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PELICAN BOOKS

SUMMERHILL

A. S. Neill was born in 1883 in Forfar, Scotland, and gained his M.A. degree in English from Edinburgh University. For twelve years he taught in Scottish State schools, then spent two years at King Alfred's school, Hampstead. In 1921 he founded, with others, an international school in Hellerau, Dresden, which afterwards moved to Sonntagberg in Austria. Returning to England, he continued the school in a house on a hill at Lyme Regis called Summerhill, a name he kept when he moved to his present address at Leiston in Suffolk.

A. S. Neill is married and has a daughter. He has lectured in South Africa (in 1936), in Scandinavia, and in the U.S.A. as well as in England, and he holds honorary degrees from the universities of Exeter and Newcastle. His books include *A Dominie's Log* (1915), *The Problem Child* (1926), *The Problem Parent* (1932), *The Last Man Alive* (1938), *The Problem Teacher* (1939), *Hearts, Not Heads* (1945), *The Problem Family* (1948), *The Free Child* (1953) and *Talking of Summerhill* (1967).

He has been influenced not by educationists but by psychologists such as Freud, Reich and Homer Lane; Summerhill's self-government derives from Lane's *Little Commonwealth*. Neill describes himself as 'only a doer, not a profound thinker'; others have called him a genius.

THULB Jena



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PREFACE

THIS book is a compilation of extracts from four of my books selected by my American publisher Harold Hart. One of the original books was *That Dreadful School*, written in 1936, so that there may be parts of *Summerhill* that I would not have written today - minor parts, for I have not changed anything fundamental in my philosophy of education or of life. Summerhill today is in essentials what it was when founded in 1921. Self-government for the pupils and staff, freedom to go to lessons or stay away, freedom to play for days or weeks or years if necessary, freedom from any indoctrination whether religious or moral or political, freedom from character moulding.

Where I have changed is in my attitude to psychology. When my school was in Germany and then Austria (from 1921 to 1924) I was in the midst of the then new psycho-analytical movement. Like so many other young fools I thought that Utopia was in sight. Make the unconscious conscious and the world will be rid of its hates and crimes and wars, so the answer was psycho-analysis. When I came back to England to a house called Summerhill in Lyme Regis I had only five pupils. In three years the number grew to twenty-seven. Most were problem children sent in despair by parents and schools - thieves, destroyers, bullies of both sexes. I 'cured' them by analysis I thought, but discovered that the ones who refused to come to my analysis sessions were cured also, and had to conclude that freedom, not analysis, was the active agent. Luckily, for analysis is not the answer to the sickness of humanity.

I am rather weary of talking about the past, but naturally rather chary about guessing about the future. I see signs of progress. The modern primary schools can be excellent. One I saw in Leicester was a great contrast to the primary school of forty years ago; happy faces, a buzz of natural conversation, each child busy on his or her own job. The next step is the application of such free methods to the secondary modern and comprehensive school, an almost impossible task within the examination system.

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot
visit, not even in your dreams.

You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like
you,
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are
sent forth.

.....
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness.

KAHILIL GIBRAN

I see signs of stagnation, even of retrogression. Over 80 per cent of English teachers want to retain the cane, and most likely the percentage in favour of the tawse in Scotland would be similar. More and more education is geared to O and A levels.

One great tragedy is that school learning has little contact with life after leaving school. How many old pupils read Milton or Hardy or Shaw? How many listen to Beethoven and Bach? School leaves the emotions alone or at least school subjects do, so that the emotional side of a child is catered for by outside factors... TV, pop bands, bingo, football, the picture papers, the sexy magazines. And as these are controlled and exploited commercially the poor teacher hasn't a chance. What staff member could arouse a screaming Beatie cheer? A belly-wagging maths teacher would awaken a whole school to the delights of surds. This is to me the most urgent feature in education, the antithesis between an old Victorian curriculum of subjects and a new age of youthful longings for a full life.

I'd like to feel delighted about the rebellion of the hippies, the flower boys, but I cannot. They are challenging everything that does not matter... length of hair, style of clothes, ways of speaking, but they are not challenging the education system, the teaching of religion in a country that is not Christian, a land of R.C. and Protestant schools that bears children, hypocritically combining the advice of that old fool Solomon with that of Christ, 'Suffer the little children...'. The religious parents and teachers see that they suffer all right.

It may be different in the U.S.A. I think that the hippies of Berkeley University are challenging real and vital questions - Vietnam, race hatred, the dollar standard of status. A cynic might say that all this challenging is fine but in twenty years the flower and hippie boys will be staunch conservatives.

That society is sick no one can deny; that society does not want to lose its sickness is also undeniable. It fights every humane effort to better itself. It fought votes for women, abolition of capital punishment; it fought against the reform of our cruel divorce laws, our cruel laws against homosexuals. In a way our task as teachers is to fight against a mass psychology, a sheep psychology where every animal has the same coating and the

same ba ba... baring the black sheep, the challengers. Our schools have their shepherds... not always gentle ones. Our sheep pupils are clad in their nice uniforms. I don't want to carry the metaphor too far, but I can suggest that the wool-gathering of many a bored pupil is symbolically fitting.

Education should produce children who are at once individuals and community persons, and self-government without doubt does this. In an ordinary school obedience is a virtue, so much so that few in later life can challenge anything. Thousands of students in teacher training are full of enthusiasm about their coming vocation. A year after leaving college they sit in staff-rooms and think that education means subjects and discipline. True they dare not challenge or they will get the sack, but few challenge if only in their minds. A lifetime of moulding is hard to break. Another generation grows up and it imposes on the new generation the old taboos and morals and pedagogical insanities, the dear old vicious circle. One sad fact is that the indoctrinated masses come to accept evils for granted. Napoleon? Difficult to get worked up about kids incinerated far away in Asia. Race hatred? O, natural; you can't mix races. There old Adolf was right. I know that Jesus told us to love our neighbours but he didn't tell us to love niggers, did he? (Sounds like Alf Garnett.)

It is most difficult to keep thinking of schools and teachers. Think of the book *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, by Selby. It was banned by law in Britain. The banning was another instance of official Bumbledom, of ignorant puritans. The book is full of four letter words, of sexual perversions, of humanity at its lowest, but as a picture of one aspect of our boasted culture I think that it should be read by millions. It really terrifies. It shows the other side of American Cadillac-status-seeking-anti-life-commercial-life, shows what slums and a bad education and commercial exploitation can do to human beings. And in one degree or other these conditions obtain in every city in the world. They are the corollary of our welfare state, our 'never had it so good'. A culture that is not there... I make the guess that our TV programmes are geared to an average emotional age of eight. What is wrong? Can it be the big bomb hanging over us? Let us eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. Is it not

more likely to be the new materialism where pleasure is supposed to spring from cars and electric kitchens and night clubs and bingo and all the other infantile idiosyncrasies? We live in a mean street, we hippie lads; we have our gang. Let the other fools work and earn the dough to get a Jaguar. We can always pinch one and take the damnes out.

I am groping. I try in vain to understand why mankind does so much evil. I cannot believe that evil is inborn, that there is original sin. I have seen too many hateful kids become good kids under freedom and adult approval. But then why does an originally good humanity make a sick and unjust and cruel world? I know from experience that children brought up with self-government and freedom will never hate Jews or negroes; they will not bear their children nor make them guilty about sex; they will never frighten their children with tales of a punishing God. I hasten to add that other schoolmasters could make similar claims. I ask myself the question: If Summerhill can produce people who are not inclined to hate and cruelty and war and prejudice, why cannot the whole world have schools that have like results? Two thousand years ago the people chose Barabbas and they crucified Christ. The people today make the same choice. Why? I wish I knew.

The great ones never answered the riddle of humanity, the Socrates, the Christs, the Freuds, the Darwins, the Popes and the Bishops. And we, the little ones, cannot find an answer either. The diagnosis we know, 'Thwart love and you get hate, but why we thwart love we do not know. Freud and Reich say because of fear and hate of sex; Adler would have claimed that the wish for power overwhelmed the wish to love. Yet is it necessary that we know origins? False Freudianism assumed that to be made conscious of the original trauma automatically cured a complex, ignoring the fact that complexes are caused by a long continuous process of repression in childhood. In its problem days Summerhill crooks went out cured without ever having discovered the roots of the compulsion to steal. Humanity might be cured of its sickness if we could get rid of the compulsive family, the disciplined school, the anti-life religions. And what a big 'If' that is. Still it is either that 'If' or the doom of

humanity whether by bomb or poisoned earth and air or poisoned emotions.

Teacher told her class about Nero, how he killed his mother andiddled while Rome was burning.

'Now children, after what I have told you, do you think that Nero was a good man or a bad man? You, Billy?'

'Please, miss, he never did nothing to me.'

Billy's philosophy rules the world today. Floods and earthquakes in India or China? Turn the page to what Sheffield United did on Saturday. 'Am I my brother's keeper?' Of course not; what do we elect M.P.s for? Or headmasters? Or parsons? Or the Army? Maybe there is original sin after all... the sin of opting out. If Summerhill has any message at all it is: Thou shalt not opt out. Fight world sickness, not with drugs like moral teachings and punishments but with natural means - approval, tenderness, tolerance... I hesitate to use the word love, for it has become almost a dirty word like so many honest and clean Anglo Saxon four letter words.

A WORD OF INTRODUCTION

IN psychology, no man knows very much. The inner forces of human life are still largely hidden from us.

Since Freud's genius made it alive, psychology has gone far; but it is still a new science, mapping out the coast of an unknown continent. Fifty years hence, psychologists will very likely smile at our ignorance of today.

Since I left education and took up child psychology, I have had all sorts of children to deal with - incendiaries, thieves, liars, bed-wetters, and bad-tempered children. Years of intensive work in child training has convinced me that I know comparatively little of the forces that motivate life. I am convinced, however, that parents who have had to deal with only their own children know much less than I do.

It is because I believe that a difficult child is nearly always made difficult by wrong treatment at home that I dare address parents.

What is the province of psychology? I suggest the word *curing*. But what kind of curing? I do not want to be cured of my habit of choosing the colours orange and black; nor do I want to be cured of smoking; nor of my liking for a bottle of beer. No teacher has the right to cure a child of making noises on a drum. The only curing that should be practised is the curing of unhappiness.

The difficult child is the child who is unhappy. He is at war with himself; and in consequence, he is at war with the world.

The difficult adult is in the same boat. No happy man ever disturbed a meeting, or preached a war, or lynched a Negro. No happy woman ever nagged her husband or her children. No happy man ever committed a murder or a theft. No happy employer ever frightened his employees.

All crimes, all hatreds, all wars can be reduced to unhappiness. This book is an attempt to show how unhappiness arises, how it ruins human lives, and how children can be reared so that much of this unhappiness will never arise.

More than that, this book is the story of a place - Summerhill

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INTRODUCTION

- where children's unhappiness is cured and, more important,
where children are reared in happiness.

A. S. N.

I

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 town of Leiston, in Suffolk, 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 (1968) we have two Scandinavians, and forty-four Americans.

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 to 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, 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, 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 over 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 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 kindergarten's 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 lessons 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 for each) - Hand (3) . . . only two got the third right - the standard of measure for a horse. Brass (4) . . . metal, creak, top army officers, department of an orchestra. Translate Hamlet's To-be-or-not-to-be speech into Summerhillsese.

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 acclimatized 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 professor of 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 master. 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 five 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 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. Klein, the chemistry man, is Allan. Other members of the staff are known as Harry, and Ulla, and Daphne. 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 grownups 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, it's only Neill,' and the fun began again at once. When I explained that I was trying to write a book down-

stairs, they showed concern and at once agreed to chuck the noise. Their scurrying came from the suspicion that their bed-time officer (one of their own age) was on their track.

I emphasize 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 seven-teen 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 me and my staff.

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 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 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 kindergartners and juniors lunch at 12:30. 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 seniors 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 cinema 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 cinemas 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 brasswork - 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 grownups.

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 art work, 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 failings, 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 spoiled 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 spoiled 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 completely to 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 cinema night?' 'Why don't I get a P.L. [Private Lesson]?' 'Have you seen Pam?' 'Where's Eva?' 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 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 overprotest 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 theorize 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 spies 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 Mummy and Daddy were also on their side.

An American visitor, a professor of psychology, criticized 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 connexion 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 realize 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 into a harmonious unit, 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. Having compromise as I do, I have to compromise here, realizing 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 ap-

prove 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 civilized 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? Handwork 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-grownup grownup 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 realizing 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 R's; the rest should be tools and clay and sports and theatre and paint and freedom.

Most of the school work 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 ungrumpiness 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 realized 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, 'Hurray! 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 exams 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 really to 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 mightily 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 dogmatize 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 the child 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 river-bank 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 than 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 lorry 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 week-ends, 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 fictions, 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. Bartel, 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 sawmill.' He is now a practising doctor in Essex.

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 cabinet-maker; some actors and actresses; some scientists and mathematicians who may yet do original work. I think that for our numbers - 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 adaption to freedom. If a child is all tied up inside, he cannot adapt himself to being free.

The P.L.s 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 cigarette packet 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.L.s? 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, 'Righto, 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 Mummy and especially about her little brother. She says he is a very silly little ass.

'He must be,' I agree. 'Do you think that Mummy 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 doctors,

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.L.s. The ideal circumstance under which to have regular sessions is when a child demands a P.L. Some of the older ones demanded P.L.s; 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.L.s, Charlie stopped coming to me. I asked him why. 'Don't need P.L.s 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 criticized 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.L.s.

'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.L.s, 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.'

'Ann 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.' (*In-created 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.L.s to thieves and have seen

resulting cures, but I have had thieves who refused to come to P.L.s. 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.L.s. 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.L.s 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 Mummy'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 so 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 carny words at a mother symbol.

But to be fair, I must say that it is only during a certain period that girls are carny 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.L.s, 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 per cent.'

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 per cent.'

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 sweet.

'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.L.s,' 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.L.s 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.L.s. 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.L.s 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.L.s 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.L.s 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.L.s. 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. Counterarguments 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 scuffle 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 meals, 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-centred 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 fathered 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 of all 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 week-end 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 asks, '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 showing 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 realize 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 cinema.

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 harsh 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 cinema. 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 last 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 adults a quiet life. On the other hand they do not give the children an overnoisy 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 so 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 criticized. As for the condemnation by the school meeting, one simply cannot sacrifice other children for 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 visualize Summerhill without it. It has always been popular. It is our show piece 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 towels in them, but