

WHAT IS TO COME?

THE more one reads, the more evident it becomes that the modern world is preparing for change. That it will be a change for the better seems possible, yet there may be far-reaching catastrophes, some man-made, others obscure in origin, which are required to open the way for constructive change. Are there any prophets now available or accessible who are making reasonable predictions about the future? Well, there are probably dozens of them, but no one we can really rely on for what may be called vision. A man with real vision would almost certainly decide to keep still, or to make only quiet recommendations, if only to avoid the precipitation of hysteria, which would surely be the path to ruin.

The best counselors in the present are doubtless those who work unceasingly toward the restoration of individual moral responsibility. They see human beings in terms of the potential of hierarchical life which by reason of its self-consciousness is able to assume responsibility for the progress of the world. This possibility is obviously distant from realization, hence the need for preparatory catastrophe. But no other possibility save self-destruction exists. This means that the truths most relevant in the present are ethical in character. How, then, are ethical truths made convincing—persuasive and convincing?

In past ages the teachers of mankind—and the fact that there have been teachers calls for reflection—simply repeated, again and again, the idea of the moral responsibility of all humans. Thus the teachings of Gautama Buddha, the man who made all Asia mild, in the most widely known text, the *Dhammapada*, began with the "twin verses" which are unforgettable:

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: all that we are is founded on our thoughts and formed of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain pursues him, as the wheel of the wagon follows the hoof of the ox that draws it.

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: all that we are is founded on our thoughts

and formed of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness pursues him like his own shadow that never leaves him.

Twenty-five hundred years have passed since those words were uttered, and while the words may still ring true at an intuitive level, their meaning has grown obscure. What, for example, is a "pure thought"? We hardly know. Is it simply an "honest" thought? The world is now filled with ugly things, and is an honest account of them "pure"? What shall we say about the harsh realities of existence? Are our voracious hungers, arising spontaneously, "natural" and therefore to be described as true? Are our angers and resentments to be denied or embraced? Are the longings of the flesh to be ignored or welcomed and accepted? In what sense, if any, is the human a dual being?

What, indeed, should we understand by "Nature"? Is evil simply pain to be avoided, or has it a deeper explanation? The Buddha says:

The evil-doer suffers in this world and he grieves in the next; he mourns in both. Afflicted he grieves in the visualization of his evil deeds.

The righteous man is happy here, he is happy hereafter. "I have done well," he soliloquizes. Greater is his delight in the blissful place.

He who forsakes lust, hatred and folly is possessed of true knowledge and a serene mind, craves nought of this world or of any other, applies to himself the teachings of the Sacred texts he recites, even though a few in number—such a one shares in the blessings of the Good Life.

A thoughtful European, an Englishman, G. Lowes Dickinson, during his travels throughout the East, went to Borobudur in Java, where there is a low pyramid honoring the Buddha, with many statues of the Indian teacher. With one of them he held a conversation. As he tells it:

The stars came out, and I spoke of eternal law. He said, one law concerns you—that which binds you to the wheel of life." The moon rose, and I spoke of

beauty. He said, "There is one beauty—that of a *soul* redeemed from desire." Thereupon the West stirred in me, and cried "No!" "Desire," it said, "is the heart and essence of the world. It needs not and craves not extinction. It needs and craves perfection. Youth passes; strength passes; life passes. Yes! What of it? We have access to the youth, the strength, the life of the world. Man is born to sorrow. Yes! But he feels it as tragedy and redeems it. Not round life, not outside life, but through life is the way. Desire more and more intense, because more and more pure, not peace, but the plenitude of experience Your foundation was false. You thought man wanted rest. He does not. We at least do not, we of the West. We want more labor; we want more stress we want more passion. Pain we accept, for it stings us into life. Strife we accept, for it hardens us to strength. We believe in action; we believe in desire. And we believe that by them we shall attain."

So the West broke out in me; and I looked at him to see if he was moved. But the calm eye was untroubled, unruffled the majestic brow, unperplexed the sweet, solemn mouth. Secure in his Nirvana, he heard or he heard me not. He had attained the life-in-death he sought. But I, I had not attained the life in life. Unhelped by him, I must go my way. The East, perhaps, he had understood. He had not understood the West.

We should remember that this was written before the outbreak of the first world war, before the horrors and shame of the "peace" which followed it, before the intoxications which preceded 1929 and the struggling years of the 1930s. Then came the second World War and the sowing the dragon's teeth it produced out of its own kind of fertility, with smaller wars becoming the order of day after day, until the present. Would Dickinson have perhaps changed his mind, if he had lived through all these ordeals, and was then confronted by the nuclear horrors of the present? We can only say that he was a decent, sensitive man who abominated war and many of the things that make for war. That other men and women, feeling as he felt, have since become Gandhians.

It is worth recalling, here, some of the things said by Theodore Roszak in his review of E.F. Schumacher's *Guide for the Perplexed*, a really fine book when it is the author speaking, but less useful

in its plentiful quotations from Aristotle, Dante, and Thomas Aquinas. As Roszak put it:

It does no good at all to quote them at length, to celebrate their insight, to adulate their wisdom. Of course, they are wise and fine and noble, but they stand on the other side of the abyss. They have not, with Conrad's Mr. Kurtz, looked into the heart of darkness and seen "the horror." No, not even Dante, who traveled all the circles of hell, but always knowing that there was a way down and out and through.

Similarly, it is naïve to summon us to self-knowledge of our time without acknowledging that the deepest self-knowledge of our time begins in the experiencing of radical absurdity and cosmic abandonment. Self-knowledge for us must go through Nietzsche, Kafka, Sartre, Beckett, not around them. Where does serious philosophy begin with us?

It begins, he says, with the fact that "religious tradition has failed us."

It has withered in our grasp. At some point in the drama of the modern world, the vertical dimension failed to provide a sure purchase upon the need for personal autonomy and common decency that people have come to yearn for desperately.

This is a way of saying that the time has come for seeking a new place to begin. What we have learned from history, if we have learned anything, is that the place to begin is where we are. This is the fundamental message of the bioregionalists, who have already made their beginning. In a book on this subject (*Dwellers in the Land—The Bioregional Vision*, published by the Sierra Club in 1985), Kirkpatrick Sale makes these observations:

One rather interesting thing about the bioregional perspective is that through a close analysis of nature's patterns—in maps of physiographic provinces and natural vegetation and soil distribution and forest belts and climatic types and riverine systems and land-use variations and all the other natural features the experts have diligently charted—you begin to see something almost (appropriately enough) organic. For it turns out that bioregions are not only of different sizes but often can be seen to be like Chinese boxes, one within the other, forming a complex arrangement from the largest to the smallest, depending upon which natural characteristics are dominant.

Sale calls the largest bioregion an ecoregion, usually a huge area encompassing several hundred thousand square miles. The boundaries, he says, are likely to be indistinct, "but one can identify about forty such ecoregions across the North American continent."

The Ozark Plateau is a good example. It covers some 55,000 square miles clearly demarcated by the Missouri, Mississippi, and Arkansas rivers, uplifted in a dome some 2,000 feet about the surrounding terrain. Its natural forest of predominantly oak and hickory is distinguishable from the pine forests to the south and the tall-grass prairie to the west, and its calcareous and chert soils are distinct from the non-calcareous deposits to the east and the sandstones and shales to the south and west. Or take the Sonoran Desert that arid, scrub-brush area of perhaps 100,000 square miles that stretches from the southern foothills of the Sierra Nevada and the Mohave Desert down along the Gulf of California to the Sonora River and the northern edges of the Sinaloa forest. It is distinct in vegetation as the province of creosote bush, saguaro and cardon cacti, jojoba, ironwood, and white bursage; in native animal life as the territory of bighorn sheep, pronghorns, and Gambel's quail; in climate as a hot, dry land of double cycles of rain and drought each year.

A bioregion, according to Kirkpatrick Sale, is a *life region* "governed by nature, not legislature." Peter Berg, who has formed the Planet Drum in San Francisco, recently told a Los Angeles interviewer that "There are more than 100 bioregional groups and publications around the country." Ann Japenga wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* for Sept. 3 of last year:

So popular is bioregionalism in Northern California that Berg predicts that some Northern California sectors will eventually "go bioregional," dividing the area and electing officials according to bioregions, not counties.

In Berg's vision, someday departments of bioregions will replace state governments. Existing borders will be disregarded because they interfere with natural bioregions. The Great Lakes Bioregional Conference already ignores the U.S.-Canadian border, Berg said.

Defending the movement toward living in bioregions, Kirkpatrick Sale writes in *Dwellers in the Land*:

First, it has the virtue of *gradualism*. It suggests that the processes of change—first of organizing, educating, activating a constituency, and then of re-imagining, reshaping, and recreating a continent—are slow, steady, continuous, and methodical, not revolutionary and cataclysmic. . . .

One cannot imagine bioregionalism being installed by revolution, no matter whose revolution it is, if for no other reason than that revolutions almost never produce the *contrariety* but the *continuation* of what they have replaced—and how, really, could they ever do else—and a bioregional civilization would obviously have to be vastly different from the industrio-scientific one we now have. . . .

Because it is basic to the bioregional ideal of diversity that we take people as they are and insist on letting them behave in their diverse ways in their own separate habitats there is no need or desire to remold them all to some imaginative and impossible design. Bioregionalism does require a certain amount of shifting of attitudes and rethinking of premises . . . but nothing wrenching, really, nothing that has not been thought and felt before by all kinds of people, nothing more than the wisdom of our forebears and the experience of our predecessors

Yet acquiring the bioregional state of mind does require radical changes in our habitual ways of thinking. We must begin to think in terms of the welfare of the natural environment—in terms of the health of our surroundings as much as our own. We need to become managers of the general good—what other reason have we for learning the ways of nature? For some, this naturally begins in childhood, with the delight in natural things, with the joy in discovering a new flower in the underbrush of the woods, seeing a bird one has never seen before, feeling the breath of a strong breeze on a summer afternoon. Then, as we grow older and more experienced, we learn how the margins between the wild and human settlements become hosts to many forms of life, birds and insects as well as small mammals. Cities garnished with strips of green cease to be formidably ugly and grimy, festering with human ills, and people slowly recover the lost arts of gardening and the pleasures of subsistence agriculture. With restorations of this sort comes the natural revival of the crafts and the turning of households into places where things are made, for those who live there or for others.

In our colonial years and the early days of the United States, our country was once a place of this sort. As Arthur M. Schlesinger wrote in his essay on the first Americans—

Besides wrestling with the soil, every husbandman was a manufacturer and every home a factory, engaged in grinding grain, making soap and candles, preparing the family meat supply, tanning skins, fabricating nails, harness, hats, shoes and rugs, contriving tools, churns, casks, beds, chairs, tables. Occasionally he did some of these things for hire. . . . As cold weather closed in, the men used their spare time in getting out rough timber products, such as shingles and planks, or spent the long winter evenings before the open fireplace carving gunstocks or making brooms while the womenfolk knitted, spun or wove. . . .

Probably no legacy from our farmer forebears has entered more deeply into the national psychology. If an American had no purposeful work on hand, the fever in his blood impels him nevertheless to some form of visible activity. . . . A European visitor in the 1890s found more fact than fiction in a magazine caricature which pictured a foreigner as saying to his American hostess, "It's a defect in your country that you have no leisured classes." "But we have them," she replied, "only we call them tramps."

In his conclusion, Prof. Schlesinger quoted James Russell Lowell:

"Our ancestors sought a new country. What they found was a new condition of mind." The long tutelage to the soil acted as the chief formative influence, removing ancient inhibitions, freeing latent energies, revamping mental attitudes. The rise of the city confirmed or strengthened many of the earlier attributes while altering others. Probably none of the traits is peculiar to the American people; some of them we may regard with more humility than pride; but the sum total represents a way of life unlike that of any other nation. . . . The American character, whatever its shortcomings, abounds in courage, creative energy and resourcefulness and is bottomed upon the profound conviction that nothing in the world is beyond its power to accomplish:

So it is that the ecological vision is now before us as a foundation principle for our lives. It joins the ethical with the natural, awakening deeply hidden moral ideas which now have a pragmatic sanction. It has a pantheist inspiration along with the spirit of

fellowship in the natural association that goes with cooperation with nature—the community. And as Kirkpatrick Sale says:

What makes the bioregional effort different—in any foreseeable future, anyway—is that it asks nothing of the Federal government and needs no national legislation, no governmental regulation, no Presidential dispensation. What commends it especially to its age is that it does not need any Federal presence to promote it, only a Federal obliviousness to permit it. In that respect it is very much in tune with that basic American spirit once described by Thoreau:

"The government never of itself furthered any enterprise, but by the alacrity with which it got out of the way. It does not keep the country free. It does not settle the West. It does not educate. The character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished; and it would have done somewhat more, if the government had not sometimes got in its way."

Bioregional activity is already widespread. Sale writes in conclusion:

The bioregional library already established is impressive. Planet Drum has published a half-dozen books and pamphlets as well as bundles from the Rockies, the Northwest, the Hudson Valley, and elsewhere. Fourteen regional magazines are published with some regularity, ranging from *Rain* in Portland . . . *Tilth* in Seattle, and *Raise the Stakes* in San Francisco, all of which have been going on for more than a decade, to *Konza* in Kansas and the *Annals of Earth Stewardship* in Massachusetts, now in their second years. And there are probably several dozen books in issues that are more or less specifically bioregional, written by such adherents of the movement as Raymond Dasmann, Gary Snyder, Peter Berg, Murray Bookchin, Morris Berman, Jerry Mander, Gary Coates, Gary Nabhan, Jim Dodge, John and Nancy Todd, Michael Helm, and Donald Worster. (I am not talking about the literally hundreds of other books that speak directly to bioregional concerns by such people as Schumacher, Lovins, Roszak, Capra, Berry, Dubos, Mumford, Kohr, Illich, and Lappé.) All of which adds up to a considerable body of literature on the whats and whys of bioregionalism. . . .

This is plainly an idea whose time has come.

REVIEW

AN INNER EXPLORATION

WE have for review a book that has been kept alive since it was first published in 1937 (in England by Chatto & Windus) by the interest of its readers, mostly people interested in the mind and how it works. It is *An Experiment in Leisure* by Joanna Field, the pen name of Marion Milner, a psychologist, still alive and active in England. The present publisher is Jeremy Tarcher here in Los Angeles, the price is \$7.95.

We first came across this writer in an appreciative reference by A. H. Maslow to another of her books, *On Not Being Able to Paint*. Her study of *Leisure* has a compelling quality for the reader. You read on and on even though you're not sure what the author means, because you wonder where she will get to, but even then you're far from sure. Yet the trip, somehow, was worth making. In a perceptive foreword Gabriele Lusser Rico says:

Her experiment in leisure, most simply put, is an experiment in "letting go." Such letting go is a way to discover inner images, leading to meaningful patterns that come from within, rather than being imposed from without.

Letting go. Trust. Wonder. Curiosity. These are the necessities for allowing the inner ear to attune itself to clues of feeling. Without access to this open-ended mode of thought, it is difficult to counteract the "shoulds," "oughts," and "musts" of reason and of "trying harder," which all too often submerge this less-visible thinking process inherent in all of us.

Her first chapter is largely made up of material she set down in childhood and teen years, recording her fascination with birds, flowers, marshes, shooting stars, and plants. At seventeen she grew interested in the healing properties of herbs but never made use of them as remedies. Yet she had a garden full of them. The question was why—why these interests and not some others? A strange rock she photographed at twelve became a subject of reverie:

To part of my mind it was an interesting geological specimen, to the other stood now for the idea of hidden inner fires, powerful and unaccountable, upheaving and rending the surface. The first meaning had left me bored and depressed at the futility of what I was writing, the second had given me such deep satisfaction that I knew it

was one of those significant memories from childhood that my questing imagination had been groping after.

In her second chapter, on travel, she grows lyrical:

". . . driving through the night to avoid the Arizona sun—and knowing that away on our left was Meteor City, grown up, they said, to mine the wealth of a great meteorite that had fallen in Indian days. (We never saw it, but it remained more vividly in my mind than many of the cities we did pass through.)

". . . more long hot days of driving, thunder every afternoon, empty rivers of dry white sand, little whirlwinds that moved and those transparent pillars of sand, little whirlwinds that moved over the country ahead of us like Moses' pillar of cloud—or sometimes scudded giddily over the dead riverbeds like pale tubular ghosts.

". . . and then the Grand Canyon. I suppose it was too vast to be absorbed in one impression; I cannot believe I have looked giddily across that great gash in the earth, or walked down it at dawn and paddled in the gloomy Colorado river, the water so thick with swirling sand that they say if you fall in you would surely drown from the weight of sand in your clothes. My mind will not dare to remember, it is as if someone else were telling me about it. . . ."

Why was it that all these memories, which were marked with such a peculiar feeling of importance, should again be almost exclusively concerned with natural surroundings, not with people at all, except for Indians? If I had been asked what had interested me most in America, I would have spoken of the people I met and the many different aspects of social life. But when I asked myself, not my opinions, but my feelings, the answer seemed to be quite different.

What is Joanna Field doing in this book? She is taking into account not her reasoning processes but her impulses, her involuntary longings, the things she is drawn to. Doing this, she found, seemed to make her more sensible, more "reasonable." At the end of the book she said:

For to know where your impulses are taking you is surely useful, not only in the management of private life, but also in one's attitude to public affairs. We are continually reading of how democracy demands that all of us should think more clearly, reason more adequately, about public affairs. But also, it has in recent years been proved that the inborn reasoning capacity of the majority is not very high. I wondered whether the problem of the education of opinion toward public affairs might not be approached from a different angle; instead of trying to teach people to reason better, which is very likely beyond the inborn capacity of most of us, why not teach us to

understand our feelings better, to know what we really want, so that we would be less at the mercy of the unscrupulous exploiters who would like to rush us into what suits them? . . .

Certainly education might be less concerned with teaching children how to reproduce information and make a show of reasoning that has no basis in their own real experience, and more with teaching them how to know what they want, how to be alert to the changing seasons of inner need. But I did not think this alertness would come by simply turning them loose to "do as they like," without the guidance and protection of a tradition. For it seemed to me after this experiment, that knowing what you really want is an exceedingly delicate process: to bridge the gap between vague inner urgencies and the practical possibilities of the outer world requires the finest coordination and economy of mental power.

In a review of a book about Nazi Germany she found it said that "For the last two or three thousand years moralists and philosophers have told us that we ought to make efforts to overcome our passions and discount our prejudices," but that nationalists hold "an opposite opinion." She comments:

The phrase "the attempt to replace passion and prejudice by reason" struck me particularly. If that was what moralists and philosophers had been trying to do for the last two or three thousand years was it not perhaps time to ask why they had so little succeeded, and whether it might not be that they had been using the wrong method? Was it not possible that Freud was right, and that man's discovery of reason had, so to speak, gone to his head, with the result that many reformers assumed it should be possible to make everybody live by reason all the time, when actually the great majority of people can never live by reason, but only by habit and by faith? It was obvious that among even the professionally intelligent, they were only intelligent over a small range of problems, you could always find subjects in which they had none of the open-mindedness which reason demands. . . . Reason and passion were notoriously so utterly unlike—and yet people seemed to assume that the transition from one to the other, as a guiding force in living, could be accomplished in a single bound.

Her own conclusion was this:

Apparently it was as much a false extreme to try and live by reason alone, leaving the passions out of account, as to ignore reason and put passion in its place as the guiding force in life. For myself at least, I was sure that the way to pass safely between this Scylla and Charybdis was to listen to the voice of the blood and the bones, but not to make the mistake of taking it at its face value, not to take its images literally and assume that it

was talking about external truth when in fact it was talking about inner truth about the problem of the inner organization of desire and experience.

Apparently her experiment led Joanna Field to develop a great deal of common sense, learning first of all the importance of independence.

Just as I had often been aware of the tendency in myself to run away from the facts, moods of continually hankering after something different, so also I had been aware of the desire to find someone I could rely on; I had often found myself deeply resentful when I was forced to admit that someone I liked was not a paragon of all the virtues. . . . I seemed to be freed from the restless search for the ideal person, the perfect leader. . . . My conclusion was that there was a psychological necessity to pay deliberate homage to something, since if it is not deliberate it will be furtive, but none the less powerful and at the mercy of public exploiters of furtive emotion—the politicians, the atrocity-mongers, the popular press; and also the psychological necessity to find your own pantheon of vital images, a mythology of one's own, not the reach-me-down mass-produced mythology of Hollywood, of the newspapers, or the propaganda of dictators.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about this book is the way the author comes up with some kind of wisdom, no matter what subject she discusses. There is for example this passage in her conclusion:

Someone has said: "Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach." I might have added: "Those who can't write." Probably there are a great many people in the world who have already known what I have been laboriously discovering, people who simply live it in their daily lives, and do not need to write about it because they can do it. But even if it is true that the fact of writing about a certain activity implies that one is not very good at doing it, this does not free one from the need to write, it is not much good refusing crutches when you have broken your leg just because most people have two good feet to walk upon. . . . But just in so far as I refused to give up so I found experience becoming continually richer: experience, this thing which was always more than all that could be said about it—and yet in order to know it, you had to be continuously trying to say things about it.

And you, the reader, agree.

COMMENTARY

"MORE THAN A MACHINERY"

READING, recently, in an old book, *The Greek View of Life*, by G. Lowes Dickinson, published by Doubleday, Page in 1913, we came upon some passages which show the striking contrast between the ancient Greek conception of politics and the state and that of the present day. Writing on the "Greek View of the State," Dickinson says:

The present kingdom of Greece is among the smallest of European states; but to the Greeks it would have appeared too large to be a state at all. Within that little peninsula whose whole population and wealth are so insignificant according to modern ideas, were comprised in classical times not one but many flourishing polities. And the conception of an amalgamation of these under a single government was so foreign to the Greek idea, that even to Aristotle, the clearest and most comprehensive thinker of his age, it did not present itself even as a dream. To him, as to every ancient Greek, the state meant the City—meant, that is to say, an area about the size of an English county, with a population, perhaps, of some hundred thousand, self-governing and independent of any larger political whole.

A general idea of the political institution of the Greeks, Dickinson suggests, can be obtained only by thinking of counties, free from the control of a central government, free to make their own laws, manage their own finance and system of justice, raise troops and form offensive and defensive alliances, without interference by anyone. An ordinary man of today taken up by his trade or profession, whose chief relation with the state is simply the payments of taxes, would not have seemed to the Greeks a proper citizen at all.

For the state, to them, was more than a machinery, it was a spiritual bond; and "public life," as we call it, was not a thing to be taken up and laid aside at leisure, but a necessary and essential phase of the existence of a complete man. . . . Plato, in the construction of his ideal republic, is thinking much less of the happiness of the individual citizens, than of the symmetry and beauty of the whole. . . . Nothing escapes the net of legislation, from the production of children to the fashion of houses, clothes, and food. . . The best individual, in their view, was also the best

citizen; the two ideals not only were not incompatible, they were almost indistinguishable.

The State, then, became for the ancient Greeks a symbol for the entire community, and individual responsibility was not fulfilled save as it served the welfare of the State. Yet this brings what to us seems a radical moral contradiction. As Dickinson says, the class of laborers and traders were not citizens, and could not vote, and the slaves, who were the most numerous, had no rights at all. The citizen was an aristocrat, above the calling of production of his livelihood; they were men of leisure, free to devote all their time to the public good. Plato, however, held that the slave should be treated "with even greater fairness than if he were in a position of equality." As critics of slavery Dickinson quotes the poets who denied the theory of "natural slavery."

"No man," says the poet Philemon, "was ever born a slave by nature. Fortune only has put men in that

"No man," says the poet Philemon, "was ever born a slave by nature. Fortune only has put men in that position." And Euripides, the most modern of the Greeks, writes in the same strain: "One thing only disgraces a slave, and that is the name. In all other respects a slave, if he be good, is no worse than a freeman."

Yet the view of the Greek citizen was fundamentally aristocratic, which was no doubt a cause of the almost continual revolutions which beset ancient Greece. We have largely or often overlooked this aspect of ancient Greek life, probably because we find other aspects of the ways of the Greeks so admirable. Yet it should not be forgotten, since in no case does the modern state recognize the gulf that for the Greeks separated the freeman from the slave and the citizen from the non-citizen.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

THE WAY IT USED TO BE

THE book, *My Country School Diary*, by Julia Weber Gordon, was written in the 1930s and published by Delta in 1946. A later edition came out in 1970 with an introduction by John Holt. Julia Weber taught in a one-room schoolhouse in the New Jersey town of Stony Grove, located in a clearing in the woods. She was an experienced teacher when she came there and especially enjoyed the freedom it gave her.

Stony Grove was a good place to be in. I did not have to conform to anything I was in a state and a county whose educational program for years had taken children into account. It was a developing program in which I could have a share. When I began to teach at Stony Grove I was ready to learn and free to experiment to find out how a group of children and their teacher may reach a high level of creative and democratic living. If I have succeeded somewhat, it is because all the roads were open to me.

For many readers this book will stir innumerable nostalgic recollections. People who lived and were brought up in the country will begin to recover memories of the ingenious ways good teachers devised ways of teaching which are hardly possible in the modern urban classroom. They borrowed, discovered, invented, and made do. The children learned to cooperate—and collaborate. In Miss Weber's school, there were about thirty pupils in all, from five-year-olds to full adolescents. Following is an early entry in Miss Weber's diary:

Children learn to be responsible by assuming responsibilities. If they are to become intelligent citizens they must have practice in the responsibilities of citizenship. At the end of the day I talked to the children about organizing a service club. They had no idea what the activities of such a club were so I did most of the talking. I explained that they would share in the solution of problems which affected the whole group and that we would keep trying to make our school a better place to live in. We organized ourselves into a club and elected officers. . . . Names

were suggested for our club and we finally decided on the "Helpers' Club."

Miss Weber made up her own rules of procedure:

I like to go over the papers with the children as often as possible. It seems such a waste of time to correct papers after school, for children seldom look at them after they are corrected except to see what grade they received. Consequently, in order to focus attention on the correction of errors, I have stopped grading papers. Working closely with the children is efficient, and the valuable time after school can be spent in learning more about the children and the community, in meeting needs through clubwork, and in planning and evaluating the program of the school.

John Holt says in his Introduction:

We do not need enormous centralized schools in order to have quality education. This is the reverse of what we have been told and sold. All over the country we have destroyed small schools in which it might at least have been possible for teachers to do some of the things Miss Weber did. In their place we have built giant school-factories we run, for the most part, like armies and prisons because they seem too big to be run like anything else. The idea behind this was that in small schools we could not have, could not afford to have, the kinds of equipment, materials, and specialized teachers that we thought we had to have to get enough variety and depth in the children's learning. Miss Weber shows us that even in the late '30s this need not have been so. In less than a month she and her pupils were already able to make their tiny school in its impoverished rural community a more beautiful and richer learning environment, more full of interesting things to look at and work with and think about, than most current schoolrooms ever are. .

It is not in the book, but I remember Miss Weber telling me once that in one year her class of about thirty children borrowed *seven hundred books* from the county library. More than twenty books per pupil! Very few of our fancily equipped central schools get that kind of use out of their libraries; indeed, in many schools the library is so hedged about with rules and restrictions that students can hardly use it at all. . . . Children need to grow in and into a community of older people that they can at least in part see, think about, and understand. They learn and grow best when their school is part of such a community, when their community comes into the school, when their

learning touches at many points the lives, work, needs, and problems of people outside the school building. Where did Miss Weber learn this? Was she one of the few, the very few, who really understood what Dewey was writing and talking about? Or did she figure this out for herself, as she figured out many other important things? Anyway, she was able to get her children out into their community and to think about its history and life and work. And she was able to get the older people into the school, and to make them feel that it was a part of their life, not just a box where they left their children for a few hours every day.

Here are some other entries in Miss Weber's diary:

For the past three days we have used the social studies period to do research on travel in the pioneer days. It is a difficult task to help these children to extract the material they need in spite of all the time we took in the beginning of the year to learn how to get material from a book, the children want to copy whole pages. . . .

While the older children worked alone at their study of travel, I spent almost an hour with the little children. Their play house is completed now. They have made and painted wooden furniture. They have woven rugs and have made one hooked one. The girls have sewed curtains, bedding, and other household articles. We spent most of the time today finishing up the stories about their experiences in building the little house. These children have had much writing experience, which had helped them to improve in the various skills necessary for writing. All the older primary children are now writing original stories of appropriate length.

These children learned to be competent and to have self-confidence. Is anything more important? They learned how to teach themselves what they needed to know.

Here is an entry made in 1939:

Today I started out by asking if the children knew of what materials their clothing was made. We found clothing made of cotton, wool, silk, and rayon, but not of linen. The children carefully examined the pieces of material from the box and kept asking, "Is this linen?" Then came the first question, after the children had made several mistakes, "How can you tell?" I turned the question back to the group. Helen said, "It wrinkles easily." Others pointed out that all

the materials wrinkled. You couldn't tell that way. Albert said some cotton looked like linen and that made it hard to tell. Andrew said his brother could tell materials by feeling them. The children began to pick up pieces of materials to feel them. . . . Since the time was almost up, I suggested that they look at materials they have at home and talk with their parents about ways of telling them apart.

Then, a few days later the diary relates:

The children read about the textile machines which greatly reduced the cost of woolen goods, and about how they came to be invented. They studied about the spinning jenny, about the spinning machine of Arkwright, and about the weaving machine of Cartwright. As I moved around helping the children, one by one they began to ask questions. Why were all the inventions made in England? Why did people hate these inventions? Why was Arkwright called the "Father of the Industrial Age?" What were the factories like in those days? Why did women and children work in those early factories? Do these conditions exist today? We added all these to the question chart. . . .

"We read not long ago in *Current Events* that people of the South are fighting the cotton picker because it would put millions of people out of work," Thomas reminded us. They are being helped to understand the world in which they live!

After two weeks:

We left the study of textiles last week so that we could concentrate on preparing for the puppet show which we gave on Thursday night and last night and which we shall give tonight. . . .

FRONTIERS

The Meaning of Land

IN the *Land Stewardship Letter* for last summer Frances Moore Lappé proposes that what we call "Capitalism" as a theory of life as well as of economics cannot be the basis of sustainable agriculture. She asks:

What do I mean by capitalist? I mean an economy driven by an exchange of commodities—including farmland and labor—based on market prices. I mean an economy not just based on private property but one allowing unlimited individual accumulation of even the scarcest resources. I mean an economy in which labor and ownership are almost universally distinct. While we associate these rules with a democratic economy, they are, especially in agriculture, inadequate tools.

One reason for this inadequacy—there are others—is that agriculture deals with living things, plants, animals, and humans, whereas capitalism and the market provide rules for inanimate objects, commodities which are bought and sold. The rules of life are different from the rules for objects of trade. People are not "things." Farm animals are not tractors. Plants are living organisms in a world where interdependence is the ruling principle. Frances Lappé goes on:

Left to its own devices, the market leads to concentration of control. In agriculture, this reality has special significance. Because industry and trade (compared to farming) lend themselves more readily to concentration, farmers today find themselves squeezed among highly organized sectors, what economists call "oligopolistic" industries. On the one side are the manufacturers of farm supplies and equipment—from pesticides to combines—along with the banking industry. On the other are the trade and processing industries. In each, a handful of companies command the field.

Such oligopolies can better pass on their increased costs to customers, including farmers, thus assuring themselves profit. But farmers have to swallow increased costs—especially those farmers not big enough to skirt the market through bulk discount buying and other devices. And they have to take whatever price traders and processors offer. Farmers,

who remain competitive, cannot pass on their increased costs by hiking their prices.

Actually, prices are not a useful measure of the true economics of farming. Prices tell us nothing about the erosion of topsoil as the result of exploitive methods of farming. They give us no indication of the diminishing groundwater reserves. "In the market," Frances Lappé says, "what nature makes has no price," and therefore its gradual loss has no record in the market. What nature makes, we think, is "free." Nor do the prices of farm goods tell us anything about the well-being of farmers.

Commodity prices multiplied by volume do make up gross farm sales, but not what the farmers get to keep. Since 1940, adjusted for inflation, the gross income of the farming sector taken as a whole has doubled, largely because of vast increases in volume. At the same time *net* income from farming has fallen by 10 per cent.

Think about those figures for a moment. In other words, more than the equivalent of the entire increase in income to farmers since 1940 has gone *not to farmers* themselves but to manufacturers of farm supplies and to banks.

We need to remember, Frances Lappé says, that only five per cent of all farms get three-fourths of net farm income. Thus, "average return" tells us nothing about the well-being of most farmers. She goes on:

My point is simple: The market price simply cannot provide the information needed to protect the land and the people who farm it. It ignores vital information—the costs to the land, soil and human health—on which our ultimate survival depends. It is blind to other critical questions: whether gross returns from farm sales actually remain on the farm; and a parallel question within the farm sector: Which farmers—a few or the vast majority—enjoy the gains from greater volume or better prices?

Generally speaking, and in terms of present practice, the owners of farms are not farmers. These owners have conventional reasons for buying up farms, but not the reasons they should have—the reasons which animate real farmers.

Here Frances Lappé reaches her strongest and most important point:

Agriculture dependent upon hired labor belies the vision of sustainable agriculture. Sustainable agriculture is necessarily knowledge-intensive, depending upon *all* the faculties of the farmer. Since sustainable agriculture consists of a mix of crops along with livestock, farmers must understand the many subtle interrelations of their chosen mix in order to enrich the soil and minimize pest damage.

Thus sustainable agriculture depends upon a specific type of *relationship of the farmer to the land*. It must be enduring, for only over time can the necessary information be acquired. And the farmers must feel a personal stake in the welfare of the land, in order to call forth not just the physical exertion required, but the mental alertness needed to observe and record subtle changes and interactions over decades.

Such a relationship is incompatible with farm labor and with farm ownership as an investment.

The writer then gives the rules for sustainable agriculture:

Land is not an investment, returning income by virtue of inflation to an owner who does nothing. Land is a tool with which to earn a living by working it well.

Land, however, is not a tool exclusively; it has value in and of itself.

Because of its intrinsic worth and its value to unborn generations, a farmer seeks not maximum output from the land but to leave the land "more valuable at the end of his life than it was when he took hold of it," in Theodore Roosevelt's words.

Finally in a sustainable agriculture, land is not just a place to live—interchangeable with any urban site. It is a locus of enriched family life because, almost uniquely in today's world it offers the possibility of shared economic responsibilities within the family.

The plight of agriculture and of the farmer thus gives us reason to begin rethinking our basic attitude towards life, what we are here for on earth, and what are the natural obligations of human beings. The mythic meanings we sensed intuitively in ancient times are now being explained to us by multiplying disasters in the

natural world. Reflection may help us to find our way back to the primeval meaning of duty and to a feeling of having a role of some importance in the scheme of things. We may even learn the meaning of the heroic in human life, although that will probably take a lot longer time.