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THE POET'S DISTANCE

THE poet, by reason of his role as observer and seer, while in the world, must stand at a certain distance from it in order to see. If he goes too far, the objects of perception dissolve into the formless robes of space, while the close intimacy of personal action removes the perspective which his art requires. What must he do? The answer is the poem, framed by the failure to reach infinity, shaped by the strands of his love of earth.

Why are we drawn to poetry? Because the poet, in the rare moments of his success, gives voice to the timeless intentions hidden or inverted in the affairs of the world. The accents of Logos become his own, its rhythms the meter of his lines. You do not ask of a poet if what he says is true. The question does not arise. The hearer, who always knows more than the reader, becomes the choral resonance of what he hears; the sound is its own confirmation; no field for questioning exists; doubts are unborn in the world of poetry; they are a resistance that has no ground.

Yet the poet is a man who lives in a world of things, things separated and apart. His heart has affections, his hopes reach through shadows toward their receding goals. So the poet becomes a generator of pain. A song is a temporal defeat, a brief suspension, of pain. This much is permitted to the poet. Like the physicist who works with cosmological constants, the poet's tools are the psychological constants. They are the weapons of his war with entropy, making possible the extension of his small victories, the renewal of his hopes.

It is a Promethean struggle. In his *Nobel Lecture*—response to the award of the prize for literature in 1980—Czeslaw Milosz, the Polish poet, makes this clear. He needs no interpreter—no more than would a great poem. He begins by recalling from childhood reading Selma Lagerlof's *Nils* "who flies above the earth and looks at it *from above* but at the same time sees it in every detail."

> This double vision may be a metaphor of the poet's vocation. I found a similar metaphor in a Latin ode of a seventeenth-century poet . . . once known all over Europe under the pen name of Casimire. He taught poetics at my university. In that ode he describes his voyage—on the back of Pegasus from Vilno to Antwerp, where he is going to visit his poet friends. Like Nils Holgersson, he beholds under him rivers, lakes, forests; that is, a map, both distant and yet concrete. Hence, two attributes of the poet: avidity of the eye and the desire to describe that which he sees.

Later he says:

> The Earth which the poet viewed in his flight calls with a cry, indeed, out of the abyss and doesn't allow itself to be viewed *from above.* An insoluble contradiction appears, a terribly real one, giving no peace of mind either day or night, whatever we call it: it is the contradiction between being and action, or, on another level, a contradiction between art and solidarity with one's fellow men. Reality calls for a name, for words, but it is unbearable, and if it is touched, if it draws very close, the poet's mouth cannot even utter a complaint of Job: all art proves to be nothing compared with action. Yet to embrace reality in such a manner that it is preserved in all its old tangle of good and evil, of despair and hope, is possible only thanks to a distance, only by soaring *above* it—but this in turn seems then a moral treason.
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> Such was the contradiction at the very core of conflicts engendered by the twentieth century and discovered by poets of an Earth polluted by the crime of genocide.

How can a poet retire from such a scene? Some of them do. Others feel that while they must, they cannot. Yet whatever they do, they find an involuntary exile imposed by a change in the very elements of their craft.

> The exile of a poet is today a simple function of a relatively recent discovery: that whoever wields

> power is also able to control language and not only with the prohibition of censorship but also by changing the meaning of words. A peculiar phenomenon makes its appearance: the language of a captive community acquires certain durable habits; whole zones of reality cease to exist simply because they have no name. There is, it seems, a hidden link between theories of literature as *écriture*, of speech feeding on itself, and the growth of the totalitarian state. In any case, there is no reason why the state should not tolerate an activity that consists of creating "experimental" poems and prose, if these are conceived as autonomous systems of reference, enclosed within their own boundaries. Only if we assume that a poet constantly strives to liberate himself from borrowed styles in search of reality is he dangerous. In a room where people unanimously maintain a conspiracy of silence, one word of truth sounds like a pistol shot.

The conspiracy of silence has an inevitable effect—the loss of memory, which has become almost deliberate.

> Our planet that gets smaller every year, with its fantastic proliferation of mass media, is witnessing a process that escapes definition, characterized by a refusal to remember. Certainly, the illiterates of past centuries, then an enormous majority of mankind, knew little of the history of their respective countries and of their civilization. In the minds of modern illiterates, however, who know how to read and write and even teach in schools and at universities, history is present but blurred, in a state of strange confusion. Molière becomes a contemporary of Napoleon, Voltaire a contemporary of Lenin.

Or, as G.K. Chesterton put it, in a lighter vein, years ago:

> Newspapers not only deal with news, but they deal with everything as if it were entirely new. Tut-ankh-amen, for instance, was entirely new. It is exactly in the same fashion that we read that Admiral Bangs has been shot, which is the first intimation we have that he has ever been born. As it deals with individuals [journalism] deals with institutions and ideas. After the Great War our public began to be told of all sorts of nations being emancipated. It had never been told a word about their being enslaved. We were called upon to judge of the justice of the settlements, when we had never been allowed to hear of the very existence of the quarrels. . . . Things that are as old as Europe are regarded as more recent than the very latest claims pegged out on the prairies of America.

Literacy, then, by no means gives immunity to a past made up out of whole cloth, as with the Trojan origin of both the French and the British, or, for some, to the lies of brazen fabricators. Milosz relates:

> We are surrounded today by fictions about the past, contrary to common sense and to an elementary perception of good and evil. As the *Los Angeles Times* recently stated, the number of books in various languages which deny that the Holocaust ever took place, and claim that it was invented by Jewish propaganda, has exceeded one hundred. If such an insanity is possible, is a complete loss of memory as a permanent state of mind improbable? And would it not present a danger more grave than genetic engineering or poisoning the natural environment?

Poets, then, are barometers, diagnosticians more aware of the human condition in their anticipations than either physicians or historians; they are prophets of a promethean sort. Milosz speaks of a relative, Oscar Milosz, who treated him as a son, teaching him much. Oscar Milosz, a Polish poet who lived in Paris, and wrote in French, tried "to address a warning to a crazy world rushing toward a catastrophe."

> That a catastrophe was imminent I heard from him, but I also heard from him that the great conflagration he predicted would be merely a part of a larger drama to be played out to the end.
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> He saw deeper causes in an erroneous direction taken by science in the eighteenth century, a direction which provoked landslide effects. Not unlike William Blake before him, he announced a New Age, a second Renaissance of imagination now polluted by a certain type of scientific knowledge, but, as he believed, not by all scientific knowledge, least of all by the science that would be discovered by men of the future.

So it was that Prometheus saw far in advance the reconciliation of his quarrel with Zeus. The Titan knew how it would come about, but the Olympian ruler could not understand the subtleties of peace-making and would not therefore be told. He had to wait for the ages to exhaust the evil he had done, and purge the earth of its uncommon crimes. Our century draws to its close, with all its

disaster gathering for some final paroxysm, yet Milosz sees beyond the horizons to currents of faith, signs of hope.

> A profound transformation of which we are hardly aware, because we are a part of it, has been taking place, coming to the surface from time to time in phenomena that provoke general astonishment. That transformation has to do, and I use here the words of Oscar Milosz, with "the deepest secret of toiling masses, more than ever alive, vibrant and tormented." Their secret, an unavowed need of true values, finds no language to express itself, and here not only the mass media but also intellectuals bear a heavy responsibility.
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> But transformation has been going on, defying short-term predictions, and it is probable that in spite of all horrors and perils, our time will be judged as a necessary travail before mankind ascends to a new awareness.

We turn now to another man, one with the inclinations of a poet—or who listens to them—Freeman Dyson, the English physicist. During the war Dyson planned many British bombing expeditions over Germany. Kenneth Brower quoted his recollections in *The Starship and the Canoe:*

> The defenses made it impossible to bomb accurately. Burning down cities was all we could do, so we did that. Even in killing the civilian population, we were inefficient. The Germans had killed one person for every ton of bombs that they dropped on England. To kill a German, we dropped three tons. I felt my responsibility deeply, being in possession of all this information that was concealed from the British public. Many times I decided I owed it to the public to run out into the streets and tell them what stupidities were being committed in their name. But I never had the moral courage to do it. I sat in my office until the end, calculating how to murder another hundred thousand people most economically.
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> After the war ended, I read reports of the trials of men who had been high up in the Eichmann organization. They had sat in their offices writing memoranda and calculating how to murder people efficiently, just like me. The main difference was that they were sent to jail or hanged as war criminals and I went free.

In the summer of 1945, after the defeat of the Germans, Dyson was ordered to go to Okinawa to direct the American bombing of Japanese cities.

> I found this new slaughter of defenseless Japanese even more sickening than the slaughter of well-defended Germans. Still I did not quit. By that time, I had been at war so long that I could hardly remember peace. No living poet had words to describe that emptiness of soul which allowed me to go on killing without hatred and without remorse. But Shakespeare understood it, and he gave Macbeth the words:
>
> *I am in blood*
> *Stepped in so far, that, should I wade no more,*
> *Returning were as tedious as go o'er.*
>
> I was sitting home eating a quiet breakfast with my mother when the morning paper arrived with the news of Hiroshima. I understood at once what it meant. "Thank God for that," I said. I knew that Tiger Force would not fly, and I would never have to kill anybody again.

Yet he would never be able to shut the subject of killing or mistreating people out of his mind. In the *New Yorker* for February 6 Freeman Dyson began a four-part series of "Reflections" concerned with Weapons and Hope. Why are we able to kill so many—or see that they are killed—with such equanimity? His anecdotal answer grows into a psychological law:

> When I was seven years old, I was reprimanded by my mother for an act of collective brutality in which I had been involved at school. A group of seven-year-olds had been teasing and tormenting a six-year-old. "It is always so," my mother said. "You do things together that not one of you would think of doing alone." That is a piece of my education which I have never forgotten. Wherever one looks in the world of human organization, collective responsibility brings a lowering of moral standards. The military establishment is an extreme example—an organization that seems to have been designed expressly to make it possible for people to do together what nobody in his right mind would do alone.

In this first installment in the *New Yorker* Dyson gives several pages to an argument that results in agreement with Tolstoy in *Way and Peace:* "that war is in its nature incalculable and unpredictable and uncontrollable." When it comes

to nuclear war, the question, Can it be survived? is absolutely unanswerable. Dyson draws a conclusion:

> Since the believers in survival and the believers in nonsurvival have failed for thirty-five years to convince each other, I propose to break the deadlock by dogmatically adopting a third position. My dogma is that the question of survival is undecidable. There is no way short of actually fighting a nuclear war to find out whether anything worth preserving would survive it. This dogma of undecidability is consistent with all the available evidence. And it may help the world to escape from the doctrinal rigidities that have frustrated its efforts to negotiate nuclear disarmament. The dogma of undecidability is not just an abstract proposition. It has immediate practical consequences. It implies two fundamental rules of conduct for the nuclear age. It says that since survival may be possible it makes sense to try to save lives. It says that since survival is impossible it makes no sense to count the lives saved.

This approach gets rid of the notion of "affordable" fatalities. It says that while you may try to calculate about the unthinkable, you can't reach any answers worth repeating, although you may use them for propaganda. It is much better to throw them away. Percentages have no meaning in such an issue. Dyson says:

> In a world where one cannot count the lives saved, there is no reason to distrust the naive human instinct that tells one it is better to aim weapons at things than at people.
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> The rule that it is meaningless to count the lives saved has other consequences. It applies to the enemy's lives as well as to our own. Both applications of the rule are important. Applied to the enemy's lives, the rule says that it is absurd for Americans to react with paranoid anxiety to reports that the Soviet government is building bomb shelters and planning the evacuation of cities in an attempt to protect some fraction of the Soviet population. The Soviet government is acting reasonably in doing whatever it can to save the lives of Soviet citizens, but neither the Soviet government nor ours has any reason to feel confident of the effectiveness of such efforts.

Can either the Americans or the Soviets learn to think in this most logical way? The likelihood seems small, yet we may be thankful that *someone* is able to do it. Our difficulty is this:

> Americans have grown up in a cultural milieu that leads them to expect practical questions to have answers. They tend to believe numerical predictions and calculations. A conspicuous example of this tendency is the American style of strategic analysis, both in the military establishment and in the academic arms control community. Even in congressional-committee hearings, which are supposed to be intelligible to laymen, discussions of strategic issues are generally conducted in quantitative terms, with frequent reference to calculations of kill-probabilities, cost-effectiveness ratios, and survival rates. With this background, it is difficult for American policy-makers to grasp the central fact about nuclear war: that survival cannot be calculated. They want a calculable answer to every question.

No wonder that, at the end, Freeman Dyson has recourse to poetry. He says:

> Perhaps the best answer to the question of active defense and all the other ethical questions of nuclear policy is to be found not in the professional literature of twentieth-century strategists but in an Indian poem written two thousand years ago, the *Bhagavad-Gita:*
>
> "You have the right to work, but for the work's sake only. You have no right to the fruits of work. Desire for the fruits of work must never be your motive in working."
>
> This was the answer of the god Krishna to the warrior Arjuna when he asked whether it was right to engage in war. The same answer can be given to the modern warrior who asks whether it is right to try to defend a country against nuclear weapons. You have the right to defend, but you have no right to count the fruits of defense. You have the right to try to save lives, but you have no right to count the lives saved. This answer is not easy for Americans to digest. We are accustomed to making Indians think like Americans. It is more difficult to persuade Americans to think like Indians.

REVIEW
GEORGE PERKINS MARSH

UNTIL publication of *The World of George Perkins Marsh* (Countryman Press, Woodstock, Vermont, 1982, $9.95) it has been difficult to obtain information about the life of this pioneer ecologist, except for the sketch provided by Stewart Udall in *The Quiet Crisis* (1963). Born in the village of Woodstock in 1801, Marsh combined the qualities of a nature lover and a scholar. A great oak, he said, had a better claim to respectability than many humans he knew. The authors of *The World of George Perkins Marsh*—Jane and Will Curtis and Frank Lieberman—say: "Formal education hardly counted in Marsh's life. His immense erudition was due to his own life-long search for knowledge."

He learned Greek and Latin and mathematics at Dartmouth, and by the time he graduated he was fluent in French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. He instructed his astronomy professor in "needed hints" for the only science course the college offered. By the time he was thirty he knew twenty languages—an attainment that was of great value for his life work, published in 1864—*Man and Nature*, the first serious study in modern times of the effect of human behavior on the planet.

This book, in its second edition—*The Earth as Modified by Human Action* (Scribner, 1874)—has been in what became the MANAS library for nearly fifty years, a much used source of material. The object of the author, as stated in his preface, is "to indicate the character and, approximately, the extent of the changes produced by human action in the physical conditions of the globe we inhabit; to point out the dangers of imprudence and the necessity of caution in all operations which, on a large scale, interfere with the spontaneous arrangements of the organic or the inorganic world; to suggest the possibility and the importance of the restoration of disturbed harmonies and the material improvement of wasted and exhausted regions; and, incidentally, to illustrate the doctrine that man is, in both kind and degree, a power of a higher order than any of the other forms of animated life, which, like him, are nourished at the table of spontaneous nature." If this is read, not as food for egoism, but as an indication of human responsibility, no one should take offense. That indeed was Marsh's purpose.

The book has more than 650 pages plus an extensive bibliography, with notes extending comment on almost every page. The subjects are forests', seas and streams, sands and dunes, with a long chapter on major projects such as the cutting of isthmuses and canals, and the diversion of rivers. Fortunately, not all of man's activities have been destructive. For example, the ancient Egyptian engineers who regulated the flow of the Nile in behalf of agriculture brought into cultivation "not less than 11,000 square miles," according to research drawn upon by Marsh. Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch, and Pliny have described the embankments, reservoirs, and canals which gently diffused the swelling waters and their fertile sediment "over as wide a surface as possible," with provision for a second submersion of the land, if needed. Borings to great depths in the Nile valley have revealed the great antiquity of this practice. "The old Egyptian system of embankments and canals," Marsh wrote, "is probably more ancient than the geological changes which have converted the Mississippi from a limpid to a turbid stream, and occasioned the formation of a vast delta at the mouth of that river." Using only gravity flow, the Egyptians put into cultivation land equal in size to the area expected to benefit by the Aswan High Dam built by the Soviets for Egypt, but with so many ill effects. Ecologists have been for years making dread predictions, some of them already verified, as in the spread of the terrible disease, bilharxiasis, carried by snails which find harbor in the still waters behind the dam. Meanwhile, the slowing of the course of the Nile by the dam has held back sediment that once fed the fish off the mouths of the Nile, with serious loss to the fishing industry.

The sardine catch is much reduced and the delta shrimp have dwindled. Since the mud once carried by the river is now held back, the main source of free building material used (for making brick) by the peasants has been cut off, so that Egypt must build plants to make concrete blocks which, incidentally, few peasants can afford. Quite evidently, the "organic" methods of irrigation used by the old Egyptians were far better for both land and people, and probably produced sufficient food for all.

Marsh presents fascinating tidbits of information concerning the cultivation of marginal lands—actually much less than marginal—telling about the Moselle wine "derived from grapes grown on earth carried high up the cliffs on the shoulders of men." He also says that "the steep terraced slopes of the Island of Teneriffe are covered with soil painfully scooped out from fissures in and between rocks which have been laid bare by the destruction of the native forests." He adds: "Schliemann asserts that the quantity of dust brought by the scirocco from Africa is so great that by cutting in the naked rocks of Malta enough of Libyan transported earth can be caught and retained, in the course of fourteen years, to form a soil fit for cultivation."

The World of George Perkins Marsh tells how Marsh acquired the background (in addition to his knowledge of languages) to compile this extraordinary volume. His personal career, however, was filled with disappointments. Trained as a lawyer, he had some success in this profession, but he cared nothing for courtroom drama and gave much of his time to geographic studies. He failed more than once in business, had an invalid wife and a sickly son, and did not come into his own until, in later life, after serving some terms in Congress, he was appointed U.S. ambassador to Turkey, and then sent to Italy by Abraham Lincoln to serve American diplomacy there. The authors say:

> For 63 years he had been inwardly digesting what he had seen as a youth in Vermont, as well as on his travels in the Near East and in Europe. Since the age of five, when he had driven with his father about the Vermont hills, the significance of watersheds and their vegetation had been clear to him. Trees retained moisture and prevented soil from washing down the slopes. Careless deforestation led to erosion, flooding and drought. He read clearly the story of man's interference in the ruined hills of Greece and Turkey. It was time now that his acute perceptions, his vast stores of information should be brought together so that men could understand what they had done to the earth.

A measure of the lasting value and excellence of his book is given in the fact that on the centenary in 1964 of the appearance of *Man and Nature*, Harvard University Press reprinted the text of the first edition, including a paperback (now, unfortunately, out of print).

> It was a pioneer in its field. No one had ever pointed out the total effect of all the works of man. No one had ever before turned to the study of the earth as the home of mankind. Others had voiced concern about the silted rivers, deforested hills, but only Marsh saw the *total* interdependency of the environmental and social relationships. The 18th Century naturalists had considered man's action as beneficial, order and cultivation being wrested from chaos. Marsh knew better. But the prospect was not hopeless. With man's scientific knowledge and technological advances restoration was possible. Modern conservation is based on his theories.
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> The year that *Man and Nature* came out marked a change in national policy; Marsh's book doubtless crystallized opposition to the government's detrimental land proposals. Yosemite was ceded to California to be made a park, and in 1872, Yellowstone, the first national park, was established. By the end of the century the notion of dedicating wild lands to forestry and recreation was an established idea. . . .In Marsh's time, the devastation of the forests was the foremost evil. But the main theme of *Man and Nature* is not obscured by the omission of future evils; the principle remains constant: man must learn to control himself, to restore where he has destroyed, to replace where he has reaped. As Marsh grew older, he was less and less sure that this would be done.

In the chapter devoted to Marsh in *The Quiet Crisis*—the story of the struggle of thoughtful Americans to preserve the continent from the

depredations of industrial exploiters and the carelessness of too many citizens—Stewart Udall says:

> It was Marsh's omni-competence, his wholeness as a man, that made *Man and Nature* a bench mark. Within his mind there was an incessant dialogue between a naturalist, a humanist, a historian, a geographer, and a practical politician; it was this versatility which gave him dominion over a wide range of human knowledge. *Man and Nature* was at once an exciting introduction to the inchoate science of ecology, a veritable encyclopedia of land facts, and the major American contribution to geography in the nineteenth century. The book gained an international reputation, and ten years after its publication in America a European reviewer remarked that *Man and Nature* had "come with the force of a revelation."

The writers of *The World of George Perkins Marsh*—a book lavishly illustrated with photographs of the scenes of his life, at home and abroad—say on their first page:

> George Perkins Marsh was without doubt one of the most extraordinary of beings, a man of boundless enthusiasms and massive intelligence. In his long life he managed to write a definitive book on the origin of the English language, a Scandinavian grammar, and to form one of the first collections of art in America. He was also a bankrupt businessman, who at the age of 55 regarded himself as a failure. He headed the commission that designed the present Vermont State House in Montpelier. . . . He helped to found the Smithsonian Institution. The final design of the Washington Monument was his. . . . He was an expert instrument maker, a lawyer, a politician, a master of twenty languages, a Minister to Turkey and finally, the first American Minister to the newly formed Kingdom of Italy, a post he held for twenty-one years, a record unsurpassed by any other American diplomat. But of far greater importance, he was this country's first environmentalist.

The term "Ecology" was not invented until Ernst Haeckel thought of it in 1869. Marsh died in Italy in 1882. A fitting monument to his memory would be to put his great book back into print. (The address of the Countryman Press is P.O. Box 175, Woodstock, Vermont 05091. Ask for a catalog.)

COMMENTARY
ADVICE TO READERS

WE are happy to report that Horace Alexander's book on Gandhi (see page 5), *Gandhi Through Western Eyes*, out of print for years, is now available in a new edition by New Society Publishers (4722 Baltimore Ave., Philadelphia, Pa. 19143), $8.95 in paperback. For an American starting out to read about Gandhi, this is probably the best of all the biographies. Alexander, an English Quaker living in this country (now in his nineties), worked with Gandhi in India and knew him well (an appendix of this edition of the book prints a selection of Gandhi's letters to him, making the relationship evident). In his original Preface (1969) he said:

> It will be seen that there are many difficulties that beset the man who attempts to write the story of Gandhi's life. Which life is it to be? The Indian, the British, the American or some other? Of course, it must be an amalgam of all these. But the story of his life is inevitably the story of his political activity, for he spent his life in politics. Yet the essence of the man was not to be found in his political activity. The things that made him "Mahatma" were there all the time infusing his political activity no less than everything else he did. One might say that his every act had an aroma about it, which made him the prophetic human being he was. If you missed that quality, then you missed the true nature of the man altogether. It is hardly possible to bring that quality, that unique infusion, to life through the pages of a biography. So, If you read the book and leave off dissatisfied, as you should do, then go back to his writings, and see if the secret is revealed to you there.

This is valuable advice to all readers of lives of the great—advice which Mr. Alexander himself took. He says:

> In the past forty years I have read a good deal of "Gandhiana," coming from many different sources. In recent years especially, I have been amazed at the number of pure golden nuggets of penetrating human wisdom that these students of the human predicament continue to dig out of Gandhi's writings. Many have been collected together in Homer Jack's *The Gandhi Reader;* but there are many more to be found that are not included there.

Homer Jack's book was also reprinted this year, and for other books and pamphlets a handy source in this country is Greenleaf Books, Weare, New Hampshire 03281, which offers a long list for mail order at reasonable prices.

Mr. Alexander also gives good counsel on other reading. In his Preface to the new edition of his own book, he says:

> Anyone who is prepared to study Gandhi seriously should at least read his book, *Hind Swaraj*, to see how and why he rejects the very basis of modern western culture. I must confess that when I first read it, long after I had met Gandhi and read a great deal of his weekly writings in *Young India* and *Harijan*, I thought he would surely now reject some of the positions he there defends. But I was wrong. To his dying day, he accepted it all. And the western way of life seems to be leading the world to very strange and alarming conclusions. Perhaps the time is due for paying closer attention to the wisdom of Gandhi.

The quality in Gandhi that this writer chooses as most important is his fearlessness, which gave him clarity of mind above all. Fearlessness would indeed put an end to many international problems. And as Alexander concludes: "Not many of us will become Gandhis; but there is no reason why we should not learn from him."

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
GANDHIAN INSTRUCTTON

GOING through a book that had been mislaid for years—which then turned up on the shelf where it belonged!—*The New Student Left*, edited by Mitchell Cohen and Dennis Hale, published by Beacon in 1966—we came across an extract from the Port Huron Statement (mostly, it is said, by Tom Hayden) that seems as useful today as it was more than twenty years ago. For example:

> Unlike youth in other countries we are used to moral leadership being exercised and moral dimensions being clarified by our elders. . . . It has been said that our liberal and socialist predecessors were plagued by vision without program, while our own generation is plagued by program without vision. All around us there is astute grasp of method techniques—the committee, the *ad hoc* group, the lobbyist, the hard and soft sell, the make, the projected image—but if pressed critically, such expertise is incompetent to explain its implicit ideals. It is highly fashionable to identify oneself by old categories, or by naming a respected political figure, or by explaining "how we would vote" on various issues.
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> Theoretic chaos has replaced the idealistic thinking of old—and, unable to reconstitute theoretic order, men have condemned idealism itself. Doubt has replaced hopefulness, and men act out of a defeatism that is labelled realistic. The decline of utopia and hope is in fact one of the defining features of social life today. The reasons are various: The dreams of the older left were perverted by Stalinism and never recreated; the congressional stalemate makes men narrow their view of the possible; the specialization of human activity leaves little room for sweeping thought; the horrors of the twentieth century, symbolized in the gas ovens and concentration camps and atom bombs, have blasted hopefulness. To be idealistic is to be considered apocalyptic, deluded. To have no serious aspirations, on the contrary, is to be "tough-minded."

Seldom has the modern mind-set, in its several aspects, been more deftly characterized. Critical insight was not lacking among the youth of the sixties. Nor were they without vision. Turning to positive considerations, Hayden wrote:

> We are aware that to avoid platitudes we must analyze the concrete conditions of social order. But to direct such an analysis we must see the guideposts of basic principles. Our own social values involve conceptions of human beings human relationships, and social systems.
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> We regard *men* as infinitely precious and possessed of unfulfilled capacities for reason, freedom, and love. In affirming these principles we are aware of countering perhaps the dominant conceptions of man in the twentieth century: that he is a thing to be manipulated, and that he is inherently incapable of directing his own affairs. We oppose the depersonalization that reduces human beings to the status of things. If anything, the brutalities of the twentieth century teach that means and ends are intimately related, that vague appeals to "posterity" cannot justify the mutilation of the present. We oppose, too, the doctrine of human incompetence because it rests essentially on the modern fact that men have been "competently" manipulated into incompetence. We see little reason why men cannot meet with increasing skill the complexities and responsibilities of their situation, if society is organized not for minority participation but for majority participation in decision-making. . . .
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> The goal of man and society should be human independence: a concern not with image or popularity but with finding a meaning in life that is personally authentic; a quality of mind not compulsively driven by a sense of powerlessness, nor one which unthinkingly adopts status values, nor one which represses all threats to its habits, but one which has full, spontaneous access to present and past experiences, one which easily unites the fragmented parts of personal history, one which openly faces problems which are troubling and unresolved—one with an intuitive awareness of possibilities, an active sense of curiosity, an ability and willingness to learn. . . .
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> Loneliness and estrangement and isolation describe the vast distance between man and man today. These dominant tendencies cannot be overcome by better personnel management, nor by improved gadgets, but only when a love of man overcomes the idolatrous worship of things by man.

It seems especially worth noting that this is a statement by college students—or by one student in behalf of the convictions of himself and others. The expression has a depth that is seldom equalled by adults, and an insight into the complexities of human nature that no politician would be likely to give expression. The Port Huron declaration is something Americans should be proud of, whatever happened to the New Left. Conceivably, the New Left failed to have lasting impact on American life because, lacking in

positive philosophy, it fell back on Marxist-Leninism for structural content, and the sterility, for Americans, of the class struggle provided no basis for the "love of man" to overcome the worship of things. For Marx, as Louis Halle has shown, there was not one humanity but two—two species, the proletariat and the capitalists. Only endless conflict, with hatred at its core, can grow from this outlook, as the final chapter of the New Left (or rather a portion of it) in Weatherman attempts at terrorism revealed. But a serious account of the fortunes of the New Left would require consideration of numerous factors that only the participants were aware of, as the two or three books on the subject suggest.

There may seem to be few parallels between the situation of the American working man and the peasants of India, for whom Gandhi-strove, yet the way in which the Indian leader undertook his task should be of interest. He was no conventional politician. As Horace Alexander says in *Gandhi Through Western Eyes* (Asia Publishing House, 1969):

> Gandhi was constantly falling out with his colleagues of the Indian National Congress. For most of them, pure politics, which meant a displacement of the British by a national government, was at all times the most important consideration. It is true, no doubt, that Gandhi was just as impatient for the disappearance of the British as any of his colleagues. But his fundamental philosophy was different from theirs. To them, the question of Indian fitness for self-government did not arise. For Gandhi it did. Not, indeed, in the same sense as for the British who thought that a people must fit itself for self-government by trying doses of gradually increasing strength: let them first run municipal and local government well, then provincial government, with "safeguards," meaning no control for the time being over such essential services as defence and finance; finally, full responsibility for the central government would follow. Gandhi's political philosophy was different. To him, the essential evidence of fitness for self-government was shown by the capacity of the Indian people for self-discipline. And this could be shown in two main ways. Mass civil disobedience could show their ability to suffer without retaliation in resistance to the authority of the British Government. Beyond this, their ability could be tested, not by running government under British tutelage, but rather by undertaking large-scale economic reforms under their own leadership. To Gandhi, this latter activity, which he called "the constructive programme," was quite as vital an aspect of true ahimsa, or non-violent social life, as the non-violent resistance to the government. To many of his colleagues, it appeared to be nothing but a retreat from the political struggle.

Well, look around at the "good things happening" in the world today. Few of them can be traced to government action. Most of them have grown out of independent resolve to do what needs to be done no matter what government may decide. Is there nothing to be learned from this?

One more passage from Mr. Alexander, who worked side by side with Gandhi for some years, and in several relations:

> To Gandhi, the first need of the dumb masses was to overcome their vast poverty. He has often been quoted as saying that God comes to the starving man in the form of bread, and that many men were too poor to have any religion. . . . India produces her own cotton. Yet the very men who produced the cotton were often condemned to spend several months of each year in idleness. Why not spend this time in spinning and weaving their own clothes out of their own cotton? This at least would be the first step out of the pit of destruction. . . . Every day that he was in London at the time of the Round Table Conference [1931] on the future government of India, at almost every possible opportunity, he insisted that he represented the dumb, semi-starved millions of Indian villagers. . . . This emphasis needs to be made; for in a world that has an obsession with politics, it is a man's political career that receives all the attention.

Gandhi's involvement in politics was only to get rid of it as a distraction from the real tasks before the Indian people—and all human beings. Sending the British home would accomplish this, and the work of developing self-reliance, self-control, and responsibility could then begin in earnest. Gandhi had no other goal. No one in the world was as revolutionary as this. The "Lefts" both old and new, and of every description, could learn to understand their failures from Gandhi.

FRONTIERS

The Good of Life on Earth

FOR about two years we have been taking note here of the work of the Center of Science for Villages, begun at Wardha, India, in 1976, by Devendra Kumar, who edits *Science for Villages* (Megan Sangrahalaya, Wardha, Maharashtra, India). In the issue for December 1983-January 1984, there is a report on the origin and contributions of the Center. Wardha, where Gandhi conducted his rural technology experiments in the mid-thirties, "is almost the central point on the map of India and is a very poor district with hardly 6 per cent land under irrigation, but having a long history of experiments in rural development under the guidance of people who worked with Gandhi." Gandhi worked through a group called the "All-India Village Industries Association" founded in 1946.

The Center of Science for Villages began with planning:

> For two years (1976 and 1977), before the CSV could take up any project activities, it was felt necessary to collect information on the appropriate technologies from various parts of the country as well as outside. For this four areas were chosen, namely: (1) Rural Housing and Environment (2) Fuel and Energy; (3) Non-conventional New Industries; and (4) Rural Tools and Equipment.
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> It was understood from the beginning that the work of agriculture and other land-based activities should not form an important aspect of our activities since there are many other agencies already engaged in these fields in India and these do not directly benefit the landless poor who form about one quarter to one third of the village families. The CSV, therefore, specialized in non-land-based and non-conventional technologies which could specifically assist the rural poor.

An early project was publication of a pamphlet, *Techniques for the Rural Poor,* and in 1978 the Center sponsored an international seminar on "Techniques Appropriate for the Rural Poor of the Third World," held at Sevagram, in Wardha. The work of this gathering was inaugurated by Ivan Illich, who spoke from the cottage occupied by Gandhi in Sevagram. Then the magazine was started and a workshop stressed the need for having "voluntary agencies working in the villages which could act as links for the transfer of technology from laboratories to the villages."

Starting in 1979, the staff of CSV undertook five projects: the development of construction materials, construction techniques, the making of heavy pottery, a banana fiber and paper technology, energy production, and biogas. For construction materials the researchers found that boards from 10 to 12 mm thick could be made out of the pulp of plantain stems, a regional crop. The stems were dried and used to make pulp for various products. The pulping machine was a simplified version of the Hollandar Beater which could be cheaply constructed by the villagers. Bitumen was used to impregnate the boards, making them waterproof for use as roofing material. Thick varieties of paper were produced for covers and file folders as well as for furniture panelling furniture, doors, and for sound-proofing. Stronger boards were produced with a hot hydraulic press, resulting in a substitute for wood, of importance in saving timber.

Clay stoves which cost about a tenth of iron stoves are another development, with red clay gas burners. Presently they are working on a gobar gas plant constituted of a series of fired mud pots which act as digesters and collect the gas in polythene bags, making the fuel available at a much cheaper rate. The remaining slurry becomes the basis of a cowdung manure which is ready for use in a hundred days.

Among the pottery products are clay tile for both floors and walls; cooling utensils; a smokeless stove that is prefabricated in fired clay and assembled at the place of installation; various bricks for house building; a substitute for Portland cement using slaked lime and pozollanic materials.

An example of the Nubian arch pioneered in modern times by the Egyptian architect, Hassan Fathy, has been built at CSV, as a demonstration of home construction.

> One village—Karla, pop. 30—was chosen for an integrated development program. Smokeless ovens, soak pits, and fuel wood trees were introduced in this village. A community lavatory was connected with a gas plant, the gas being used to run an internal combustion engine which operated a flour mill, while the affluents were turned into an algal tank which produces Spirulina—a nourishing food for humans.

Workers in the Center have also researched techniques that would assist the women working in the fields, farms, cowsheds, collecting fuel and fodder, and in other ways. All this is documented and described in pamphlets for use by others. *Science for Villages* notes similar developments at other Indian centers of research and development.

In the issue under review the editor, Devendra Kumar, writes:

> Greed, avarice, aggrandizement and competition are not the right guides in formulation of policies regarding the use of scientific knowledge. The days of *laissez faire* are long gone. Things now cannot be allowed to run as per the whims and fancies of individual selfishness—be it of a man a group, or a nation. . . . The objective truths of science must be used by equally objective and dispassionate hands. The new age of the maturity of our scientific era can be possible only if the above trends are corrected, otherwise the very instruments of scientific knowledge—which have the great potentialities of a full flowing of the human spirit, to bring a heaven on earth—will lead to our annihilation.
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> The deadly missiles positioned by confronting powers, ready to explode a large part of the world to smithereens, are not the cause but the effect of the total misutilization of science and technology. This is an index of the end-result toward which science without morality or spirituality leads. The ship of human existence is heavily laden with destructive goods. . . . If we want atomic warheads to be dismantled and the "3.1 million dollars per minute" expenditure on arms stopped, the consumerist competitive trade and industry with profit as the only motive will have to be gradually dismantled and redesigned. . . .
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> The scientific life of man must therefore be such that the use of all the knowledge and power that has been learnt by his head and hand be directed by the good of life on earth, for not only today but also for the future.