry* and other books and arranged them to give a coherent account of his thought for the. general reader. The present-day reader is likely to feel that much of what Godwin says is obvious common sense, but this would be to forget that in the eighteenth century such ideas were fresh, exciting, and indeed revolutionary. Yet many of his ideas were already in the air as expressive of the aspirations of emerging working class and dissenting intellectuals. Godwin is a man of the Enlightenment, filled with its ardor and optimism, secure in his confidence in the power of reason which, he felt, is sure to triumph when effectively used. His mind was shaped by the passion of his Calvinist upbringing, and then leavened by the French philosophes and their account of human nature. In the paragraphs below we give his convictions concerning the nature of man and his prescriptions for a better arrangement of human society. He says:

> The actions and dispositions of men are not the offspring of any original bias that they bring into the world in favour of one sentiment or character rather than another, but flow entirely from the operation of circumstances and events acting upon a faculty of receiving sensible impressions.
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> "Consider, that man is but a machine! He is just what his nature and circumstances have made him: he obeys the necessities which he cannot resist. If he is corrupt, it is because he has been corrupted. If he is unamiable, it is because he has been 'mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spit upon.' Give him a different education, place him under other circumstances, treat him with as much gentleness and generosity, as he has experienced of harshness, and he would be altogether a different creature."

> Government, under whatever point of view we examine this topic, is unfortunately pregnant with motives to censure and complaint. Incessant change, everlasting innovation, seem to be dictated by the true interests of mankind. But government is the perpetual enemy of change. . . . Their tendency is to perpetuate abuse. Whatever was once thought right and useful they undertake to entail to the latest posterity. They reverse the genuine propensities of man, and instead of suffering us to proceed, teach us to look backward for perfection. They prompt us to seek the public welfare, not in alteration and improvement, but in a timid reverence for the decisions of our ancestors, as if it were the nature of the human mind always to degenerate, and never to advance. . . . With what delight must every well informed friend of mankind look forward to the auspicious period the dissolution of political government, of that brute engine which has been the only perennial cause of the vices of mankind, and which, as has abundantly appeared in the progress of the present work, has mischiefs of various sorts incorporated with its substance, and not otherwise removable than by its utter annihilation!

Yet Godwin had the utmost faith in education, in consideration of his theory of human nature. He did not believe in violence and looked to the gradual transformation of mankind through rational inquiry and schooling. Today, people are not so sure about such things, the origin of evil remaining something of a mystery. But more and more people are becoming convinced of Thoreau's rule—that the best government is the least government. A great many of us are studying how to simplify our lives, wondering how we can possibly start afresh.

COMMENTARY
REASONS FOR REREADING

WE invite attention to the lyrical qualities of the long passage on evolution quoted from W. MacNeile Dixon, at the end of this week's lead article. When a man's prose rises to this quality, what is the result in the truth content of what he says? The reader's acceptance of it is certainly increased. Is this as it should be, or is it deceptive? From page 7 to the end on page eight, the flow of feeling as much as of words seems just right, filled with flashes of intuition that one is inclined to go by.

Then, the final paragraph by Dixon on the nature of man—is this moonshine or visionary reality? There are so many dull and unimaginative people about. But then there are the Shelleys and the Mozarts, and, at another level of expression, a Wendell Berry.

Has language, the right language, a truth-finding magic in it? Do any English teachers have the secret of communicating its power? Can a love of beauty in speech be taught, and if so, is there a guardianship against intoxication and self-deception to go along with it to the student? There are even ringing passages in Kipling that make you wonder about this.

Who would you feel safe in turning your children over to—a precisely honest and conscientious biologist or a poet like Dixon or Berry? What would you try to awaken in a child to give him security against their mistakes? Or is this asking too much? It is certainly asking for more than anything any school system has thought of as part of its responsibility.

Perhaps it is enough to point out to the child, when he reaches a certain age, that no one has the kind of certainty others should be ready to rely upon blind, without asking a few questions for himself. The child needs to realize that if there are going to be mistakes, they had better be his own, for if someone else made them, getting things straight will be a lot more difficult.

The books this week's lead article deals with are books which help the reader to cope with such questions. That is a reason why they are worth rereading.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
FUTURE PROBLEMS

EDUCATION is intended, we are told, to prepare the coming generation for life in the world. It instructs the young, therefore, in what is regarded as the knowledge we have. One important area of this teaching covers what the world and its resources present, and how people deal with them, so that the young, when they come of age, will know how. So we teach them a variety of subjects under headings like geography, economics, civics, and law, sometimes using the general title of "Social Studies." For several generations in the past it has been assumed that the content of these studies needs little change, that the elements of the pursuit of a living are more or less what they have been for years. But today, as nearly everyone knows, things are different, and the systems of education are having to try to adapt to the changes in conditions which are so rapidly overtaking both us and the rest of the world.

In fact, the changes are coming so fast and exercising their influence so widely that there are great differences in opinion among people as to what they mean. This imposes great difficulties on the schools, which are (except for small private schools) big institutions under elaborate bureaucratic management, inevitably vulnerable to political pressures, the anger of parents resistant to change, and subject to the cultural lag which seems the prevailing influence in big institutions. Yet despite all these negative factors, there are still some responsible and imaginative individuals working as teachers in the schools who exercise a measure of freedom in their work and do what they can to prepare the children for the changed world in which they will live. "Social Studies" is a natural area for such preparation to take place.

A foundation source for material in "Social Studies" would be the publications of the Worldwatch Institute in Washington, D.C., headed by Lester R. Brown. For three years now, the Institute has issued volumes which are annual reports on *State of the World—1984, 1985, 1986.* Early in the 1980s it became evident that there is simply not enough evidence of the changes the world is going through for policy-makers to consider, and for the general reader to understand. A reviewer, Martin W. Holdgate, in *Environment* for last March, giving attention to the *State of the World* reports, said: "The Worldwatch Institute has moved to meet this need." He goes on.

> These volumes . . . are evaluations of how our planet appeared to a team of informed and concerned analysts. . . . they comment on the weakness of UN population statistics as a basis for projections and on the paucity of information on soil erosion. They are selective in the subjects covered and they interpret their findings against a yardstick—sustainability. As the authors say in their first report, "the intent is not merely to describe how things are, but to indicate whether they are getting better or worse." And progress is measured by "the extent to which our social and economic systems are successfully adjusting to changes in the underlying natural resource base.". . .
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> These three reports [1984, 1985, and 1986] are rich in information, much of it disturbing. One central message is that in the past decade the 5 billion inhabitants of the world have re-emphasized their ability to strain ecological systems to the breaking point. In Africa, which was virtually self-sufficient in food in 1970, there has been a steady decline in per capita grain production by about 1 per cent per annum, and some 140 million people out of a total of 530 million received some imported grain in 1984. The Ethiopian drought caught the world's attention, but it was only the trigger for a disaster with three underlying causes: the fastest population growth of any continent, the widespread erosion and desertification of an over-stressed environment, and a failure by governments to support sustainable agriculture. Forest clearance in the tropics has been running at 11 million hectares a year, 6 per cent of it to provide cropland and most of the rest for fuel wood. Rangelands have been overstressed (the world cattle population has been rising at about 1.5 per cent a year) and mismanagement has led to degradation on a wide scale. While there are many examples of improvement in food production techniques, sound irrigation, and sensible reforestation, as a whole these efforts are inadequate and there are indications that

environmental disruption may in turn provoke climatic change.

Depletion in other resource sectors is much the same. Irrigation for agriculture (especially in the American West) has seriously reduced the water table in many large areas, fisheries are unable to supply the demand for protein, while air pollution is widely affecting the forests of the world. While industrial efficiency has reduced some of the drain on water supply and energy efficiency has made dramatic gains, the recent drop in oil prices, it is feared, will lead to increase in auto production and increased fuel use. Finally, all the Worldwatch reports "question the economics as well as the desirability of nuclear power, clearly regarded by the authors as a costly and unnecessary mistake, disengagement from which still poses severe problems of decommissioning and waste disposal."

> All three reports argue that the future turns on the management of people, of populations. This alone can ease the intolerable pressures on the environment. Some developed regions like Western Europe and some developing nations like China are achieving a demographic transition that brings hope of sustainability. But great regions like South America are still at risk, and the 1985 volume states bluntly that Africa appears to be threatened by demographic recession and a slide into socio-economic chaos. . . .
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> The natural environmental system and the economic system need to be much more closely related. Policies must be pragmatic, responsible, intelligent, and widely understood and supported. For this, leadership is essential—and over much of the world it is lacking.

That seems a fairly accurate account of the world that the generation now in school will inherit. The question is, will they be able to meet such a heavy responsibility? Perhaps the first thing that needs to be pointed out to the young is that there was practically no awareness of all these developments in the world of a century ago, or even fifty years ago. If the world continues on its present course, without undertaking far-reaching change, the conditions, which are already affecting everyone's lives, will grow worse instead of better. And as the reviewer says:

> The broad prescriptions of need—to bring populations into balance, to intensify food production on the lands suitable for stable cultivation, to conserve and expand forests, to use energy more efficiently, and to reduce waste of water and materials—are widely accepted by environmental scientists and policymakers around the world. . . . But with all that, the reports are still "top down" in their approach. They are rooted in the philosophy of decision taking at the governmental or intergovernmental level. They are less helpful when it comes to choosing practical policies that will work in the real world. . . . while reference is made to some of the good schemes that are beginning to bridge the gap, the reports still strike me as much stronger on diagnosis and theory than on cure and practice. We could do with more space for success stories that can be copied, selectively and with an eye to particular social and environmental conditions, in many parts of our diverse planet where sustainable human development still teeters on the brink of an environmental chasm.

Another thing that should be pointed out to our young people is that our civilization shines in analysis and criticism, but is deplorably weak in synthesis. The question of what positive steps ought to be taken remains obscure. Yet there are people, around the country, out on the land, many of them on experimental farms, some working in tropical regions, some in ways of fishing in which people can make a living without requiring enormous investments, some on water conservation and agriculture requiring less irrigation—people who are giving their lives to finding out what the positive steps should be. They deserve interest, help from people of like mind, and some of them need students who want to contribute to the synthesis the future will require.

One of these individuals, Wes Jackson, runs a school on the land for ten students near Salina in Kansas. He has an article in *Not Man Apart* for last April on the plight of the farmer, in which he says:

> The farm problem is not a financial crisis so much as a failure of culture. It will not be—cannot be—solved by a new farm program so long as the farm family is the primary locus for receiving money. The farm family cannot exist in any dignified sort of way without rural community. . . . Farm debt and ecological debt on the farms stands as a foreshadow of what is to come for our entire culture and the environment as a whole, unless we change, and fast. . . . Agriculture is overcapitalized and farmers have debt largely because the extraction or mining economy has moved to the fields. We need economic models that will account for the cycling of materials and handle the flow of energy—but not just any energy—contemporary energy (sunlight, non-fossil, non-nuclear) in an orderly and nondisruptive manner.

The young people need to know about such individuals and what they are doing.

FRONTIERS

Trees and Tropical Fish

READERS with ecological interests are increasingly concerned about trees—the preservation of forests and their restoration with the right species for the good of the land and its inhabitants. Every continent has decimated forests, and while governments are lax in enforcing rules that will preserve the forest cover, here and there around the world there are grassroots movements springing up to protect the land by caring for forests and planting trees. MANAS has several times reported on one of these movements that has developed in recent years in the region of Garhwal in the foothills of the Western Himalayas in India. For long centuries the care of the immense forests of this area was left to the people who lived there, but when the British came they saw great export possibilities for timber in them and assumed control of the forest lands. The present Indian government inherited the attitude of the British and continued felling trees on the slopes of the Himalayas. Then, fifteen or twenty years ago, the people who lived there began to reap the disastrous harvest of this policy.

A thick forest canopy is essential to the protection of the soil on the slopes of mountains. The trees receive the impact of rain and interrupt its flow, so that it sinks into the ground and stays there, producing springs and moist earth, helping to prevent erosion by holding it in place. But when the trees are thinned, this protection is much reduced, so that there are harmful effects in almost every direction. Runoff becomes rapid and produces flash floods. The floods pick up refuse and boulders which sometimes create dams where none was intended. Such blocks to the free flow of extra water create artificial lakes which, after some days or weeks, may overcome the obstacles that made the lakes and burst as a great torrent into streams flowing into the lowlands where the country is lower, the banks of the rivers only a few feet above the normal water level. The water now rushes over the country, washing away roads, obliterating villages, and drowning people. The water finally recedes, of course, but the damage has been done. Much of the agricultural land is ruined, its soil carried to lower levels as silt dissolved in the water, eventually, perhaps, to reach a reservoir fed by the river, which may be filled with silt in twenty-five or thirty years instead of the hundred calculated by the dam engineers.

The foregoing is a brief outline of what has been happening in Himalayan regions, causing agony to the mountain villagers. The hill people know what cutting down trees does to their lives. It dries up the springs, which makes them walk for miles, perhaps, to secure drinking water. It leaves them with less and less fuel for cooking. In some areas the collection of firewood may require women to spend a night away from home, since they must go farther to find waste wood they are able to carry. Women have been known to drown themselves in rivers to escape from the exhausting task of collecting fuel. As they learned and saw the cause of their problems—the cutting down of forest trees—they began to protest. When contractors sent their tree-cutters into the forest to take out the trees government forest officials had marked for cutting, the women of the nearby village preceded them and threw their arms about the marked trees.

> Whenever some labourers advanced toward one of the trees, they immediately hugged the tree, clasping their arms firmly around its thick trunk. For more than an hour the frustrated contractor went around the forest with his labourers, seeking to fell at least a few trees, but whenever he approached a marked tree which had been left uncovered by the tree-huggers, the women and children standing on the road below rushed to the tree to protect it.
>
> The police-force had no answer to this unique form of tree-protection. The only way of felling trees was to drag each one of the tree-huggers away from the forest and then make an arrest.
>
> There was no possibility of a violent retaliation as these protesters had throughout remained non-violent, again and again shouting two slogans:
>
> No matter what the attack on us
> Our hands will not rise in violence.

> The Policemen are our brothers,
> Our fight is not with them.

The foregoing is a passage from *Forests and People—A Report on the Himalayas*, published as an 88-page booklet by Bharat Dogra, now available from the author for $3.00, postpaid. His address is D-7, Raksha Kunj, Paschim Vihar, New Delhi 110063 India.

No one can tell the "whole story" of this struggle by Indian villagers to save the trees of the forest, but Dogra packs a lot of history and heroism into 88 pages, giving much attention to the work of Sunder Lal Bahuguna, who has been able to expand the demonstration of those women into a full-fledged grassroots movement to save the trees and to use the forests of the Himalayas properly. (We might add that MANAS readers who have sent to India for another of Dogra's books are well satisfied, and one has given his copy to his local library after reading it.)

Bill McLarney, co-founder with John Todd of the New Alchemy Institute on Cape Cod, and of a similarly named group, ANAI, in Costa Rica, whose work we reported on in MANAS for April 30, is a marine biologist and a free lance writer who earlier this year contributed to *Annals of Earth* (edited by Nancy Todd) a long article on the use of cyanide by fishermen in the Philippines to benumb and capture choice specimens of tropical fish collected for hobbyists in the United States who prize hard-to-find beauties. The fish they are after live in the tangle of coral reefs which surround many of the Philippine islands and the fishermen, despite their primitive equipment, have learned how to carry underwater a bottle of sodium cyanide solution which they squirt into the coral hiding-places used by the fish when an intruder comes into their habitat on the reefs. As McLarney tells it:

> After all the accessible fish have been gathered, three glints of blue remain within the coral. He [the diver] aims three direct shots from the squeeze bottle. One of the fish emerges, coughing and spinning, and is snatched up. The other two lie still, in crevices too small for a hand. The diver can spare no more time and heads for the boat. A good haul: a dozen blue tangs and the two squirrel fish. The Chinese broker from Manila will pay 4, maybe 5 pesos (22 to 28 cents U.S.) each for the tangs, maybe half that for the squirrelfish.
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> While the diver and his companions add the latest catch to others already in the banca's "live well" (a series of large plastic bags cradled in hand-woven straw baskets) they leave behind a dying blue tang coral head, entombing two blue tangs and a multitude of shrimps, crabs and worms. They leave the bottom littered with drab colored fish of no interest to "the Chinaman."

The use of cyanide to capture the beautiful fish is of course illegal, but this is a law tacitly violated in Philippine waters, at the expense of the ecological health of the region. It is hard indeed to prove the use cyanide by the fishermen, who have become extremely clever at concealing their techniques. Much of McLarney's story is devoted to the efforts of decent collectors who refuse to use cyanide and fight to stop others from using it. Yet, as McLarney puts it, "Philippine collectors, their buyers and importers, dealers and hobbyists in the affluent countries are involved, with various degrees of awareness, in what amounts to a conspiracy to cash in on that irreplaceable resource for short term gain." It should be added that the benumbed fish may seem to recover, but often die enroute to the U.S., or after they have been proudly purchased by aquarium owners. For the full story write to *Annals of Earth*, 10 Shanks Pond Road, Falmouth, Mass. 03540, for issue No. 1 of Vol. 4.