

1

SUMMERHILL SCHOOL



The Idea of Summerhill

This is a story of a modern school – Summerhill.

Summerhill was founded in the year 1921. The school is situated within the village of Leiston, in Suffolk, England, and is about one hundred miles from London.

Just a word about Summerhill pupils. Some children come to Summerhill at the age of five years, and others as late as fifteen. The children generally remain at the school until they are sixteen years old. We generally have about twenty-five boys and twenty girls.

The children are divided into three age groups: the youngest range from five to seven, the intermediates from eight to ten, and the oldest from eleven to fifteen.

Generally we have a fairly large sprinkling of children from foreign countries. At the present time (1960) we have five Scandinavians, one Hollander, one German and one American.

The children are housed by age groups with a housemother for each group. The intermediates sleep in a stone building, the seniors sleep in huts. Only one or two older pupils have rooms for themselves. The boys live two or three or four to a room, and so do the girls. The pupils do not have to stand room inspection and no one picks up after them. They are left free. No one tells them what to wear: they put on any kind of costume they want at any time.

Newspapers call it a Go-as-you-please School and imply that it is a gathering of wild primitives who know no law and have no manners.

It seems necessary, therefore, for me to write the story of Summerhill as honestly as I can. That I write with a bias is

natural; yet I shall try to show the demerits of Summerhill as well as its merits. Its merits will be the merits of healthy, free children whose lives are unspoiled by fear and hate.

Obviously, a school that makes active children sit at desks studying mostly useless subjects is a bad school. It is a good school only for those who believe in such a school, not for those uncreative citizens who want docile, uncreative children who will fit into a civilization whose standard of success is money.

Summerhill began as an experimental school. It is no longer such; it is now a demonstration school, for it demonstrates that freedom works.

When my first wife and I began the school, we had one main idea: to make the school fit the child – instead of making the child fit the school.

I had taught in ordinary schools for many years. I knew the other way well. I knew it was all wrong. It was wrong because it was based on an adult conception of what a child should be and of how a child should learn. The other way dated from the days when psychology was still an unknown science.

Well, we set out to make a school in which we should allow children freedom to be themselves. In order to do this, we had to renounce all discipline, all direction, all suggestion, all moral training, and all religious instruction. We have been called brave, but it did not require courage. All it required was what we had – a complete belief in the child as a good, not an evil, being. For almost forty years, this belief in the goodness of the child has never wavered; it rather has become a final faith.

My view is that a child is innately wise and realistic. If left to himself without adult suggestion of any kind, he will develop as far as he is capable of developing. Logically, Summerhill is a place in which people who have the innate ability and wish to be scholars will be scholars; while those who are only fit to sweep the streets will sweep the streets. But we have not produced a street cleaner so far. Nor do I write this snobbishly, for I would

4 Summerhill School

rather see a school produce a happy street cleaner than a neurotic scholar.

What is Summerhill like? Well, for one thing, lessons are optional. Children can go to them or stay away from them – for years if they want to. There is a timetable – but only for the teachers.

The children have classes usually according to their age, but sometimes according to their interests. We have no new methods of teaching, because we do not consider that teaching in itself matters very much. Whether a school has or has not a special method for teaching long division is of no significance, for long division is of no importance except to those who want to learn it. And the child who wants to learn long division will learn it no matter how it is taught.

Children who come to Summerhill as kindergarteners attend lessons from the beginning of their stay; but pupils from other schools vow that they will never attend any beastly lessons again at any time. They play and cycle and get in people's way, but they fight shy of lessons. This sometimes goes on for months. The recovery time is proportionate to the hatred their last school gave them. Our record case was a girl from a convent. She loafed for three years. The average period of recovery from lesson aversion is three months.

Strangers to this idea of freedom will be wondering what sort of madhouse it is where children play all day if they want to. Many an adult says, "If I had been sent to a school like that, I'd never have done a thing." Others say, "Such children will feel themselves heavily handicapped when they have to compete against children who have been made to learn."

I think of Jack who left us at the age of seventeen to go into an engineering factory. One day, the managing director sent for him.

"You are the lad from Summerhill," he said. "I'm curious to know how such an education appears to you now that you are mixing with lads from the old schools. Suppose you had to choose again,

would you go to Eton or Summerhill?"

"Oh, Summerhill of course," replied Jack.

"But what does it offer that the other schools don't offer?"

Jack scratched his head. "I dunno," he said slowly, "I think it gives you a feeling of complete self-confidence."

"Yes," said the manager dryly. "I noticed it when you came into the room."

"Lord," laughed Jack, "I'm sorry if I gave you that impression."

"I liked it," said the director. "Most men when I call them into the office fidget about and look uncomfortable. You came in as my equal. By the way, what department did you say you would like to transfer to?"

This story shows that learning in itself is not as important as personality and character. Jack failed in his university exams because he hated book learning. But his lack of knowledge about Lamb's essays or the French language did not handicap him in life. He is now a successful engineer.

All the same, there is a lot of learning in Summerhill. Perhaps a group of our twelve-year-olds could not compete with a class of equal age in handwriting or spelling or fractions. But in an examination requiring originality, our lot would beat the others hollow.

We have no class examinations in the school, but sometimes I set an exam for fun. The following questions appeared in one such paper:

Where are the following: Madrid, Thursday Island, yesterday, love, democracy, hate, my pocket screwdriver [alas, there was no helpful answer to that one].

Give meanings for the following: (the number shows how many are expected of each) hand (3) [Only two got the third right – the standard of measure for a horse], *brass (4), metal, cheek, top army officers, department of an orchestra.*

6 Summerhill School

Translate Hamlet's to-be-or-not-to-be speech into Summerhillese.

These questions are obviously not intended to be serious, and the children enjoy them thoroughly. Newcomers, on the whole, do not rise to the answering standard of pupils who have become accustomed to the school. Not that they have less brain power, but rather because they have become so accustomed to work in a serious groove that any light touch puzzles them.

This is the play side of our teaching. In all classes much work is done. If, for some reason, a teacher cannot take his class on the appointed day, there is usually much disappointment for the pupils.

David, aged nine, had to be isolated for whooping cough. He cried bitterly. "I'll miss Roger's lesson in geography," he protested. David had been in the school practically from birth, and he had definite and final ideas about the necessity of having his lessons given to him. David is now a lecturer in mathematics at London University.

A few years ago someone at a General School Meeting (at which all school rules are voted by the entire school, each pupil and each staff member having one vote) proposed that a certain culprit should be punished by being banished from lessons for a week. The other children protested on the ground that the punishment was too severe.

My staff and I have a hearty hatred of all examinations. To us the university exams are anathema. But we cannot refuse to teach children the required subjects. Obviously, as long as the exams are in existence, they are our masters. Hence, the Summerhill staff is always qualified to teach to the set standard.

Not that many children want to take these exams; only those going to the university do so. And such children do not seem to find it especially hard to tackle these exams. They generally begin to work for them seriously at the age of fourteen, and they do the work in about three years. Of course they don't always pass at the first try. The more important fact is that they try again.

Summerhill is possibly the happiest school in the world. We have no truants and seldom a case of homesickness. We very rarely have fights – quarrels of course, but seldom have I seen a stand-up fight like the ones we used to have as boys. I seldom hear a child cry; because children when free have much less hate to express than children who are downtrodden. Hate breeds hate, and love breeds love. Love means approving of children, and that is essential in any school. You can't be on the side of children if you punish them and storm at them. Summerhill is a school in which the child knows that he is approved of.

Mind you, we are not above and beyond human foibles. I spent weeks planting potatoes one spring, and when I found eight plants pulled up in June, I made a big fuss. Yet there was a difference between my fuss and that of an authoritarian. My fuss was about potatoes, but the fuss an authoritarian would have made would have dragged in the question of morality – right and wrong. I did not say that it was wrong to steal my spuds; I did not make it a matter of good and evil – I made it a matter of my spuds. They were my spuds and they should have been left alone. I hope I am making the distinction clear.

Let me put it another way. To the children, I am no authority to be feared. I am their equal, and the row I kick up about my spuds has no more significance to them than the row a boy may kick up about his punctured bicycle tyre. It is quite safe to have a row with a child when you are equals.

Now some will say: "That's all bunk. There can't be equality. Neill is the boss; he is bigger and wiser." That is indeed true. I am the boss, and if the house caught fire the children would run to me. They know that I am bigger and more knowledgeable, but that does not matter when I meet them on their own ground, the potato patch, so to speak.

When Billy, aged five, told me to get out of his birthday party because I hadn't been invited, I went at once without hesitation – just as Billy gets out of my room when I don't want his company. It is not easy to describe this relationship between teacher and

8 Summerhill School

child, but every visitor to Summerhill knows what I mean when I say that the relationship is ideal. One sees it in the attitude to the staff in general. Rudd, the chemistry man, is Derek. Other members of the staff are known as Harry, and Ulla, and Pam. I am Neill, and the cook is Esther.

In Summerhill, everyone has equal rights. No one is allowed to walk on my grand piano, and I am not allowed to borrow a boy's cycle without his permission. At a General School Meeting, the vote of a child of six counts for as much as my vote does.

But, says the knowing one, in practice of course the voices of the grown-ups count. Doesn't the child of six wait to see how you vote before he raises his hand? I wish he sometimes would, for too many of my proposals are beaten. Free children are not easily influenced; the absence of fear accounts for this phenomenon. Indeed, the absence of fear is the finest thing that can happen to a child.

Our children do not fear our staff. One of the school rules is that after ten o'clock at night there shall be quietness on the upper corridor. One night, about eleven, a pillow fight was going on, and I left my desk, where I was writing, to protest against the row. As I got upstairs, there was a scurrying of feet and the corridor was empty and quiet. Suddenly I heard a disappointed voice say, "Humph, its only Neill," and the fun began again at once. When I explained that I was trying to write a book downstairs, they showed concern and at once agreed to chuck the noise. Their scurrying came from the suspicion that their bedtime officer (one of their own age) was on their track.

I emphasise the importance of this absence of fear of adults. A child of nine will come and tell me he has broken a window with a ball. He tells me, because he isn't afraid of arousing wrath or moral indignation. He may have to pay for the window, but he doesn't have to fear being lectured or being punished.

There was a time some years back when the school government resigned, and no one would stand for election. I seized the opportunity of putting up a notice: "In the absence of a

government, I herewith declare myself Dictator. Heil Neill!" Soon there were mutterings. In the afternoon Vivien, aged six, came to me and said, "Neill, I've broken a window in the gym."

I waved him away. "Don't bother me with little things like that," I said, and he went. A little later he came back and said he had broken two windows. By this time I was curious, and asked him what the great idea was.

"I don't like dictators!" he said, "and I don't like going without my grub." (I discovered later that the opposition to dictatorship had tried to take itself out on the cook, who promptly shut up the kitchen and went home.)

"Well," I asked, "What are you going to do about it?"

"Break more windows," he said doggedly.

"Carry on," I said, and he carried on.

When he returned, he announced that he had broken seventeen windows. "But mind," he said earnestly, "I'm going to pay for them."

"How?"

"Out of my pocket money. How long will it take me?"

I did a rapid calculation. "About ten years," I said.

He looked glum for a minute; then I saw his face light up. "Gee," he cried, "I don't have to pay for them at all."

"But what about the private property rule?" I asked. "The windows are my private property."

"I know that but there isn't any private property rule now. There isn't any government, and the government makes the rules."

It may have been my expression that made him add, "But all the same I'll pay for them."

But he didn't have to pay for them. Lecturing in London shortly afterward, I told the story; and at the end of my talk, a young man came up and handed me a pound note "to pay for the young devil's windows". Two years later, Vivien was still telling people

of his windows and of the man who paid for them. "He must have been a terrible fool, because he never even saw me."

Children make contact with strangers more easily when fear is unknown to them. English reserve is, at bottom, really fear, and that is why the most reserved are those who have the most wealth. The fact that Summerhill children are so exceptionally friendly to visitors and strangers is a source of pride to my staff and me. We must confess, however, that many of our visitors are people of interest to the children. The kind of visitor most unwelcome to them is the teacher, especially the earnest teacher, who wants to see their drawing and written work. The most welcome visitor is the one who has good tales to tell – of adventure and travel or, best of all, of aviation. A boxer or a good tennis player is surrounded at once, but visitors who spout theory are left severely alone.

The most frequent remark that visitors make is that they cannot tell who is staff and who is pupil. It is true: the feeling of unity is that strong when children are approved of. There is no deference to a teacher as a teacher. Staff and pupils have the same food and have to obey the same community laws. The children would resent any special privileges given to the staff.

When I used to give the staff a talk on psychology every week, there was a muttering that it wasn't fair. I changed the plan and made the talks open to everyone over twelve. Every Tuesday night, my room is filled with eager youngsters who not only listen but also give their opinions freely. Among the subjects the children have asked me to talk about have been these: The Inferiority Complex, The Psychology of Stealing, The Psychology of the Gangster, The Psychology of Humour, Why Did Man Become a Moralist?, Masturbation, Crowd Psychology. It is obvious that such children will go out into life with a broad clear knowledge of themselves and others.

The most frequent question asked by Summerhill visitors is, "Won't the child turn round and blame the school for not making him learn arithmetic or music?" The answer is that young Freddy

Beethoven and young Tommy Einstein will refuse to be kept away from their respective spheres.

The function of the child is to live his own life – not the life that his anxious parents think he should live, nor a life according to the purpose of the educator who thinks he knows what is best. All this interference and guidance on the part of adults only produces a generation of robots.

You cannot *make* children learn music or anything else without to some degree converting them into will-less adults. You fashion them into accepters of the *status quo* – a good thing for a society that needs obedient sitters at dreary desks, standers in shops, mechanical catchers of the 8:30 suburban train; a society, in short, that is carried on the shabby shoulders of the scared little man, the scared-to-death conformist.

A Look at Summerhill

Let me describe a typical day in Summerhill. Breakfast is from 8:15 to 9. The staff and pupils carry their breakfast from the kitchen across to the dining room. Beds are supposed to be made by 9:30, when lessons begin.

At the beginning of each term, a timetable is posted. Thus, Derek in the laboratory may have Class I on Monday, Class II on Tuesday, and so on. I have a similar timetable for English and mathematics, Maurice for geography and history. The younger children (aged seven to nine) usually stay with their own teacher most of the morning, but they also go to the Science or the Art Room.

No pupil is compelled to attend lessons. But if Jimmy comes to English on Monday and does not make an appearance again until Friday of the following week, the others quite rightly object that he is holding back the work, and they may throw him out for impeding progress.

Lessons go on until one, but the kindergarteners and juniors lunch

12 Summerhill School

at 11:30. The school has to be fed in two relays. The staff and seniors sit down to lunch at 1:30.

Afternoons are completely free for everyone. What they all do in the afternoon I do not know. I garden, and seldom see youngsters about. I see the juniors playing gangsters. Some of the minors busy themselves with motors and radios and drawing and painting. In good weather, seniors play games. Some tinker about in the workshop, mending their bicycles or making boats or revolvers.

Tea is served at four. At five, various activities begin. The juniors like to be read to. The middle group likes work in the Art Room – painting, linoleum cuts, leather work, basket making. There is usually a busy group in the pottery; in fact, the pottery seems to be a favourite haunt morning and evening. The oldest group works from five onward. The wood and metal workshop is full every night.

On Monday nights, the pupils go to the local movie at their parents' expense. When the programme changes on Thursday, those who have the money go again.

On Tuesday night, the staff and seniors hear my talk on psychology. At the same time the juniors have various reading groups. Wednesday night is dance night. Dance records are selected from a great pile. The children are all good dancers, and some visitors say that they feel inferior dancing with them. On Thursday night, there's nothing special on. The seniors go to the cinema in Leiston or Aldeburgh. Friday is left for any special event, such as rehearsing for a play.

Saturday night is our most important one, for it is General School Meeting night. Dancing usually follows. During the winter months, Sunday is theatre evening.

There is no timetable for handiwork. There are no set lessons in woodworking. Children make what they want to. And what they want to make is nearly always a toy revolver or gun or boat or kite. They are not much interested in elaborate joints of the

dovetail variety; even the older boys do not care for difficult carpentry. Not many of them take an interest in my own hobby – hammered brass work – because you can't attach much of a fantasy to a brass bowl.

On a good day you may not see the boy gangsters of Summerhill. They are in far corners intent on their deeds of derring-do. But you will see the girls. They are in or near the house, and never far away from the grown-ups.

You will often find the Art Room full of girls painting and making bright things with fabrics. In the main, however, I think that the small boys are more creative; at least I never hear a boy say he is bored because he doesn't know what to do, whereas I sometimes hear girls say that.

Possibly I find the boys more creative than the girls because the school may be better equipped for boys than for girls. Girls of ten and over have little use for a workshop with iron and wood. They have no desire to tinker with engines, nor are they attracted by electricity or radio. They have their artwork, which includes pottery, cutting linoleum blocks and painting and sewing work, but for some that is not enough. Boys are just as keen on cooking as girls are. The girls and boys write and produce their own plays, make their own costumes and scenery. Generally, the acting talent of the pupils is of a high standard, because the acting is sincere and not show-offish.

The girls seem to frequent the chemical lab just as often as the boys do. The workshop is about the only place that does not attract girls from nine up.

The girls take a less active part in school meetings than the boys do, and I have no ready explanation for this fact.

Up to a few years ago, girls were apt to come late to Summerhill; we had lots of failures from convents and girls' schools. I never consider such a child a true example of a free education. These girls who came late were usually children of parents who had no appreciation of freedom, for if they had had, their girls would not

have been problems. Then when the girl was cured here in Summerhill of her special failing, she was whisked off by her parents to "a nice school where she will be educated". But in recent years we have been getting girls from homes that believe in Summerhill. A fine bunch they are, too, full of spirit and originality and initiative.

We have lost girls occasionally because of financial reasons; sometimes when their brothers were kept on at expensive private schools. The old tradition of making the son the important one in the family dies hard. We have lost both girls and boys through the possessive jealousy of the parents, who feared that the children might transfer to the school their loyalty toward home.

Summerhill has always had a bit of a struggle to keep going. Few parents have the patience and faith to send their children to a school in which the youngsters can play as an alternative to learning. Parents tremble to think that at twenty-one their son may not be capable of earning a living.

Today, Summerhill pupils are mostly children whose parents want them brought up without restrictive discipline. This is a most happy circumstance, for in the old days I would have the son of a die-hard who sent his lad to me in desperation. Such parents had no interest at all in freedom for children, and secretly they must have considered us a crowd of lunatic cranks. It was very difficult to explain things to those die-hards.

I recall the military gentleman who thought of enrolling his nine-year-old son as a pupil.

"The place seems all right," he said, "but I have one fear. My boy may learn to masturbate here."

I asked him why he feared this. "It will do him so much harm," he said. "It didn't do you or me much harm, did it?" I said pleasantly. He went off rather hurriedly with his son.

Then there was the rich mother who, after asking me questions for an hour, turned to her husband and said, "I can't decide whether to send Marjorie here or not."

"Don't bother," I said. "I have decided for you. I'm not taking her."

I had to explain to her what I meant. "You don't really believe in freedom," I said. "If Marjorie came here, I should waste half my life explaining to you what it was all about, and in the end you wouldn't be convinced. The result would be disastrous for Marjorie, for she would be perpetually faced with the awful doubt: Which is right, home or school?"

The ideal parents are those who come down and say, "Summerhill is the place for our kids; no other school will do."

When we opened the school, the difficulties were especially grave. We could only take children from the upper and middle classes because we had to make ends meet. We had no rich man behind us. In the early days of the school, a benefactor, who insisted on anonymity, helped us through one or two bad times; and later one of the parents made generous gifts – a new kitchen, a radio, a new wing on our cottage, a new workshop. He was the ideal benefactor, for he set no conditions and asked for nothing in return. "Summerhill gave my Jimmy the education I wanted for him," he said simply, for James Shand was a true believer in freedom for children.

But we have never been able to take the children of the very poor. That is a pity, for we have had to confine our study to only the children of the middle class. And sometimes it is difficult to see child nature when it is hidden behind too much money and expensive clothes. When a girl knows that on her twenty-first birthday she will come into a substantial amount of money, it is not easy to study child nature in her. Luckily, however, most of the present and past pupils of Summerhill have not been spoilt by wealth; all of them know that they must earn a living when they leave school.

In Summerhill, we have chambermaids from the town who work for us all day but who sleep at their own homes. They are young girls who work hard and well. In a free atmosphere where they

are not bossed, they work harder and better than maids do who are under authority. They are excellent girls in every way. I have always felt ashamed of the fact that these girls have to work hard because they were born poor, whereas I have had spoilt girls from well-to-do homes who had not the energy to make their own beds. But I must confess that I myself hated to make my bed. My lame excuse that I had so much else to do did not impress the children. They jeered at my defence that you can't expect a general to pick up rubbish.

I have suggested more than once that the adults in Summerhill are no paragons of virtue. We are human like everyone else, and our human frailties often come into conflict with our theories. In the average home, if a child breaks a plate, father or mother makes a fuss – the plate becoming more important than the child. In Summerhill, if a maid or a child drops a pile of plates I say nothing and my wife says nothing. Accidents are accidents. But if a child borrows a book and leaves it out in the rain, my wife gets angry because books mean much to her. In such a case, I am personally indifferent, for books have little value for me. On the other hand, my wife seems vaguely surprised when I make a fuss about a ruined chisel. I value tools but tools mean little to her.

In Summerhill, our life is one of giving all the time. Visitors wear us out more than the children do for they also want us to give. It may be more blessed to give than to receive, but it certainly is more exhausting.

Our Saturday night General Meetings, alas, show the conflict between children and adults. That is natural, for to have a community of mixed ages and for everyone to sacrifice all to the young children would be to completely spoil these children. The adults make complaints if a gang of seniors keeps them awake by laughing and talking after all have gone to bed. Harry complains that he spent an hour planning a panel for the front door, went to lunch, and came back to find that Billy had converted it into a shelf. I make accusations against the boys

who borrowed my soldering outfit and didn't return it. My wife makes a fuss because three small children came after supper and said they were hungry and got bread and jam, and the pieces of bread were found lying in the hallway the next morning. Peter reports sadly that a gang threw his precious clay at each other in the pottery room. So it goes on, the fight between the adult point of view and the juvenile lack of awareness. But the fight never degenerates into personalities; there is no feeling of bitterness against the individual. This conflict keeps Summerhill very much alive. There is always something happening, and there isn't a dull day in the whole year.

Luckily, the staff is not too possessive, though I admit it hurts me when I have bought a special tin of paint at three pounds a gallon and then find that a girl has taken the precious stuff to paint an old bedstead. I am possessive about my car and my typewriter and my workshop tools, but I have no feeling of possession about people. If you are possessive about people, you ought not to be a schoolmaster.

The wear and tear of materials in Summerhill is a natural process. It could be obviated only by the introduction of fear. The wear and tear of psychic forces cannot be obviated in any way, for children ask and must be given. Fifty times a day my sitting room door opens and a child asks a question: "Is this movie night?" "Why don't I get a P.L. [Private Lesson]?" "Have you seen Pam?" "Where's Ena?" It is all in a day's work, and I do not feel any strain at the time, though we have no real private life, partly because the house is not a good one for a school – not good from the adult's point of view, for the children are always on top of us. But by the end of the term, my wife and I are thoroughly fatigued.

One noteworthy fact is that members of the staff seldom lose their tempers. That says as much for the children as for the staff. Really, they are delightful children to live with, and the occasions for losing one's temper are very few. If a child is free to approve of himself, he will not usually be hateful. He will not

see any fun in trying to make an adult lose his temper.

We had one woman teacher who was oversensitive to criticism, and the girls teased her. They could not tease any other member of the staff, because no other member would react. You can only tease people who have dignity.

Do Summerhill children exhibit the usual aggression of ordinary children? Well, every child has to have some aggression in order to force his way through life. The exaggerated aggression we see in unfree children is an over-protest against hate that has been shown toward them. At Summerhill where no child feels he is hated by adults, aggression is not so necessary. The aggressive children we have are invariably those whose homes give them no love and understanding.

When I was a boy at a village school, bloody noses were at least a weekly phenomenon. Aggression of the fighting type is hate, and youngsters full of hate need to fight. When children are in an atmosphere in which hate is eliminated, they do not show hate.

I think that the Freudian emphasis on aggression is due to the study of homes and schools as they are. You cannot study canine psychology by observing the retriever on a chain. Nor can you dogmatically theorise about human psychology when humanity is on a very strong chain – one fashioned by generations of life-haters. I find that in the freedom of Summerhill aggression does not appear in anything like the same strength in which it appears in strict schools.

At Summerhill, however, freedom does not mean the abrogation of common sense. We take every precaution for the safety of the pupils. The children may bathe only when there is a life-saver present for every six children; no child under eleven may cycle on the street alone. These rules come from the children themselves, voted in a General School Meeting.

But there is no law about climbing trees. Climbing trees is a part of life's education, and to prohibit all dangerous undertakings

would make a child a coward. We prohibit climbing on roofs, and we prohibit air guns and other weapons that might wound. I am always anxious when a craze for wooden swords begins. I insist that the points be covered with rubber or cloth, but even then I am always glad when the craze is over. It is not easy to draw the line between realistic carefulness and anxiety.

I have never had favourites in the school. Of course I have always liked some children better than others, but I have managed to keep from revealing it. Possibly the success of Summerhill has been in part because the children feel that they are all treated alike and treated with respect. I fear the existence in any school of a sentimental attitude toward the pupils; it is so easy to make your geese swans, to see a Picasso in a child who can splash colour about.

In most schools where I have taught, the staff room was a little hell of intrigue, hate, and jealousy. Our staff room is a happy place. The spites so often seen elsewhere are absent. Under freedom, adults acquire the same happiness and good will that the pupils acquire. Sometimes, a new member of our staff will react to freedom very much as children react: he may go unshaved, stay abed too long of mornings, even break school laws. Luckily, the living out of complexes takes a much shorter time for adults than it does for children.

On alternate Sunday nights, I tell the younger children a story about their own adventures. I have done it for years. I have taken them to Darkest Africa, under the sea, and over the clouds. Some time ago, I made myself die. Summerhill was taken over by a strict man called Muggins. He made lessons compulsory. If you even said *Dash*, you got caned. I pictured how they all meekly obeyed his orders.

Those three- to eight-year-olds got furious with me. "We didn't. We all ran away. We killed him with a hammer. Think we would stand a man like that?"

In the end, I found I could satisfy them only by coming to life

again and kicking Mr. Muggins to the front door. These were mostly small children who had never known a strict school, and their reaction of fury was spontaneous and natural. A world in which the schoolmaster was not on their side was an appalling one for them to think of – not only because of their experience of Summerhill but also because of their experience at home where Mommy and Daddy were also on their side.

An American visitor, a professor of psychology, criticised our school on the grounds that it is an island, that it is not fitting into a community, and that it is not part of a larger social unit. My answer is this: If I were to found a school in a small town, attempting to make it a part of the community, what would happen? Out of a hundred parents, what percentage would approve of free choice in attending lessons? How many would approve of a child's right to masturbate? From the word go, I should have to compromise with what I believe to be truth.

Summerhill is an island. It has to be an island, because its parents live in towns miles apart, in countries overseas. Since it is impossible to collect all the parents together in the town of Leiston, Suffolk, Summerhill cannot be a part of Leiston's cultural and economic and social life.

I hasten to add that the school is not an island to Leiston town. We have many contacts with local people, and the relationship on both sides is a friendly one. Yet fundamentally, we are not a part of the community. I would never think of asking the editor of the local newspaper to publish success stories about my old pupils.

We play games with the town children, but our educational aims are far apart. Not having any religious affiliation, we have no connection with religious bodies in the town. If Summerhill were part of the town community centre, it would be obliged to give religious teaching to its pupils.

I have the distinct feeling that my American friend did not realise what his criticism meant. I take it that it meant: Neill is only a rebel against society; his system can do nothing to weld society

Summerhill Education vs. Standard Education 21

into a harmonious unit; it cannot bridge the gulf between child psychology and the social ignorance of child psychology, between life and anti-life, school and home. My answer is that I am not an active proselytizer of society: I can only convince society that it is necessary for it to rid itself of its hate and its punishment and its mysticism. Although I write and say what I think of society, if I tried to reform society by action, society would kill me as a public danger.

If, for example, I tried to form a society in which adolescents would be free to have their own natural love life, I should be ruined if not imprisoned as an immoral seducer of youth. Hating compromise as I do, I have to compromise here, realising that my primary job is not the reformation of society, but the bringing of happiness to some few children.

Summerhill Education vs. Standard Education

I hold that the aim of life is to find happiness, which means to find interest. Education should be a preparation for life. Our culture has not been very successful. Our education, politics and economics lead to war. Our medicines have not done away with disease. Our religion has not abolished usury and robbery. Our boasted humanitarianism still allows public opinion to approve of the barbaric sport of hunting. The advances of the age are advances in mechanism – in radio and television, in electronics, in jet planes. New world wars threaten, for the world's social conscience is still primitive.

If we feel like questioning today, we can pose a few awkward questions. Why does man seem to have many more diseases than animals have? Why does man hate and kill in war when animals do not? Why does cancer increase? Why are there so many suicides? So many insane sex crimes? Why the hate that is anti-Semitism? Why Negro hating and lynching? Why back-biting and spite? Why is sex obscene and a leering joke? Why is being a bastard a social disgrace? Why the continuance of religions that have long ago lost their love and hope and charity?

Why, a thousand whys about our vaunted state of civilised eminence!

I ask these questions because I am by profession a teacher, one who deals with the young. I ask these questions because those so often asked by teachers are the unimportant ones, the ones about school subjects. I ask what earthly good can come out of discussions about French or ancient history or what not when these subjects don't matter a jot compared to the larger question of life's natural fulfilment – of man's inner happiness.

How much of our education is real doing, real self-expression? Handiwork is too often the making of a pin tray under the eye of an expert. Even the Montessori system, well-known as a system of directed play, is an artificial way of making the child learn by doing. It has nothing creative about it.

In the home, the child is always being taught. In almost every home, there is always at least one un-grown-up grown-up who rushes to show Tommy how his new engine works. There is always someone to lift the baby up on a chair when baby wants to examine something on the wall. Every time we show Tommy how his engine works, we are stealing from that child the joy of life – the joy of discovery – the joy of overcoming an obstacle. Worse! We make that child come to believe that he is inferior, and must depend on help.

Parents are slow in realising how unimportant the learning side of school is. Children, like adults, learn what they want to learn. All prize-giving and marks and exams sidetrack proper personality development. Only pedants claim that learning from books is education.

Books are the least important apparatus in a school. All that any child needs is the three Rs; the rest should be tools and clay and sports and theatre and paint and freedom.

Most of the schoolwork that adolescents do is simply a waste of time, of energy, of patience. It robs youth of its right to play and play and play; it puts old heads on young shoulders.

When I lecture to students at teacher training colleges and universities, I am often shocked at the un-grown-upness of these lads and lasses stuffed with useless knowledge. They know a lot; they shine in dialectics; they can quote the classics but in their outlook on life many of them are infants. For they have been taught to know, but have not been allowed to feel. These students are friendly, pleasant, eager, but something is lacking – the emotional factor, the power to subordinate thinking to feeling. I talk to these of a world they have missed and go on missing. Their textbooks do not deal with human character, or with love, or with freedom, or with self-determination. And so the system goes on, aiming only at standards of book learning – goes on separating the head from the heart.

It is time that we were challenging the school's notion of work. It is taken for granted that every child should learn mathematics, history, geography, some science, a little art, and certainly literature. It is time we realised that the average young child is not much interested in any of these subjects.

I prove this with every new pupil. When told that the school is free, every new pupil cries, "Hurrah! You won't catch me doing dull arithmetic and things!"

I am not decrying learning. But learning should come after play. And learning should not be deliberately seasoned with play to make it palatable.

Learning is important – but not to everyone. Nijinsky could not pass his school exam in St. Petersburg, and he could not enter the State Ballet without passing those exams. He simply could not learn school subjects – his mind was elsewhere. They faked an exam for him, giving him the answers with the papers – so a biography says. What a loss to the world if Nijinsky had had to really pass those exams!

Creators learn what they want to learn in order to have the tools that their originality and genius demand. We do not know how much creation is killed in the classroom with its emphasis on learning.

I have seen a girl weep nightly over her geometry. Her mother wanted her to go to the university, but the girl's whole soul was artistic. I was delighted when I heard that she had failed her college entrance exams for the seventh time. Possibly, the mother would now allow her to go on the stage as she longed to do.

Some time ago, I met a girl of fourteen in Copenhagen who had spent three years in Summerhill and had spoken perfect English here. "I suppose you are at the top of your class in English," I said.

She grimaced ruefully. "No, I'm at the bottom of my class because I don't know English grammar," she said. I think that disclosure is about the best commentary on what adults consider education.

Indifferent scholars who, under discipline, scrape through college or university and become unimaginative teachers, mediocre doctors and incompetent lawyers would possibly be good mechanics or excellent bricklayers or first-rate policemen.

We have found that the boy who cannot or will not learn to read until he is, say, fifteen is always a boy with a mechanical bent who later on becomes a good engineer or electrician. I should not dare dogmatise about girls who never go to lessons, especially to mathematics and physics. Often such girls spend much time with needlework, and some, later on in life, take up dressmaking and designing. It is an absurd curriculum that makes a prospective dressmaker study quadratic equations or Boyle's Law.

Caldwell Cook wrote a book called *The Play Way*, in which he told how he taught English by means of play. It was a fascinating book, full of good things, yet I think it was only a new way of bolstering the theory that learning is of the utmost importance. Cook held that learning was so important that the pill should be sugared with play. This notion that unless a child is learning something he is wasting his time is nothing less than a curse – a curse that blinds thousands of teachers and most school inspectors. Fifty years ago the watchword was "Learn through doing". Today the watchword is "Learn through playing". Play is

thus used only as a means to an end, but to what good end I do not really know.

If a teacher sees children playing with mud, and he thereupon improves the shining moment by holding forth about riverbank erosion, what end has he in view? What child cares about river erosion? Many so-called educators believe that it does not matter what a child learns as long as he is taught something. And, of course, with schools as they are – just mass-production factories – what can a teacher do but teach something and come to believe that teaching in itself matters most of all?

When I lecture to a group of teachers, I commence by saying that I am not going to speak about school subjects or discipline or classes. For an hour my audience listens in rapt silence, and after the sincere applause, the chairman announces that I am ready to answer questions. At least three-quarters of the questions deal with subjects and teaching.

I do not tell this in any superior way. I tell it sadly to show how the classroom walls and the prisonlike buildings narrow the teacher's outlook, and prevent him from seeing the true essentials of education. His work deals with the part of a child that is above the neck; and perforce, the emotional vital part of the child is foreign territory to him.

I wish I could see a bigger movement of rebellion among our younger teachers. Higher education and university degrees do not make a scrap of difference in confronting the evils of society. A learned neurotic is not any different from an unlearned neurotic.

In all countries, capitalist, socialist, or communist, elaborate schools are built to educate the young. But all the wonderful labs and workshops do nothing to help John or Peter or Ivan surmount the emotional damage and the social evils bred by the pressure on him from his parents, his schoolteachers, and the pressure of the coercive quality of our civilization.

What Happens to Summerhill Graduates

A parent's fear of the future affords a poor prognosis for the health of his children. This fear, oddly enough, shows itself in the desire that his children should learn more than he has learned. This kind of parent is not content to leave Willie to learn to read when he wants to, but nervously fears that Willie will be a failure in life unless he is pushed. Such parents cannot wait for the child to go at his own rate. They ask, if my son cannot read at twelve, what chance has he of success in life? If he cannot pass college entrance exams at eighteen, what is there for him but an unskilled job? But I have learned to wait and watch a child make little or no progress. I never doubt that in the end, if not molested or damaged, he will succeed in life.

Of course, the philistine can say, "Humph, so you call a truck driver a success in life!" My own criterion of success is *the ability to work joyfully and to live positively*. Under that definition most pupils in Summerhill turn out to be successes in life.

Tom came to Summerhill at the age of five. He left at seventeen, without having in all those years gone to a single lesson. He spent much time in the workshop making things. His father and mother trembled with apprehension about his future. He never showed any desire to learn to read. But one night when he was nine, I found him in bed reading *David Copperfield*.

"Hullo," I said, "who taught you to read?"

"I taught myself."

Some years later, he came to me to ask, "How do you add a half and two-fifths?" and I told him. I asked if he wanted to know any more. "No thanks," he said.

Later on, he got work in a film studio as a camera boy. When he was learning his job, I happened to meet his boss at a dinner

party, and I asked how Tom was doing.

"The best boy we ever had," the employer said. "He never walks – he runs. And at weekends, he is a damned nuisance, for on Saturdays and Sundays he won't stay away from the studio."

There was Jack, a boy who could not learn to read. No one could teach Jack. Even when he asked for a reading lesson, there was some hidden obstruction that kept him from distinguishing between b and p, l and k. He left school at seventeen without the ability to read.

Today, Jack is an expert toolmaker. He loves to talk about metalwork. He can read now; but so far as I know, he mainly reads articles about mechanical things and sometimes he reads works on psychology. I do not think he has ever read a novel, yet he speaks perfectly grammatical English, and his general knowledge is remarkable. An American visitor, knowing nothing of his story, said to me, "What a clever lad Jack is!"

Diane was a pleasant girl who went to lessons without much interest. Her mind was not academic. For a long time, I wondered what she would do. When she left at sixteen, any inspector of schools would have pronounced her a poorly educated girl. Today, Diane is demonstrating a new kind of cookery in London. She is highly skilled at her work, and more important, she is happy in it.

One firm demanded that its employees should have at least passed the standard college entrance exams. I wrote to the head of the firm concerning Robert, "This lad did not pass any exams, for he hasn't got an academic head. But he has got guts." Robert got the job.

Winifred, aged thirteen, a new pupil, told me that she hated all subjects, and shouted with joy when I told her she was free to do exactly as she liked. "You don't even have to come to school if you don't want to," I said.

She set herself to have a good time, and she had one – for a few weeks. Then I noticed that she was bored.

"Teach me something," she said to me one day, "I'm bored stiff."

"Righto!" I said cheerfully, "What do you want to learn?"

"I don't know," she said. "And I don't either," said I, and I left her.

Months passed. Then she came to me again. "I am going to pass the college entrance exams," she said, "and I want lessons from you."

Every morning she worked with me and other teachers and she worked well. She confided that the subjects did not interest her much, but the aim did interest her. Winifred found herself by being allowed to be herself.

It is interesting to know that free children take to mathematics. They find joy in geography and in history. Free children cull from the offered subjects only those which interest them. Free children spend most time at other interests – woodwork, metalwork, painting, reading fiction, acting, playing out fantasies, playing jazz records.

Tom, aged eight, was continually opening my door and asking, "By the way, what'll I do now!" No one would tell him what to do.

Six months later, if you wanted to find Tom you went to his room. There you always found him in a sea of paper sheets. He spent hours making maps. One day a professor from the University of Vienna visited Summerhill. He ran across Tom and asked him many questions. Later the professor came to me and said, "I tried to examine that boy on geography, and he talked of places I never heard of."

But I must also mention the failures. Barbel, Swedish, fifteen, was with us for about a year. During all that time, she found no work that interested her. She had come to Summerhill too late. For ten years of her life, teachers had been making up her mind for her. When she came to Summerhill, she had already lost all initiative. She was bored. Fortunately, she was rich and had the promise of a lady's life.

I had two Yugoslavian sisters, eleven and fourteen. The school

failed to interest them. They spent most of their time making rude remarks about me in Croatian. An unkind friend used to translate these for me. Success would have been miraculous in this case, for the only common speech we had was art and music. I was very glad when their mother came for them.

Over the years we have found that Summerhill boys who are going in for engineering do not bother to take the matriculation exams. They go straight to practical training centres. They have a tendency to see the world before they settle down to university work. One went around the world as a ship's steward. Two boys took up coffee farming in Kenya. One boy went to Australia and one even went to remote British Guiana.

Derrick Boyd is typical of the adventurous spirit that a free education encourages. He came to Summerhill at the age of eight and left after passing his university exams at eighteen. He wanted to be a doctor, but his father could not afford to send him to the university at the time. Derrick thought he would fill in the waiting time by seeing the world. He went to the London docks and spent two days trying to get a job – any job – even as a stoker. He was told that too many real sailors were unemployed, and he went home sadly.

Soon a schoolmate told him of an English lady in Spain who wanted a chauffeur. Derrick seized the chance, went to Spain, built the lady a house or enlarged her existing house, drove her all over Europe, and then went to the university. The lady decided to help him with his university fees. After two years, the lady asked him to take a year off to drive her to Kenya and build her a house there. Derrick finished his medical studies in Capetown.

Larry, who came to us about the age of twelve, passed university exams at sixteen and went out to Tahiti to grow fruit. Finding this a poorly paid occupation, he took to driving a taxi. Later he went to New Zealand, where I understand he did all sorts of jobs, including driving another taxi. He then entered Brisbane University. Some time ago, I had a visit from the dean of that university, who gave an admiring account of Larry's doings.

"When we had vacation and the students went home," he said, "Larry went out to work as a labourer at a saw mill." He is now a practising physician in Essex, England.

Some old boys, it is true, have not shown enterprise. For obvious reasons, I cannot describe them. Our successes are always those whose homes were good. Derrick and Jack and Larry had parents who were completely in sympathy with the school, so that the boys never had that most tiresome of conflicts: Which is right, home or school?

Has Summerhill produced any geniuses? No, so far no geniuses; perhaps a few creators, not famous as yet; a few bright artists; some clever musicians; no successful writer that I know of; an excellent furniture designer and cabinetmaker; some actors and actresses; some scientists and mathematicians who may yet do original work. I think that for our number – about forty-five pupils in the school at one time – a generous proportion has gone into some kind of creative or original work.

However, I have often said that one generation of free children does not prove anything much. Even in Summerhill some children get a guilty conscience about not learning enough lessons. It could not be otherwise in a world in which examinations are the gateways to some professions. And also, there is usually an Aunt Mary who exclaims, "Eleven years old and you can't read properly!" The child feels vaguely that the whole outside environment is anti-play and pro-work.

Speaking generally, the method of freedom is almost sure with children under twelve, but children over twelve take a long time to recover from a spoon-fed education.

Private Lessons at Summerhill

In the past, my main work was not teaching but the giving of "Private Lessons". Most of the children required psychological attention, but there were always some who had just come from other schools, and the private lessons were intended to hasten

their adoption to freedom. If a child is all tied up inside, he cannot adapt himself to being free.

The P.Ls. were informal talks by the fireside. I sat with a pipe in my mouth, and the child could smoke, too, if he liked. The cigarette was often the means of breaking the ice.

Once I asked a boy of fourteen to come and have a chat with me. He had just come to Summerhill from a typical Public School. I noticed that his fingers were yellow with nicotine, so I took out my pack of cigarettes and offered it to him. "Thanks," he stammered, "but I don't smoke, sir."

"Take one, you damned liar," I said with a smile, and he took one. I was killing two birds with one stone. Here was a boy to whom headmasters were stern, moral disciplinarians to be cheated every time. By offering him a cigarette, I was showing that I approved of his smoking. By calling him a damned liar, I was meeting him on his own level. At the same time, I was attacking his authority complex by showing him that a headmaster could swear easily and cheerfully. I wish I could have photographed his facial expression during that first interview.

He had been expelled from his previous school for stealing. "I hear you are a bit of a crook," I said. "What's your best way of swindling the railway company?"

"I never tried to swindle it, sir."

"Oh," I said, "that won't do. You must have a try. I know lots of ways," and I told him a few. He gaped. This surely was a madhouse he had come to. The principal of the school telling him how to be a better crook? Years later, he told me that that interview was the biggest shock of his life.

What kind of children needed P.Ls.? The best answer will be a few illustrations.

Lucy, the kindergarten teacher, comes to me and says that Peggy seems very unhappy and antisocial. I say, "Right, tell her to come and have a P.L." Peggy comes to my sitting room.

"I don't want a P.L.," she says, as she sits down. "They are just silly."

"Absolutely," I agree. "Waste of time. We won't have one."

She considers this. "Well," she says slowly, "I don't mind a tiny wee one." By this time, she has placed herself on my knee. I ask her about her Daddy and Mommy and especially about her little brother. She says he is a very silly little ass.

"He must be," I agree. "Do you think that Mommy likes him better than she likes you?"

"She likes us both the same," she says quickly, and adds, "She says that, anyway."

Sometimes the fit of unhappiness has arisen from a quarrel with another child. But more often it is a letter from home that has caused the trouble, perhaps a letter saying that a brother or sister has a new doll or a bike. The end of the P.L. is that Peggy goes out quite happily.

With newcomers it was not so easy. When we got a child of eleven who had been told that babies are brought by the doctor, it took hard work to free the child from lies and fears. For naturally, such a child had a guilt sense toward masturbation, and that sense of guilt had to be destroyed if the child was to find happiness.

Most small children did not require regular P.Ls. The ideal circumstance under which to have regular sessions is when a child demands a P.L. Some of the older ones demanded P.Ls.; sometimes, but rarely, a young child did too.

Charlie, aged sixteen, felt much inferior to lads of his own age. I asked him when he felt most inferior, and he said when the kids were bathing, because his penis was much smaller than anybody else's. I explained to him how his fear came about. He was the youngest child in a family of six sisters, all much older than he. There was a gulf of ten years between him and the youngest sister. The household was a feminine one. The father was dead, and the big sisters did all the bossing. Hence, Charlie identified

himself with the feminine in life, so that he, too, could have power. After about ten P.Ls., Charlie stopped coming to me. I asked him why. "Don't need P.Ls. now," he said cheerfully, "My tool is as big as Bert's now."

But there was more involved than that in the short course of therapy. Charlie had been told that masturbation would make him impotent when he was a man, and his fear of impotence had affected him physically. His cure was also due to the elimination of his guilt complex and of the silly lie about impotence. Charlie left Summerhill a year or two later. He is now a fine, healthy, happy man who will get on in life.

Sylvia had a stern father who never praised her. On the contrary, he criticised and nagged her all day long. Her one desire in life was to get father's love. She sat in her room and wept bitterly as she told her story. Hers was a difficult case to help. Analysis of the daughter could not change the father. There was no solution for Sylvia until she became old enough to get away from home. I warned her that there was a danger that she might marry the wrong man merely to escape from the father.

"What sort of wrong man?" she asked.

"A man like your father, one who will treat you sadistically," I said.

Sylvia was a sad case. At Summerhill, she was a social, friendly girl who offended no one. At home she was said to be a devil. Obviously, it was the father who needed analysis – not the daughter.

Another insoluble case was that of little Florence. She was illegitimate, and she didn't know it. My experience tells me that every illegitimate child knows unconsciously that he is illegitimate. Florence assuredly knew that there was some mystery behind her. I told the mother that the only cure for her daughter's hate and unhappiness was to tell her the truth.

"But, Neill, I daren't. It wouldn't make any difference to me. But

if I tell her, she won't keep it to herself, and my mother will cut her out of her will."

Well, well, we'll just have to wait till the grandmother's gone before Florence can be helped, I'm afraid. You can do nothing if a vital truth has to be kept dark.

An old boy of twenty came back to stay with us for a time, and he asked me for a few P.Ls.

"But I gave you dozens when you were here," I said.

"I know," he said sadly, "Dozens that I didn't really care for, but now I feel I want them."

Nowadays, I don't give regular therapy. With the average child, when you have cleared up the birth and masturbation question and shown how the family situation has created hates and jealousies, there is nothing more to be done. Curing a neurosis in a child is a matter of the release of emotion, and the cure will not be furthered in any way by expounding psychiatric theories to the child and telling him that he has a complex.

I recall a boy of fifteen whom I tried to help. For weeks he sat silent at our P.Ls., answering only in monosyllables. I decided to be drastic, and at his next P.L. I said to him: "I'm going to tell you what I think of you this morning. You're a lazy, stupid, conceited, spiteful fool."

"Am I?" he said, red with anger. "Who do you think you are anyway?" From that moment, he talked easily and to the point.

Then there was George, a boy of eleven. His father was a small tradesman in a village near Glasgow. The boy was sent to me by his doctor. George's problem was one of intense fear. He feared to be away from home even at the village school. He screamed in terror when he had to leave home. With great difficulty, his father got him to come to Summerhill. He wept and clung to his father so that the father could not return home. I suggested to the father that he stay for a few days.

I had already had the case history from the doctor, whose

comments were, in my estimation, correct and most useful. The question of getting the father to return home was becoming acute. I tried to talk to George, but he wept and sobbed that he wanted to go home. "This is just a prison," he sobbed. I went on talking and ignored his tears.

"When you were four," I said, "your little brother was taken to the infirmary and they brought him back in a coffin. [Increased sobbing.] Your fear of leaving home is that the same thing will happen to you – you'll go home in a coffin. [Louder sobs.] But that's not the main point George, my boy: you killed your brother!"

Here he protested violently, and threatened to kick me.

"You didn't really kill him, George, but you thought that he got more love from your mother than you got; and sometimes, you wished he would die. When he did die, you had a terrible guilty conscience, because you thought that your wishes had killed him, and that God would kill you in punishment for your guilt if you went away from home."

His sobbing ceased. Next day, although he made a scene at the station, he let his father go home.

George did not get over his homesickness for some time. But the sequel was that in eighteen months he insisted on travelling home for the vacation – alone, crossing London from station to station by himself. He did the same on his way back to Summerhill.

More and more I come to the conclusion that therapy is not necessary when children can live out their complexes in freedom. But in a case like that of George, freedom would not have been enough.

In the past I have given P.Ls. to thieves and have seen resulting cures, but I have had thieves who refused to come to P.Ls. Yet after three years of freedom, these boys were also cured.

At Summerhill, it is love that cures; it is approval and the freedom to be true to oneself. Of our forty-five children, only a small fraction receive P.Ls. I believe more and more in the therapeutic

effect of creative work. I would have the children do more handiwork, dramatics, and dancing.

Let me make clear that I gave P.Ls. only for emotional release. If a child were unhappy, I gave him a P.L. But if he couldn't learn to read or if he hated mathematics, I did not try to cure him with analytic treatment. Sometimes, in the course of a P.L., it came out that the inability to learn to read dated from Mommy's constant promptings to be "a nice, clever boy like your brother" or that the hatred of arithmetic came from dislike of a previous teacher of arithmetic.

Naturally, I am the father symbol for all the children; and my wife is the mother symbol. Socially, my wife fares worse than I do, for she gets all the unconscious hate of mother displaced on her by the girls, while I get their love. The boys give their love of their mother to my wife and hatred of their father to me. Boys do not express hate as easily as girls. That is due to their being able to deal so much more with things than with people. An angry boy kicks a ball while a girl spits catty words at a mother symbol.

But to be fair, I must say that it is only during a certain period that girls are catty and difficult to live with – the pre-adolescent and the first-year-of-adolescence period. And not all girls go through this stage. Much depends on their previous school and, more still, on the mother's attitude toward authority.

In the P.Ls., I pointed out relationships between reactions to home and school. Any criticism of me I translated as one of father. Any accusation against my wife I showed to be one against mother. I tried to keep analysis objective; to enter into subjective depths would have been unfair to the children.

There were occasions, naturally, when a subjective explanation was necessary, as in the case of Jane. Jane, aged thirteen, went round the school telling various children that Neill wanted to see them.

I had a stream of callers – "Jane says you want me." I told Jane

later that sending others to me meant that she wanted to come herself.

What was the technique of a P.L.? I had no set method. Sometimes, I began with a question, "When you look in the mirror, do you like your face?" The answer was always no.

"What part of your face do you hate most?" The invariable answer was, "My nose."

Adults give the same reply. The face is the person as far as the outside world is concerned. We think of faces when we think of people, and we look at faces when we talk to people. So that the face becomes the outside picture of the inner self. When a child says he dislikes his face, he means he dislikes his personality. My next step was to leave the face and to go on to the self.

"What do you hate most in yourself?" I asked.

Usually, the answer was a physical one. "My feet are too big." "Too fat." "Too little." "My hair."

I never gave an opinion – never agreed that he or she was fat or lean. Nor did I force things. If the body was of interest, we talked about it until there was nothing more to be said. Then we went on to the personality.

I often gave an exam. "I am going to write down a few things," I would say, "and examine you in them. You give yourself the mark you think you deserve. For example, I'll ask you what percentage out of a hundred you would give yourself for, say, ability at games or for bravery and so on." And the exam began.

Here is one given to a boy of fourteen.

Good looks: "Oh, not so good, about 45 percent."

Brains: "Um, 60."

Bravery: "25."

Loyalty: "I don't let my pals down – 80."

Musicality: "Zero."

Handiwork: (Mumbled. Answer unclear.)

Hate: "That's too difficult. No, I can't answer that one."

Games: "66."

Social feeling: "90."

Idiocy: "Oh, about 190 percent."

Naturally, the child's answers allowed an opportunity for discussion. I found it best to begin with the ego since it awakened interest. Then, when we later went on to the family, the child talked easily and with interest.

With young children, the technique was more spontaneous. I followed the child's lead. Here is a typical first P.L. with a six-year-old girl named Margaret. She comes into my room and says, "I want a P.L."

"Righto," I say. She sits down in an easy chair.

"What is a P.L.?" she asks.

"It isn't anything to eat," I say, "but somewhere in this pocket I have a caramel. Ah, here it is." And I give her the candy.

"Why do you want a P.L.?" I ask.

"Evelyn had one, and I want one too."

"Good. You begin it. What do you want to talk about?"

"I've got a dolly. [Pause.] Where did you get that thing on the mantelpiece? [She obviously does not want to wait for an answer.] Who was in this house before you came?"

Her questions point to a desire to know some vital truth, and I have a good suspicion that it is the truth about birth.

"Where do babies come from?" I ask suddenly.

Margaret gets up and marches to the door.

"I hate P.Ls.," she says, and departs. But a few days later, she asks for another P.L. – and so we progress.

Little Tommy, aged six, also did not mind P.Ls. as long as I refrained from mentioning "rude" things. For the first three sessions he went out indignantly, and I knew why. I knew that

only rude things really interested him. He was one of the victims of the masturbation prohibition.

Many children never got P.Ls. They did not want them. These were the children who had been properly brought up without parental lies and lectures.

Therapy does not cure at once. The treated person does not benefit much for some time, usually about a year. Hence, I never felt pessimistic about older pupils who left school in what we might describe as a half-baked psychological condition.

Tom was sent to us because he had been a failure at his school. I gave him a year's intensive P.Ls. and there was no apparent result. When he left Summerhill, he looked as if he would be a failure all through life. But a year later, his parents wrote that he had suddenly decided to be a doctor and was studying hard at the university.

Bill seemed a more hopeless case. His P.Ls. took three years. He left school, apparently, an aimless youth of eighteen. He drifted about from job to job for over a year, and then he decided to be a farmer. All reports I've heard say that he is doing well and is keen on his work.

P.Ls. were really a re-education. Their object was to lop off all complexes resulting from morality and fear.

A free school like Summerhill could be run without P.Ls. They merely speed up the process of re-education by beginning with a good spring cleaning before the summer of freedom.

Self-government

Summerhill is a self-governing school, democratic in form. Everything connected with social, or group life, including punishment for social offences, is settled by vote at the Saturday night General School Meeting.

Each member of the teaching staff and each child, regardless of

his age, has one vote. My vote carries the same weight as that of a seven-year-old.

One may smile and say, "But your voice has more value, hasn't it?" Well, let's see. Once I got up at a meeting and proposed that no child under sixteen should be allowed to smoke. I argued my case: a drug, poisonous, not a real appetite in children, but mostly an attempt to be grown-up. Counter arguments were thrown across the floor. The vote was taken. I was beaten by a large majority.

The sequel is worth recording. After my defeat, a boy of sixteen proposed that no one under twelve should be allowed to smoke. He carried his motion. However, at the following weekly meeting, a boy of twelve proposed the repeal of the new smoking rule, saying, "We are all sitting in the toilets smoking on the sly just like kids do in a strict school, and I say it is against the whole idea of Summerhill." His speech was cheered, and that meeting repealed the law. I hope I have made it clear that my voice is not always more powerful than that of a child.

Once, I spoke strongly about breaking the bedtime rules, with the consequent noise and the sleepy heads that lumbered around the next morning. I proposed that culprits should be fined all their pocket money for each offence. A boy of fourteen proposed that there should be a penny reward per hour for everyone staying up after his or her bedtime. I got a few votes, but he got a big majority.

Summerhill self-government has no bureaucracy. There is a different chairman at each meeting, appointed by the previous chairman, and the secretary's job is voluntary. Bedtime officers are seldom in office for more than a few weeks.

Our democracy makes laws – good ones, too. For example, it is forbidden to bathe in the sea without the supervision of life-guards, who are always staff members. It is forbidden to climb on the roofs. Bedtimes must be kept or there is an automatic fine. Whether classes should be called off on the Thursday or

on the Friday preceding a holiday is a matter for a show of hands at a General School Meeting.

The success of the meeting depends largely on whether the chairman is weak or strong, for to keep order among forty-five vigorous children is no easy task. The chairman has power to fine noisy citizens. Under a weak chairman, the fines are much too frequent.

The staff takes a hand, of course, in the discussions. So do I, although there are a number of situations in which I must remain neutral. In fact, I have seen a lad charged with an offence get away with it on a complete alibi, although he had privately confided to me that he had committed the offence. In a case like this, I must always be on the side of the individual.

I, of course, participate like anyone else when it comes to casting my vote on any issue or bringing up a proposal of my own. Here is a typical example. I once raised the question of whether football should be played in the lounge. The lounge is under my office, and I explained that I disliked the noise of football while I was working. I proposed that indoor football be forbidden. I was supported by some of the girls, by some older boys, and by most of the staff. But my proposal was not carried and that meant my continuing to put up with the noisy scenes of feet below my office. Finally, after much public disputation at several meetings, I did carry by majority approval the abolition of football in the lounge. And this is the way the minority generally gets its rights in our school democracy; it keeps demanding them. This applies to little children as much as it does to adults.

On the other hand, there are aspects of school life that do not come under the self-government regime. My wife plans the arrangements for bedrooms, provides the menu, sends out and pays bills. I appoint teachers and ask them to leave if I think they are not suitable.

The function of Summerhill self-government is not only to make laws but to discuss social features of the community as well. At the beginning of each term, rules about bedtime are made by

vote. You go to bed according to your age. Then questions of general behaviour come up. Sports committees have to be elected, as well as an end-of-term dance committee, a theatre committee, bedtime officers, and downtown officers who report any disgraceful behaviour out of the school boundaries.

The most exciting subject ever brought up is that of food. I have more than once waked up a dull meeting by proposing that second helpings be abolished. Any sign of kitchen favouritism in the matter of food is severely handled. But when the kitchen brings up the question of wasting food, the meeting is not much interested. The attitude of children toward food is essentially a personal and self-centered one.

In a General School Meeting all academic discussions are avoided. Children are eminently practical and theory bores them. They like concreteness not abstraction. I once brought forward a motion that swearing be abolished by law, and I gave my reason. I had been showing a woman around with her little boy, a prospective pupil. Suddenly from upstairs came a very strong adjective. The mother hastily gathered up her son and went off in a hurry. "Why," I asked at a meeting, "should my income suffer because some fathead swears in front of a prospective parent? It isn't a moral question at all; it is purely financial. You swear and I lose a pupil."

My question was answered by a lad of fourteen. "Neill is talking rot," he said. "Obviously, if this woman was shocked, she didn't believe in Summerhill. Even if she had enrolled her boy, the first time he came home saying damn or hell, she would have taken him out of here." The meeting agreed with him, and my proposal was voted down.

A General School Meeting often has to tackle the problem of bullying. Our community is pretty hard on bullies, and I notice that the school government's bullying rule has been underlined on the bulletin board: "*All cases of bullying will be severely dealt with.*" Bullying is not so rife in Summerhill, however, as in strict schools, and the reason is not far to seek. Under adult

discipline, the child becomes a hater. Since the child cannot express his hatred of adults with impunity, he takes it out on smaller or weaker boys. But this seldom happens in Summerhill. Very often, a charge of bullying when investigated amounts to the fact that Jenny called Peggy a lunatic.

Sometimes a case of stealing is brought up at the General School Meeting. There is never any punishment for stealing, but there is always reparation. Often children will come to me and say, "John stole some coins from David. Is this a case for psychology, or shall we bring it up?"

If I consider it a case for psychology, requiring individual attention, I tell them to leave it to me. If John is a happy, normal boy who has stolen something inconsequential, I allow charges to be brought against him. The worst that happens is that he is docked all of his pocket money until the debt is paid.

How are General School Meetings run? At the beginning of each term, a chairman is elected for one meeting only. At the end of the meeting he appoints his successor. This procedure is followed throughout the term. Anyone who has a grievance, a charge, or a suggestion, or a new law to propose brings it up.

Here is a typical example: Jim took the pedals from Jack's bicycle because his own cycle is in disrepair, and he wanted to go away with some other boys for a weekend trip. After due consideration of the evidence, the meeting decides that Jim must replace the pedals, and he is forbidden to go on the trip.

The chairman asked, "Any objections?"

Jim gets up and shouts that there jolly well are! Only his adjective isn't exactly "jolly". "This isn't fair!" he cries. "I didn't know that Jack ever used his old crock of a bike. It has been kicking about among the bushes for days. I don't mind shoving his pedals back, but I think the punishment unfair. I don't think I should be cut out of the trip."

Follows a breezy discussion. In the debate, it transpires that Jim usually gets a weekly allowance from home, but the allowance

hasn't come for six weeks, and he hasn't a bean. The meeting votes that the sentence be quashed, and it is duly quashed.

But what to do about Jim! Finally it is decided to open a subscription fund to put Jim's bike in order. His schoolmates chip in to buy him pedals for his bike, and he sets off happily on his trip.

Usually, the School Meeting's verdict is accepted by the culprit. However, if the verdict is unacceptable, the defendant may appeal, in which case the chairman will bring up the matter once again at the very end of the meeting. At such an appeal, the matter is considered more carefully, and generally the original verdict is tempered in view of the dissatisfaction of the defendant. The children realise that if the defendant feels he has been unfairly judged, there is a good chance that he actually has been.

No culprit at Summerhill ever shows any signs of defiance or hatred of the authority of his community. I am always surprised at the docility our pupils show when punished.

One term, four of the biggest boys were charged at the General School Meeting with doing an illegal thing – selling various articles from their wardrobes. The law forbidding this had been passed on the ground that such practices are unfair to the parents who buy the clothes and unfair as well to the school because when children go home minus certain wearing apparel, the parents blame the school for carelessness. The four boys were punished by being kept on the grounds for four days and being sent to bed at eight each night. They accepted the sentence without a murmur. On Monday night, when everyone had gone to the town cinema, I found Dick, one of the culprits, in bed reading.

"You are a chump," I said. "Everyone has gone to the cinema. Why don't you get up?"

"Don't try to be funny," he said.

This loyalty of Summerhill pupils to their own democracy is amazing. It has no fear in it, and no resentment. I have seen a boy go through a long trial for some antisocial act, and I have

seen him sentenced. Often, the boy who has just been sentenced is elected chairman for the next meeting.

The sense of justice that children have never ceases to make me marvel. And their administrative ability is great. As education, self-government is of infinite value.

Certain classes of offences come under the automatic fine rule. If you ride another's bike without permission, there is an automatic fine of sixpence. Swearing in town (but you can swear as much as you like on the school grounds), bad behaviour in the cinema, climbing on roofs, throwing food in the dining room – these and other infractions of rules carry automatic fines.

Punishments are nearly always fines: hand over pocket money for a week or miss a movie.

An oft-heard objection to children acting as judges is that they punish too harshly. I find it not so. On the contrary, they are very lenient. On no occasion has there been a brash sentence at Summerhill. And invariably the punishment has some relation to the crime.

Three small girls were disturbing the sleep of others. Punishment: they must go to bed an hour earlier every night for a week. Two boys were accused of throwing clods at other boys. Punishment: they must cart clods to level the hockey field.

Often the chairman will say, "The case is too silly for words," and decide that nothing should be done.

When our secretary was tried for riding Ginger's bike without permission, he and two other members of the staff who had also ridden it were ordered to push each other on Ginger's bike ten times around the front lawn.

Four small boys who climbed the ladder that belonged to the builders who were erecting the new workshop were ordered to climb up and down the ladder for ten minutes straight.

The meeting never seeks advice from an adult. Well, I can remember only one occasion when it was done. Three girls had

raided the kitchen larder. The meeting fined them their pocket money. They raided the kitchen again that night and the meeting fined them a movie. They raided it once more, and the meeting was gravelled what to do. The chairman consulted me. "Give them tuppence reward each," I suggested. "What? Why, man, you'll have the whole school raiding the kitchen if we do that." "You won't," I said. "Try it."

He tried it. Two of the girls refused to take the money; and all three were heard to declare that they would never raid the larder again. They didn't – for about two months.

Priggish behaviour at meetings is rare. Any sign of priggishness is frowned upon by the community. A boy of eleven, a strong exhibitionist, used to get up and draw attention to himself by making long involved remarks of obvious irrelevance. At least he tried to, but the meeting shouted him down. The young have a sensitive nose for insincerity.

At Summerhill we have proved, I believe, that self-government works. In fact, the school that has no self-government should not be called a progressive school. It is a compromise school. You cannot have freedom unless children feel completely free to govern their own social life. When there is a boss, there is no real freedom. This applies even more to the benevolent boss than to the disciplinarian. The child of spirit can rebel against the hard boss, but the soft boss merely makes the child impotently soft and unsure of his real feelings.

Good self-government in a school is possible only when there is a sprinkling of older pupils who like a quiet life and fight the indifference or opposition of the gangster age. These older youngsters are often outvoted, but it is they who really believe in and want self-government. Children up to, say, twelve, on the other hand, will not run good self-government on their own, because they have not reached the social age. Yet at Summerhill, a seven-year-old rarely misses a General Meeting.

One spring we had a spate of bad luck. Some community-minded seniors had left us after passing their college entrance exams,

so that there were very few seniors left in the school. The vast majority of the pupils were at the gangster stage and age. Although they were social in their speeches, they were not old enough to run the community well. They passed any amount of laws and then forgot them and broke them. The few older pupils left were, by some chance, rather individualist, and tended to live their own lives in their own groups, so that the staff was figuring too prominently in attacking the breaking of the school rules. Thus it came about that at a General School Meeting I felt compelled to launch a vigorous attack on the seniors for being not antisocial but asocial, breaking the bedtime rules by sitting up far too late and taking no interest in what the juniors were doing in an antisocial way.

Frankly, younger children are only mildly interested in government. Left to themselves, I question whether younger children would ever form a government. Their values are not our values, and their manners are not our manners.

Stern discipline is the easiest way for the adult to have peace and quiet. Anyone can be a drill sergeant. What the ideal alternative method of securing a quiet life is I do not know. Our Summerhill trials and errors certainly fail to give the adult a quiet life. On the other hand, they do not give the children an over noisy life. Perhaps the ultimate test is happiness. By this criterion, Summerhill has found an excellent compromise in its self-government.

Our law against dangerous weapons is likewise a compromise. Air guns are forbidden. The few boys who want to have air guns in the school hate the law; but in the main, they conform to it. When they are a minority, children do not seem to feel as strongly as adults do.

In Summerhill, there is one perennial problem that can never be solved; it might be called the problem of *the individual vs. the community*. Both staff and pupils get exasperated when a gang of little girls led by a problem girl annoy some people, throw water on others, break the bedtime laws, and make themselves

a perpetual nuisance. Jean, the leader, is attacked in a General Meeting. Strong words are used to condemn her misuse of freedom as licence.

A visitor, a psychologist said to me: "It is all wrong. The girl's face is an unhappy one; she has never been loved, and all this open criticism makes her feel more unloved than ever. She needs love, not opposition."

"My dear woman," I replied, "we have tried to change her with love. For weeks, we rewarded her for being antisocial. We have shown her affection and tolerance, and she has not reacted. Rather, she has looked on us as simpletons, easy marks for her aggression. We cannot sacrifice the entire community to one individual."

I do not know the complete answer. I know that when Jean is fifteen, she will be a social girl and not a gang leader. I pin my faith on public opinion. No child will go on for years being disliked and criticised. As for the condemnation by the School Meeting, one simply cannot sacrifice other children to one problem child.

Once, we had a boy of six who had a miserable life before he came to Summerhill. He was a violent bully, destructive and full of hate. The four- and five-year-olds suffered and wept. The community had to do something to protect them; and in doing so, it had to be against the bully. The mistakes of two parents could not be allowed to react on other children whose parents had given them love and care.

On a very few occasions, I have had to send a child away because the others were finding the school a hell because of him. I say this with regret, with a vague feeling of failure, but I could see no other way.

Have I had to alter my views on self-government in these long years? On the whole, no. I could not visualise Summerhill without it. It has always been popular. It is our showpiece for visitors. But that, too, has its drawbacks, as when a girl of fourteen whispered to me at a meeting, "I meant to bring up about girls

blocking the toilets by putting sanitary napkins in them, but look at all these visitors." I advised her to damn the visitors and bring the matter up – which she did.

The educational benefit of practical civics cannot be over-emphasised. At Summerhill the pupils would fight to the death for their right to govern themselves. In my opinion, one weekly General School Meeting is of more value than a week's curriculum of school subjects. It is an excellent theatre for practising public speaking, and most of the children speak well and without self-consciousness. I have often heard sensible speeches from children who could neither read nor write.

I cannot see an alternative method to our Summerhill democracy. It may be a fairer democracy than the political one, for children are pretty charitable to each other, and have no vested interests to speak of. Moreover, it is a more genuine democracy because laws are made at an open meeting, and the question of uncontrollable elected delegates does not arise.

After all, it is the broad outlook that free children acquire that makes self-government so important. Their laws deal with essentials, not appearances. The laws governing conduct in the town are the compromise with a less free civilization. "Downtown" – the outside world – wastes its precious energy in worrying over trifles. As if it matters in the scheme of life whether you wear dressy clothes or say hell. Summerhill, by getting away from the outward nothings of life, can have and does have a community spirit that is in advance of its time. True, it is apt to call a spade a damn shovel, but any ditch digger will tell you with truth that a spade is a damn shovel.

Co-education

In most schools there is a definite plan to separate boys from girls, especially in their sleeping quarters. Love affairs are not encouraged. They are not encouraged in Summerhill either – but neither are they discouraged.

In Summerhill, boys and girls are left alone. Relations between

the sexes appear to be very healthy. One sex will not grow up with any illusions or delusions about the other sex. Not that Summerhill is just one big family, where all the nice little boys and girls are brothers and sisters to one another. If that were so, I would become a rabid anti-co-educationist at once. Under real co-education – not the kind where boys and girls sit in class together but live and sleep in separate houses – shameful curiosity is almost eliminated. There are no Peeping Toms in Summerhill. There is far less anxiety about sex than at other schools.

Every now and again an adult comes to the school, and asks, "But don't they all sleep with each other?" And when I answer that they do not, he or she cries, "But why not? At their age, I would have had a hell of a good time!"

It is this type of person who assumes that if boys and girls are educated together, they must necessarily indulge in sexual licence. To be sure, such people do not say that this thought underlies their objections. Instead, they rationalise by saying that boys and girls have different capacities for learning, and therefore should not have lessons together.

Schools should be co-educational because life is co-educational. But co-education is feared by many parents and teachers because of the danger of pregnancy. Indeed, I am told that not a few principals of co-ed schools spend sleepless nights worrying over that possibility.

Conditioned children of both sexes are often incapable of loving. This news may be comforting to those who fear sex, but to youth in general the inability to love is a great human tragedy.

When I asked a few adolescents from a famous private co-ed school if there were any love affairs in their school, the answer was no. Upon expressing surprise, I was told, "We sometimes have a friendship between a boy and a girl, but it is never a love affair." Since I saw some handsome lads and some pretty girls on that campus, I knew that the school was imposing an anti-love ideal on the pupils and that its highly moral atmosphere was inhibiting sex.

I once asked the principal of a progressive school, "Have you any love affairs in the school?"

"No," he replied gravely. "But then, we never take problem children."

Those against co-education may object that the system makes boys effeminate and girls masculine. But deep down is the moral fear, actually a jealous fear. Sex with love is the greatest pleasure in the world, and it is repressed because it is the greatest pleasure. All else is evasion.

The reason that I entertain no fears that the older pupils at Summerhill who have been here since early childhood might indulge in sexual licence is because I know that I am not dealing with children who have a repressed, and therefore unnatural, interest in sex.

Some years ago, we had two pupils arrive at the same time: a boy of seventeen from a boy's private school and a girl of sixteen from a girl's private school. They fell in love with each other and were always together. I met them late one night and I stopped them. "I don't know what you two are doing," I said, "and morally I don't care, for it isn't a moral question at all. But economically I do care. If you, Kate, have a kid, my school will be ruined."

I went on to expand upon this theme. "You see," I said, "You have just come to Summerhill. To you it means freedom to do what you like. Naturally, you have no special feeling for the school. If you had been here from the age of seven, I'd never have had to mention the matter. You would have such a strong attachment to the school that you would think of the consequences to Summerhill." It was the only possible way to deal with the problem. Fortunately, I never had to speak to them again on the subject.

Work

In Summerhill, we used to have a community law that provided that every child over twelve and every member of the staff must

do two hours of work each week on the grounds. The pay was a token pay of sixpence an hour. If you did not work, you were fined a bob. A few, teachers included, were content to pay the fines. Of those who worked, most had their eyes on the dock. There was no play component in the work, and therefore the work bored everyone. The law was reexamined, and the children abolished it by an almost unanimous vote.

A few years ago, we needed an infirmary in Summerhill. We decided to build one ourselves – a proper building of brick and cement. None of us had ever laid a brick, but we started it. A few pupils helped to dig the foundations and knocked down some old brick walls to get the bricks. But the children demanded payment. We refused to pay wages. In the end, the infirmary was built by the teachers and visitors. The job was just too dull for children, and to their young minds the need for the sanatorium too remote. They had no self-interest in it. But some time later when they wanted a bicycle shed, they built one all by themselves without any help from the staff.

I am writing of children – not as we adults think they should be – but as they really are. Their community sense – their sense of social responsibility – does not develop until the age of eighteen or more. Their interests are immediate, and the future does not exist for them.

I have never yet seen a lazy child. What is called laziness is either lack of interest or lack of health. A healthy child cannot be idle; he has to be doing something all day long. Once I knew a very healthy lad who was considered a lazy fellow. Mathematics did not interest him, but the school curriculum demanded that he learn mathematics. Of course, he didn't want to study mathematics, and so his math teacher thought he was lazy.

I read recently that if a couple who were out for an evening were to dance every dance, they would be walking twenty-five miles. Yet they would feel little or no fatigue because they would be experiencing pleasure all evening long – assuming that their steps agreed. So it is with a child. The boy who is lazy in class

will run miles during a football game.

I find it impossible to get youths of seventeen to help me plant potatoes or weed onions, although the same boys will spend hours souping up motor engines, or washing cars, or making radio sets. It took me a long time to accept this phenomenon. The truth began to dawn on me one day when I was digging my brother's garden in Scotland. I didn't enjoy the job, and it came to me suddenly that what was wrong was that I was digging a garden that meant nothing to me. And my garden means nothing to the boys, whereas their bikes or radios mean a lot to them. True altruism is a long time in coming, and it never loses its factor of selfishness.

Small children have quite a different attitude toward work than teenagers have. Summerhill juniors, ranging from age three to eight, will work like Trojans mixing cement or carting sand or cleaning bricks; and they will work with no thought of reward. They identify themselves with grown-ups and their work is like a fantasy worked out in reality.

However, from the age of eight or nine until the age of nineteen or twenty, the desire to do manual labour of a dull kind is just not there. This is true of most children; there are individual children, of course, who remain workers from early childhood right on through life.

The fact is that we adults exploit children far too often. "Marion, run down to the mail box with this letter." Any child hates to be made use of. The average child dimly realises that he is fed and clothed by his parents without any effort on his part. He feels that such care is his natural right, but he realises that on the other hand he is expected and obliged to do a hundred menial tasks and many disagreeable chores, which the parents themselves evade.

I once read about a school in America that was built by the pupils themselves. I used to think that this was the ideal way. It isn't. If children built their own school, you can be sure that some gentleman with a breezy, benevolent authority was standing

by, lustily shouting encouragement. When such authority is not present *children simply do not build schools.*

My own opinion is that a sane civilization would not ask children to work until at least the age of eighteen. Most boys and girls would do a lot of work before they reached eighteen, but such work would be play for them, and probably uneconomical work from the viewpoint of the parents. I feel depressed when I think of the gigantic amount of work students have to do to prepare for exams. I understand that in pre-war Budapest nearly 50 percent of the students broke down physically or psychologically after their matriculation exams.

The reason we here in Summerhill keep getting such good reports about the industrious performance of our old pupils on responsible jobs is that these boys and girls have lived out their self-centered fantasy stage in Summerhill. As young adults they are able to face the realities of life without any unconscious longing for the play of childhood.

Play

Summerhill might be defined as a school in which play is of the greatest importance. Why children and kittens play I do not know. I believe it is a matter of energy.

I am not thinking of play in terms of athletic fields and organised games; I am thinking of play in terms of fantasy. Organised games involve skill, competition, teamwork; but children's play usually requires no skill, little competition, and hardly any teamwork. Small children will play gangster games with shooting or swordplay. Long before the motion picture era, children played gang games. Stories and cinema will give a direction to some kind of play, but the fundamentals are in the hearts of all children of all races.

At Summerhill the six-year-olds play the whole day long – play with fantasy. To a small child, reality and fantasy are very close to each other. When a boy of ten dressed himself up as a ghost,

the little ones screamed with delight; they knew it was only Tommy; they had seen him put on that sheet. But as he advanced on them, they one and all screamed in terror.

Small children live a life of fantasy and they carry this fantasy over into action. Boys of eight to fourteen play gangsters and are always bumping people off or flying the skies in their wooden airplanes. Small girls also go through a gang stage, but it does not take the form of guns and swords. It is more personal. Mary's gang objects to Nellie's gang, and there are rows and hard words. Boys' rival gangs are only play enemies. Small boys are thus more easy to live with than small girls.

I have not been able to discover where the borderline of fantasy begins and ends. When a child brings a doll a meal on a tiny toy plate, does she really believe for the moment that the doll is alive? Is a rocking horse a real horse? When a boy cries "Stick 'em up" and then fires, does he think or feel that his is a real gun? I am inclined to think that children do imagine that their toys are real, and only when some insensitive adult butts in and reminds them of their fantasy do they come back to earth with a plop. No sympathetic parent will ever break up a child's fantasy.

Boys do not generally play with girls. Boys play gangsters, and play tag; they make huts in trees; they dig holes and trenches.

Girls seldom organise any play. The time-honoured game of playing teacher or doctor is unknown among free children, for they feel no need to mimic authority. Smaller girls play with dolls; but older girls seem to get the most fun out of contact with people, not things.

We have often had mixed hockey teams. Card games and other indoor games are usually mixed.

Children love noise and mud; they clatter on stairs; they shout like louts; they are unconscious of furniture. If they are playing a game of touch, they would walk over the Portland Vase if it happened to be in their way – walk over it without seeing it.

Mothers, too often, do not play enough with their babies. They

seem to think that putting a soft teddy bear in the carriage with the baby solves things for an hour or two, forgetting that babies want to be tickled and hugged.

Granting that childhood is playhood, how do we adults generally react to this fact? We *ignore* it. We forget all about it – because play, to us, is a waste of time. Hence we erect a large city school with many rooms and expensive apparatus for teaching; but more often than not, all we offer to the play instinct is a small concrete space.

One could, with some truth, claim that the evils of civilization are due to the fact that no child has ever had enough play. To put it differently, every child has been hothoused into an adult long before he has reached adulthood.

The adult attitude toward play is quite arbitrary. We, the old, map out a child's timetable: Learn from nine till twelve and then an hour for lunch, and again lessons until three. If a free child were asked to make a timetable, he would almost certainly give to play many periods and to lessons only a few.

Fear is at the root of adult antagonism to children's play. Hundreds of times I have heard the anxious query, "But if my boy plays all day, how will he ever learn anything; how will he ever pass exams?" Very few will accept my answer, "If your child plays all he wants to play, he will be able to pass college entrance exams after two years' intensive study, instead of the usual five, six, or seven years of learning in a school that discounts play as a factor in life."

But I always have to add, "That is – if he ever wants to pass the exams!" He may want to become a ballet dancer or a radio engineer. She may want to be a dress designer or a children's nurse. Yes, fear of the child's future leads adults to deprive children of their right to play. There is more in it than that, however. There is a vague moral idea behind the disapproval of play, a suggestion that being a child is not so good, a suggestion voiced in the admonition to young adults, "Don't be a kid."

Parents who have forgotten the yearnings of their childhood – forgotten how to play and how to fantasy – make poor parents. When a child has lost the ability to play, he is psychically dead and a danger to any child who comes in contact with him.

Teachers from Israel have told me of the wonderful community centres there. The school, I'm told, is part of a community whose primary need is hard work. Children of ten, one teacher told me, weep if – as a punishment – they are not allowed to dig the garden. If I had a child of ten who wept because he was forbidden to dig potatoes, I should wonder if he were mentally defective. Childhood is playhood, and any community system that ignores that truth is educating in a wrong way. To me the Israeli method is sacrificing young life to economic needs. It may be necessary, but I would not dare to call that system ideal community living.

It is intriguing, yet most difficult, to assess the damage done to children who have not been allowed to play as much as they wanted to. I often wonder if the great masses who watch professional football are trying to live out their arrested play interest by identifying with the players, playing by proxy as it were. The majority of our Summerhill graduates does not attend football matches, nor is it interested in pageantry. I believe few of them would walk very far to see a royal procession. Pageantry has a childish element in it; its colour, formalism, and slow movement have some suggestion of toyland and dressed-up dolls. That may be the reason that women seem to love pageantry more than men do. As people get older and more sophisticated, they seem to be attracted less and less by pageantry of any kind. I doubt if generals and politicians and diplomats get anything out of state processions except boredom.

There is some evidence that children brought up freely and with the maximum of play do not tend to become mass-minded. Among old Summerhillians, the only ones who can easily and enthusiastically cheer in a crowd are the ones who came from the homes of parents with communist leanings.

Theatre

During the winter, Sunday night at Summerhill is acting night. The plays are always well attended. I have seen six successive Sunday nights with a full dramatic programme. But sometimes after a wave of dramatics there will not be a performance for a few weeks.

The audience is not too critical. It behaves well – much better than most London audiences do. We seldom have catcalls or feet thumping or whistling.

The Summerhill theatre is a converted squash-rackets court, which holds about a hundred people. It has a movable stage; that is, it is made of boxes that can be piled up into steps and platforms. It has proper lighting with elaborate dimming devices and spotlights. There is no scenery – only grey curtains. When the cue is *Enter villagers through gap in hedge*, the actors push the curtain aside.

The tradition of the school is that only plays written in Summerhill are performed. And the unwritten code is that a play written by a teacher is performed only if there is a dearth of children's plays. The cast makes its own costumes, too, and these are usually exceptionally well done. Our school dramas tend toward comedy and farce rather than tragedy; but when we have a tragedy, it is well done – sometimes beautifully done.

Girls write plays more than boys do. Small boys often produce their own plays, but usually the parts are not written out. They hardly need to be, for the main line of each character is always "Stick 'em up!" In these plays the curtain is always rung down on a set of corpses, for small boys are by nature thorough and uncompromising.

Daphne, a girl of thirteen, used to give us Sherlock Holmes plays. I remember one about a constable who ran away with the sergeant's wife. With the aid of the sleuth and, of course, "My

Dear Watson", the sergeant tracked the wife to the constable's lodgings. There a remarkable sight met their eyes. The constable lay on a sofa with his arm around the faithless wife, while a bevy of demimonde women danced sinuous dances in the middle of the room. *The constable was in evening dress*. Daphne always brought high life into her dramas.

Girls of fourteen or so sometimes write plays in verse, and these are often good. Of course, not all the staff and children write plays.

There is a strong aversion to plagiarism. When, some time ago, a play was dropped from the programme and I had to write one hastily as a stopgap, I wrote on the theme of one of W. W. Jacob's stories. There was an outcry of "Copycat! Swindler!"

Summerhill children do not like dramatised stories. Nor do they want the usual highbrow stuff so common in other schools. Our crowd never acts Shakespeare; but sometimes I write a Shakespearean skit as, for example, *Julius Caesar* with an American gangster setting – the language a mixture of Shakespeare and a detective story magazine.

Mary brought the house down when as Cleopatra she stabbed everyone on the stage; and then, looking at the blade of her knife, read aloud the words "stainless steel" and plunged the knife into her breast.

The acting ability of the pupils is of a high standard. Among Summerhill pupils there is no such thing as stage fright. The little children are a delight to see; they live their parts with complete sincerity. The girls act more readily than the boys. Indeed, boys under ten seldom act at all except in their own gangster plays; and some children never get to act nor have any desire to do so.

We discovered in our long experience that the worst actor is he who acts in life. Such a child can never get away from himself and is self-conscious on the stage. Perhaps self-conscious is the wrong term, for it means being conscious that others are conscious of you.

Acting is a necessary part of education. It is largely exhibitionism; but at Summerhill when acting becomes only exhibitionism, an actor is not admired.

As an actor, one must have a strong power of identifying oneself with others. With adults, this identification is never unconscious; adults know they are play-acting. But I question if small children really do know. Quite often when a child enters and his cue is "Who are you?", instead of answering, "I am the abbey ghost!", he will answer, "I'm Peter."

In one of the plays written for the very youngest, there was a dinner scene with real viands. It took the prompter some time and concern to get the actors to move on to the next scene. The children went on tucking in the food with complete indifference to the audience.

Acting is one method of acquiring self-confidence. But some children who never act tell me that they hate the performances because they feel so inferior. Here is a difficulty for which I have found no solution. Such a child generally finds another line of endeavour in which he can show superiority. The difficult case is that of the girl who loves acting but can't act. It says much for the good manners of the school that such a girl is seldom left out of a cast.

Boys and girls of thirteen and fourteen refuse to take any part that involves making love, but the small children will play any part easily and gladly. The seniors who are over fifteen will play love parts if they are comedy parts. Only one or two seniors will take a serious love part. Love parts cannot be well played until one has experienced love. Yet children who have never known grief in real life may act splendidly in a sorrowful part. I have seen Virginia break down at rehearsals and weep while playing a sad part. That is accounted for by the fact that every child has known grief in imagination. In fact, death enters early into every child's fantasies.

Plays for children ought to be at the level of the children. It is wrong to make children do classical plays, which are far away

from their real fantasy life. Their plays, like their reading, should be for their age. Summerhill children seldom read Scott or Dickens or Thackeray, because today's children belong to an age of cinema. When a child goes to the cinema, he gets a story as long as *Westward Ho!* in an hour and a quarter – a story that would take him days to read, a story without all the dull descriptions of people and landscapes. So in their plays children do not want a story of Elsinore; they want a story of their own environment.

Although Summerhill children perform the plays that they themselves write, they nevertheless, when given the opportunity, respond enthusiastically to really fine drama. One winter I read a play to the seniors once a week. I read all of Barrie, Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, some of Shaw and Galsworthy, and some modern plays like *The Silver Cord* and *The Vortex*. Our best actors and actresses liked Ibsen.

The seniors are interested in stage techniques and take an original view of it. There is a time-honoured trick in playwriting of never allowing a character to leave the stage without his making an excuse for doing so. When a dramatist wanted to get rid of the father so that the wife and daughter could tell each other what an ass he was, old father obligingly got up, and remarking, "Well, I'd better go and see if the gardener has planted those cabbages," he shuffled out. Our young Summerhill playwrights have a more direct technique. As one girl said to me, "In real life you go out of a room without saying anything about why you are going." You do, and you do on the Summerhill stage, too.

Summerhill specialises in a certain branch of dramatic art, which we call spontaneous acting. I set acting tasks like the following: *Put on an imaginary overcoat; take it off again and hang it on a peg. Pick up a bunch of flowers and find a thistle among them. Open a telegram that tells you your father (or mother) is dead. Take a hasty meal at a railroad restaurant and be on tenterhooks lest the train leave without you.*

Sometimes the acting is a "talkie". For example, I sit down at a

table and announce that I am an immigration officer at Harwich. Each child has to have an imaginary passport and must be prepared to answer my questions. That is good fun.

Again, I am a film producer interviewing a prospective cast, or a businessman seeking a secretary. Once I was a man who had advertised for an amanuensis. None of the children knew what the word meant. One girl acted as if it meant a manicurist and this afforded some good comedy.

Spontaneous acting is the creative side of a school theatre – is the vital side. Our theatre has done more for creativity than anything else in Summerhill. Anyone can act in a play, but everyone cannot write a play. The children must realise, even if dimly, that their tradition of performing only original, homegrown plays encourages creativity rather than reproduction and imitation.

Dancing and Music

On with the dance – but it must be danced according to the rules. And the strange thing is that the crowd will accept the rules as a crowd, while at the same time the individuals composing the crowd may be unanimous in hating the rules.

To me a London ballroom symbolises what England is. Dancing, which should be an individual and creative pleasure, is reduced to a stiff walk. One couple dances just like another couple. Crowd conservatism prevents most dancers from being original. Yet the joy of dancing is the joy of invention. When invention is left out, dancing becomes mechanical and dull. English dancing fully expresses the English fear of emotion and originality.

If there is no room for freedom in such a pleasure as dancing, how can we expect to find it in the more serious aspects of life? If one dare not invent his own dance steps, it is unlikely that he will be tolerated if he dares to invent his own religious, educational or political steps!

At Summerhill, every programme includes dances. These are

always arranged and performed by the girls, and they do them well. They do not dance to classical music; it is always jazz. We had one ballet to Gershwin's *An American in Paris* music. I wrote the story and the girls interpreted it in dance. I have seen worse dances on the London stage.

Dancing serves as an excellent outlet for *unconscious* sex interest. I say unconscious because a girl may be a beauty, but if she is a bad dancer, she will not have many dance partners.

Nearly every night our private living room is filled with children. We often play phonograph records and here disagreements arise. The children want Duke Ellington and Elvis Presley and I hate the stuff. I like Ravel and Stravinsky and Gershwin. Sometimes I get fed up with jazz and lay down the law, saying that since it is my room I'll play what I want to play.

The *Rosenkavalier* trio or the *Meistersinger* quintet will clear the room. But then, few children like classical music or classical paintings. We make no attempt to lead them to higher tastes – whatever that may mean.

Actually, it does not matter to one's happiness in life whether one loves Beethoven or hot jazz. Schools would have more success if they included jazz in the curriculum and left out Beethoven. At Summerhill, three boys, inspired by jazz bands, took up musical instruments. Two of them bought clarinets and one chose a trumpet. On leaving school, they all went to study at the Royal Academy of Music. Today, they are all playing in orchestras which play classical music exclusively. I like to think that the reason for this advance in musical taste is that when they were at Summerhill each was permitted to hear Duke Ellington and Bach, or any other composer for that matter.

Sports and Games

In most schools sports are compulsory. Even the watching of matches is compulsory. In Summerhill, games are, like lessons, optional.

One boy was in the school for ten years and didn't play a game, and he was never asked to play a game. But most of the children love games. The juniors do not organise games. They play gangsters or red Indians; they build tree huts and do all the things that small children usually do. Not having reached the cooperative stage, they should not have games organised for them. Organised play and sports come naturally at the right time.

At Summerhill, our chief games are hockey in the winter and tennis in the summer. One difficulty with children is to get good teamwork in tennis doubles. They take teamwork for granted in hockey; but often two tennis players act as individuals instead of as a single unit. Teamwork comes more easily about the age of seventeen.

Swimming is very popular with all ages. The beach at Sizewell is not a good beach for children, for the tide seems always to be full. The long stretches of sand with rocks and pools so dear to children are not to be found on our coast.

We have no artificial gymnastics in the school, nor do I think them necessary. The children get all the exercise they need in their games, swimming, dancing, and cycling. I question if free children would go to a gym class. Our indoor games are table tennis, chess, and cards.

The younger children have a paddling pool, a sand pit, a seesaw and swings. The sand pit is always filled with grubby children on a warm day; and the younger ones are always complaining that the bigger children come and use their sand pit. It appears that we shall have to have a sand pit for the seniors. The sand and mud-pie era lives on longer than we thought it did.

We have had debates and wrangling about our inconsistency in giving prizes for sports. The inconsistency lies in our resolute refusal to introduce prizes or marks into the school curriculum. The argument against rewards is that a thing should be done for its own sake, not for the reward, and that is indeed true. So we are sometimes asked why it is right to give a prize for tennis, but

wrong to give one for geography. I suppose the answer is that a game of tennis is naturally competitive and consists in beating the other fellow. The study of geography is not. If I know geography, I don't really care if the other fellow knows less or more geography than I do. I know that children want prizes for games, and they don't want them for school subjects – at least not in Summerhill. In Summerhill, at any rate, we do not turn our sports winners into heroes. Because Fred is captain of the hockey team does not give his voice added weight in a General School Meeting.

Sports in Summerhill are in their proper place. A boy who never plays a game is never looked down upon and never considered an inferior. "Live and let live" is a motto that finds its ideal expression when children are free to be themselves. I, myself, have little interest in sports, but I am keenly interested in good sportsmanship. If Summerhill teachers had urged, "Come on, lads, get on the field!", sports in Summerhill would have become a perverted thing. Only under freedom to play or not to play can one develop true sportsmanship.

Report of the British Government Inspectors

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Report by H. M. Inspectors

on the

Summerhill School,

Leiston, Suffolk East

Inspected on 20th and 21st June, 1949

NOTES

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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
CURZON STREET
LONDON, W.1.

IND: 38B/6/8.

This School is famous throughout the world as one in which educational experiment is conducted on revolutionary lines and in which the published theories of its Head Master, widely known and discussed, are put into practice. The task of inspecting it proved to be exacting and interesting, exacting because of the wide difference in practice between this School and others with which the inspectors were familiar, and interesting because of the opportunity offered of trying to assess, and not merely to observe, the value of the education given.

All the children in the School are boarders and the annual fee is Pounds 120. In spite of the low salaries paid to the staff, which will be referred to later, the Head Master finds it difficult to run the School at this figure which he is reluctant to increase in view of what he knows about the financial circumstances of the parents. Although the fee is low, compared with that at many independent boarding schools and the staffing ratio is high, the inspectors were a little surprised at the financial difficulties of which the Head Master complained. Only a close scrutiny of accounts and expenses could show whether costs could be cut without loss and it might be a good plan to invite such a scrutiny from some independent and experienced source. In the meantime it may be said that whatever else is deficient, the children are well and plentifully fed.

The principles upon which the School is conducted are well known to the readers of the Head Master's books. Some have gained

wide acceptance since they were first declared, some are exerting a widening influence in schools generally while others are regarded with suspicion and abhorrence by the majority of teachers and parents. While the inspectors tried to follow their normal custom of assessing what is being done in an objective manner, it appears to them impossible to report fairly on the School without some reference to its principles and aims, whether they accept them personally or not.

The main principle upon which the School is run is freedom. This freedom is not quite unqualified. There are a number of laws concerned with safety of life and limb made by the children but approved by the Head Master only if they are sufficiently stringent. Children, for instance, cannot bathe except in the presence of two members of the staff who are lifesavers. The younger children cannot go out of the school grounds without the escort of older ones. These, and similar regulations, are categorical, and transgressors are punished by a system of fines. But the degree of freedom allowed to the children is very much greater than the inspectors had seen in any other school, and the freedom is real. No child, for instance, is obliged to attend any lessons. As will be revealed later, the majority do attend for the most part regularly, but one pupil was actually at this School for 13 years without once attending a lesson and is now an expert toolmaker and precision instrument maker. This extreme case is mentioned to show that the freedom given to children is genuine and is not withdrawn as soon as its results become awkward. The School, however, is not run on anarchist principles. Laws are made by a School parliament, which meets regularly under the chairmanship of a child and is attended by any staff and child who wish. This assembly has unlimited power of discussion and apparently fairly wide ones of legislation. On one occasion it discussed the dismissal of a teacher, showing, it is understood, excellent judgment in its opinions. But such an event is rare, and normally the parliament is concerned with the day-to-day problems of living in a community.

The inspectors were able to attend a session on the first day of

the inspection. The principal matters under discussion were the enforcement of the bedtime regulations made by the parliament and the control of entry into the kitchen at unauthorised times. These problems were discussed with great vigour and freedom of comment, in a reasonably orderly fashion and without respect of persons. Although it seemed that a good deal of time was spent on some rather fruitless lines of argument the Inspectors were disposed to agree with the Head Master that the experience of learning how to organise their own affairs was more valuable to the children than the time lost.

It is evident that the majority of parents and teachers would be most hesitant to grant complete freedom in the matter of sex. Many who would agree with the Head Master up to a point would part company with him there. They would, perhaps, have no difficulty in accepting his view that sex knowledge should be freely given, that sex should be separated from guilt and that many long-accepted inhibitions have done infinite harm, but they would, in a mixed school, take more precautions than he does. It is, obviously, exceedingly difficult to comment fairly upon the results of not doing so. In any community of adolescents sexual feelings must be present and they will certainly not be removed by being surrounded by taboos. They are, in fact, likely to be inflamed. At the same time, as the Head Master agrees, complete freedom to express them is not possible even if it is desirable. All that can safely be said here is that it would be difficult to find a more natural, open-faced, unselfconscious collection of boys and girls, and disasters which some might have expected to occur have not occurred in all the 28 years of the School's existence.

One other highly controversial matter must be mentioned here, the absence of any kind of religious life or instruction. There is no ban on religion, and if the school parliament decided to introduce it, it would presumably be introduced. Similarly, if an individual wanted it, nothing would be done to hinder him. The children all come from families which do not accept orthodox Christian doctrines, and in fact no desire for religion has ever been expressed. Without doing any violence to the term it may

safely be said that many Christian principles are put into practice in this School and that there is much in it of which any Christian can approve. The effects of the complete absence of religious instruction could obviously not be judged in a two days' inspection.

It seemed necessary to write this introductory account of the School before proceeding to the more usual material of a report. It is against this background of real freedom that the organization and activities of the School must be viewed.

Organization

There are 70 children between the ages of 4 and 16. They live in four separate buildings, which will be described in the section on premises. In this section their education in the narrower sense of the word will be described. There are six Forms organised very loosely according to age but with considerable weighting according to ability. These Forms meet according to a quite ordinary and orthodox timetable of five 40-minute periods on five mornings a week. They have definite places of meeting and definite teachers to teach them. Where they differ from similar Forms in ordinary schools is that there is not the slightest guarantee that everyone, or indeed anyone, will turn up. The inspectors were at much pain to discover what in fact happened, both by attending classes and by inquiry. It appears that attendance increases in regularity as the children grow older and that once a child has decided to attend a particular class he usually does so regularly. It was much more difficult to discover whether the balance of work and subjects was a good one. As many of the children take the School Certificate, their choice is controlled by examination requirements as the examination approaches; but the younger ones are completely free to choose. On the whole the results of this system are unimpressive. It is true that the children work with a will and an interest that is most refreshing but their achievements are rather meagre. This is not, in the inspectors' opinion, an inevitable result of the system, but rather of the system working badly. Among its causes appears

to be:

1. The lack of a good teacher of juniors who can supervise and integrate their work and activities.
2. The quality of the teaching generally. The teaching of infants is, as far as could be judged, enlightened and effective and there is some good teaching in the upper Forms, but the lack of a good junior teacher who can inspire and stimulate the 8, 9 and 10 year olds is most apparent. Some surprisingly old-fashioned and formal methods are in use, and when the children reach the age at which they are ready for advanced work they suffer from considerable disadvantages and present their teachers with severe problems. The teaching of the older children is a good deal better and in one or two cases really good.
3. The children lacked guidance. It is commendable that a fifteen-year-old girl should decide that she would like to learn French and German, two languages that she had previously neglected, but to allow her to attempt this task in two periods for German and three for French a week is surely a little irresponsible. The child's progress was slow in spite of her admirable determination and she ought to have been allowed much more time. It appears to the inspectors that some kind of tutorial system might be developed to assist children in planning their work.
4. Lack of privacy. "Summerhill is a difficult place in which to study." The words are the Head Master's. It is a hive of activity and there is much to capture the attention and interest. No child has a room to himself and there are no rooms specifically set apart for quiet study. A determined person could no doubt always find somewhere, but the necessary degree of determination is rare. Few children remain in the School beyond the age of 16 though there is nothing to prevent them. There are and have been some extremely able and intelligent children at Summerhill and it must be doubted whether, academically, it is giving them all that they need.

At the same time there is some excellent work done wherever the quality of the teaching is good. The Art is outstanding. It was difficult to detect any significant difference between the painting of Summerhill children and that of children from many much more traditional schools, but by any standard the work was good. Some good craftwork in great variety was to be seen. The installation of a kiln was going on during the inspection and the pots awaiting first firing were excellent in form. The provision of a treadle-loom would allow another craft, which has made promising beginnings, to develop. A good deal of creative written work is done, including a Wall Newspaper, and plays, which are written and acted every term.

A good deal was heard of these plays, but it is apparently not customary to preserve the scripts so it was not possible to judge of their quality. Recently a performance of *Macbeth* was given in the small School theatre, all the sets and dresses being homemade. It was interesting to learn that this was decided upon by the children against the wishes of the Head Master who prefers them to act plays of their own writing.

Physical Education is carried on in accordance with the principles of the School. There are no compulsory games or physical training. Football, cricket, and tennis are all played with enthusiasm, football it is understood with considerable skill owing to the presence on the staff of an expert. The children arrange matches with other schools in the town. On the day visited there was a cricket match against the neighbouring modern school, in which Summerhill had decided not to play their best player having learned that their opponents' best player was ill.

A great deal of time is spent out of doors, and the children lead an active, healthy life and look like it. Only a close and expert investigation could reveal how much, if anything, they lose from the absence of more formal Physical Education.

Premises

The School is situated in grounds which give ample scope for recreation. The main building, which was formerly a private

house, provides for school purposes a hall, a dining room, sick rooms, an art room, a small craft room and the girls' dormitories. The youngest children sleep in a cottage, where their classroom is also situated. The dormitories for the other boys and the remaining classrooms are in huts in the garden, where are also the bedrooms of some members of the staff. All these rooms have doors opening directly to the garden. The classrooms are small, though not unsuitable, as the teaching is done in small groups. One of the dormitories represents a notable building effort by the boys and staff: it was built as a sanatorium for which apparently no use has arisen. The sleeping accommodation is somewhat primitive when judged by normal standards, but it is understood that the health record of the School is good, and the provision may be regarded as satisfactory. There are sufficient bathrooms available.

While these garden premises are at first sight unusually primitive and public, they do in fact seem to be eminently well suited for creating the atmosphere of a permanent holiday camp, which is an important feature of the School. Moreover they gave the opportunity of seeing how the children pursued their studies entirely undisturbed by the many visitors, who were present on the day of the inspection.

Staff

The staff are paid Pounds 8 a month with board and lodging. To find men and women who not only believe in the principles of the School but are sufficiently mature and well balanced to be able to live on equal terms with children, who are well qualified academically and highly skilled as teachers and then to persuade them to work for Pounds 8 a month, must be a considerable task for the Head Master. Service at Summerhill is not a recommendation in many quarters, and the necessary combination of conviction, disinterestedness, character and ability is rare. It has already been pointed out that the staff are not equal to all the demands yet they are very much better than the

staff of many independent schools paying much higher salaries. They include an M.A. (Hons.) Edinburgh in English, an M.A. and B.Sc. of Liverpool, a Cambridge Wrangler, a B.A. (Hons.) London in French and German, and a Cambridge B.A. in History. Four have teacher's qualifications. This does not include the teachers of art and crafts who have foreign qualifications and are among the best on the staff.

While they need strengthening here and there, the present staff is far from being weak and if, by attendance at courses and visits of observation, they could widen and refresh their experience and bring themselves up to date, they could give a very good account of themselves. At the same time it is too much to hope that a salary of Pounds 96 a year can go on attracting to this School the teachers that it needs and it seems clear that this difficulty will have to be squarely faced.

The Head Master is a man of deep conviction and sincerity. His faith and patience must be inexhaustible. He has the rare power of being a strong personality without dominating. It is impossible to see him in his School without respecting him even if one disagrees with or even dislikes some of his ideas. He has a sense of humour, a warm humanity and a strong common sense, which would make him a good Head Master anywhere, and his happy family life is shared with the children who are presumably as capable of profiting by example as any others.

He takes a broad view of education as the means of learning how to live abundantly and, though he would admit the force of some at least of the criticisms in this Report, he would feel that his School must stand or fall rather by the kind of children that it allows its pupils to grow into, than by the specific skills and abilities that it teaches them. On this basis of evaluation it may be said:

1. That the children are full of life and zest. Of boredom and apathy there was no sign. An atmosphere of contentment and tolerance pervades the School. The affection with which it is regarded by its old pupils is evidence of its success. An average number of 30 attend the end-of-term plays and

dances and many make the School their headquarters during the holidays.

It may be worth noting at this point that, whereas in its early days the School was attended almost entirely by "problem" children, the intake is now from a fairly normal cross-section of the population.

2. That the children's manners are delightful. They may lack, here and there, some of the conventions of manners, but their friendliness, ease and naturalness and their total lack of shyness and self-consciousness made them very easy, pleasant people to get on with.
3. That initiative, responsibility and integrity are all encouraged by the system and that, so far as such things can be judged, they are in fact being developed.
4. That such evidence as is available does not suggest that the products of Summerhill are unable to fit into ordinary society when they leave School. Information such as follows does not of course tell the whole story but it indicates that Summerhill education is not necessarily hostile to worldly success. Old pupils have become a Captain in the R.E.M.E. [Royal Electrical/Mechanical Engineers], a Battery Q.M.S. [Quartermaster Sergeant], a bomber pilot and Squadron Leader, a Nursery Nurse, an Air Hostess, a clarinet player in the Grenadier Guards Band, a Beit Fellow of the Imperial College, a ballet dancer at Sadler's Wells, a radio operator and contributor of short stories to an important national daily newspaper, and a market research investigator with a big firm. They have taken the following degrees etc., among others: B.A. Hons. Econ. Cambridge; Scholar Royal College of Art; B.Sc., 1st Class Hons. Physics, London; B.A. Hons. History, Cambridge; B.A., 1st Class Hons. Modern Language, Manchester.
5. The Head Master's educational views make this School an exceptionally suitable place for the type of education in which such fundamental work is based on children's interests and

in which class work is not unduly governed by examination requirements. To have created a situation in which academic education of the most intelligent kind could flourish is an achievement, but in fact it is not flourishing and a great opportunity is thus being lost. With better teaching at all stages, and above all the junior stage, it might be made to flourish, and an experiment of profound interest be given its full chance to prove itself.

There remain in the mind some doubts both about principles and about methods. A closer and longer acquaintance with the School would perhaps remove some of these and possibly intensify others. What cannot be doubted is that a piece of fascinating and valuable educational research is going on here which it would do all educationists good to see.

Notes on His Majesty's Inspectors' Report

We were indeed lucky to have two broad-minded inspectors sent to us. We dropped "mister" straightaway. During the two days' visit, we had quite a few friendly arguments.

I felt that school inspectors were accustomed to picking up a French book in front of a class and quizzing the class to find out what the pupils knew. I reasoned that that kind of training and experience would be of little use in inspecting the worth of a school in which lessons were not the prime criterion. I said to one of the inspectors, "You really can't inspect Summerhill because our criteria are happiness, sincerity, balance and sociability." He grinned and said they'd have a go at it anyway. And both our inspectors made a remarkable adaptation, and obviously enjoyed themselves in the process.

Odd things struck them. Said one, "What a delightful shock it is to enter a classroom and find the children not taking any notice of you, after years of seeing classes jump to attention." Yes, we were lucky to have the two of them.

But to the report itself: "...the inspectors were a little surprised

at the financial difficulties..." The answer lies mostly in bad debts, yet that is not the whole story. The report mentions an annual fee of Pounds 120, but since then we have tried to cope with high prices throughout the years by raising the average annual fee to about Pounds 250 (about \$700). This does not allow anything for repairs to the buildings, for purchasing new apparatus, and so on. For one thing, damages are heavier in Summerhill than in a disciplined school. Summerhill children are allowed to go through their gangster period, and consequently more furniture is destroyed.

The report says that we have seventy children. Today, we are down to forty-five, a fact that offsets to some extent the rise in fees.

The report speaks of the poor teaching of our juniors. We have always had that difficulty. Even with an excellent teacher, it is difficult to get through the ordinary public school work if only for the reason that the children are free to do other things. If children in a public school at the age of ten or twelve could climb trees or dig holes instead of going to lessons, their standards would be like ours. But we accept the fact that our boys and girls will have a period during which there must be a lower standard of learning, because we think that play is of greater importance during this period in their lives than learning.

Even if we assume that the backwardness in lessons of our juniors is important, it is still true that a year later these same juniors, then turned seniors, passed the Oxford exams with very good grades. These pupils were examined in a total of thirty-nine subjects, an average of $6\frac{1}{2}$ subjects for each pupil. The results were twenty-four *Very Good*, which is better than 70 percent. In all the thirty-nine exams, there was only one failure. The handicap of not being up to regular school standard when a boy is a junior in Summerhill does not necessarily mean that such a pupil will be at a low standard when he is a senior.

For my part I have always liked late starters. I have seen quite a few bright children who could recite Milton at four blossom

forth as drunkards and loafers at twenty-four. I like to meet the man who at the age of fifty-three says he doesn't quite know what he is to be in life. I have a hunch that the boy who knows at seven just what he wants to be may be an inferior who will have a conservative attitude to life later on.

The report says: "To have created a situation in which academic education of the most intelligent kind could flourish is an achievement, but in fact it is not flourishing and a great opportunity is thus being lost." That is the only paragraph in which the two inspectors did not rise above their academic preoccupations. Our system flourishes when a child wants an academic education, as our exam results show. But perhaps the inspectors' paragraph means that better junior teaching would result in more children wanting to take matriculation exams.

Is it not time that we put academic education in its place? Academic education too often tries to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. I wonder what an academic education would have done for some of our old Summerhill pupils – a dress designer, a hairdresser, a male ballet dancer, some musicians, some children's nurses, some mechanics, some engineers, and half a dozen artists.

Yet it is a fair report, a sincere one, a generous one. I am publishing it simply because it is good that the reading public should see a view of Summerhill that is not my own. Note that the report does not carry any form of official recognition by the Ministry of Education. Personally, I do not mind, but recognition would have been welcome because of two factors: the teachers would have come under the State Superannuation Scheme, and parents would have a better chance of getting aid from local Councils.

I should like to put on record the fact that Summerhill has never had any difficulty with the Ministry of Education. Any inquiry, any visit of mine to the Ministry, has been met with courtesy and friendliness. My only setback came when the Minister refused permission for a Scandinavian parent to import and erect prefabs, free of charge, just after the war.

When I think of the authoritative interest taken by European governments in private schools, I am glad I live and work in a country that allows so much scope to private venture. I show tolerance of children; the Ministry shows tolerance of my school. I am content.

The Future of Summerhill

Now that I am in my seventy-sixth year, I feel that I shall not write another book about education, for I have little new to say. But what I have to say has something in my favour; I have not spent the last forty years writing down theories about children. Most of what I have written has been based on observing children, living with them. True, I have derived inspiration from Freud, Homer Lane, and others; but gradually, I have tended to drop theories when the test of reality proved them invalid.

It is a queer job, that of an author. Like broadcasting, an author sends out some sort of message to people he does not see, people he cannot count. My public has been a special one. What might be called the official public knows me not. The British Broadcasting Company would never think of inviting me to broadcast on education. No university, my own of Edinburgh included, would ever think of offering me an honorary degree. When I lecture to Oxford and Cambridge students, no professor, no don comes to hear me. I think I am rather proud of these facts, feeling that to be acknowledged by the officials would suggest that I was out-of-date.

At one time, I resented the fact that *The London Times* would never publish any letter I sent in; but today, I feel their refusal is a compliment.

I am not claiming that I have gotten away from the wish for recognition; yet age brings changes – especially changes in values. Recently I lectured to seven hundred Swedes, packing a hall built for six hundred, and I had no feeling of elation or conceit. I thought I was really indifferent until I asked myself the question,

"How would you have felt if the audience had consisted of ten?" The answer was "damned annoyed", so that if positive pride is lacking, negative chagrin is not.

Ambition dies with age. Recognition is a different matter. I do not like to see a book with the title of, say, *The History of Progressive Schools*, when such a book ignores my work. I have never yet met anyone who was honestly indifferent to recognition.

There is a comical aspect about age. For years I have been trying to reach the young – young students, young teachers, young parents – seeing age as a brake on progress. Now that I am old – one of the Old Men I have preached against so long – I feel differently. Recently, when I talked to three hundred students in Cambridge, I felt myself the youngest person in the hall. I did. I said to them: "Why do you need an old man like me to come and tell you about freedom?" Nowadays, I do not think in terms of youth and age. I feel that years have little to do with one's thinking. I know lads of twenty who are ninety, and men of sixty who are twenty. I am thinking in terms of freshness, enthusiasm, of lack of conservatism, of deadness, of pessimism.

I do not know if I have mellowed or not. I suffer fools less gladly than I used to do, am more irritated by boring conversations, and less interested in people's personal histories. But then, I've had far too many imposed on me these last thirty years. I also find less interest in things, and seldom want to buy anything. I haven't looked in a clothes shop window for years. And even my beloved tool shops in Euston Road do not attract me nowadays.

If I have now reached the stage when children's noise tires me more than it used to, I cannot say that age has brought impatience. I can still see a child do all the wrong things, live out all the old complexes, knowing that in good time the child will be a good citizen. Age lessens fear. But age also lessens courage. Years ago, I could easily tell a boy who threatened to jump a high window if he did not get his own way, to go on and jump. I am not so sure I could do so today.

A question that is often put to me is, "But isn't Summerhill a one-man show? Could it carry on without you?" Summerhill is by no means a one-man show. In the day-by-day working of the school, my wife and the teachers are just as important as I am. *It is the idea of non-interference with the growth of the child and non-pressure on the child that has made the school what it is.*

Is Summerhill known throughout the world? Hardly. And only to a comparative handful of educators. Summerhill is best known in Scandinavia. For thirty years, we have had pupils from Norway, Sweden, and Denmark – sometimes twenty at a time. We have also had pupils from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Canada. My books have been translated into many languages, including Japanese, Hebrew, Hindustani, and Gujarati. Summerhill has had some influence in Japan. Over thirty years ago, we had a visit from Seishi Shimoda, an outstanding educator. All his translations of my books have sold rather well; and I hear that teachers in Tokyo meet to discuss our methods. Mr. Shimoda again spent a month with us in 1958. A principal of a school in the Sudan tells me that Summerhill is of great interest to some teachers there.

I put down these facts about translations, visits, and correspondence without illusions. Stop a thousand people in Oxford Street and ask them what the word Summerhill conveys to them. Very likely none of them would know the name. One should cultivate a sense of humour about one's importance or lack of it.

I do not think that the world will use the Summerhill method of education for a very long time – if it ever uses it. The world may find a better way. Only an empty windbag would assume that his work is the last word on the subject. The world must find a better way. For politics will not save humanity. It never has done so. Most political newspapers are bristling with hate, hate all the time. Too many are socialistic because they hate the rich instead of loving the poor.

How can we have happy homes with love in them when the home is a tiny corner of a homeland that shows hate socially in a hundred ways? You can see why I cannot look upon education as a matter of exams and classes and learning. The school evades the basic issue: All the Greek and math and history in the world will not help to make the home more loving, the child free from inhibitions, the parent free of neurosis.

The future of Summerhill itself may be of little import. But the future of the Summerhill idea is of the greatest importance to humanity. New generations must be given the chance to grow in freedom. The bestowal of freedom is the bestowal of love. And only love can save the world.