# The Value of Voluntary Simplicity

Originally published in August, 1936
in the Indian Journal *Visva-Bharati Quarterly*

By Richard B. Gregg

Voluntary simplicity of living has been advocated and practiced by the founders of most of the great religions—Jesus, Buddha, Lao Tse, Moses, and Mohammed—also by many saints and wise men such as St. Francis, John Woolman, the Hindu *rishis*, the Hebrew prophets, the Moslem *sufis*; by many artists and scientists; and by such great modern leaders as Lenin and Gandhi. It has been followed also by members of military armies and monastic orders—organizations which have had great and prolonged influence on the world. Simplicity has always been one of the testimonies of the Mennonites and of the Society of Friends.

Clearly, then, there is or has been some vitally important element in this observance. But the vast quantities of things given to us by modern mass production and commerce, the developments of science, and the complexities of existence in modern industrialized countries have raised widespread doubts as to the validity of this practice and principle. Our present "mental climate" is not favourable either to a clear understanding of the value of simplicity or to its practice. Simplicity seems to be a foible of saints and occasional geniuses, but not something for the rest of us.

What about it?

Before going further, let us get a somewhat clearer idea of what we are discussing. We are not here considering asceticism in the sense of a suppression of instincts. What we mean by voluntary simplicity is not so austere and rigid. Simplicity is a relative matter, depending on climate, customs, culture, the character of the individual. For example, in India, except for those who are trying to imitate Westerners, everyone, wealthy as well as poor, sits on the floor, and there are no chairs. A large number of Americans, poor as well as rich, think they have to own a motor car, and many others consider a telephone exceedingly important. A person in a certain rank of society considers it necessary to have several kinds of shoes, of hats, or other articles of clothing

for purposes other than cleanliness or comfortable temperature. What is simplicity for an American would be far from simple to a Chinese peasant.

Voluntary simplicity involves both inner and outer condition. It means singleness of purpose, sincerity and honesty within, as well as avoidance of exterior clutter, of many possessions irrelevant to the chief purpose of life. It means an ordering and guiding of our energy and our desires, a partial restraint in some directions in order to secure greater abundance of life in other directions. It involves a deliberate organization of life for a purpose. For example, the men who tried to climb Mount Everest concentrated their thoughts and energies on the planning of that expedition for several years, and in the actual attempt discarded every ounce of equipment not surely needed for that one purpose.

Of course, as different people have different purposes in life, what is relevant to the purpose of one person might not be relevant to the purpose of another. Yet it is easy to see that our individual lives and community life would be much changed if every one organized and graded and simplified his purposes so that one purpose would easily dominate all the others, and if each person then re-organized his outer life in accordance with this new arrangement of purposes—discarding possessions and activities irrelevant to the main purpose. The degree of simplification is a matter for each individual to settle for himself, but the meaning of the principle is now perhaps clear enough for discussion, even though the applications of it may differ. I will not attempt more exact definition at this point, trusting to the discussion to clarify further the meaning of the topic.

## Doubts

Since an emphasis on simplicity seems nowadays to many people a mistake, let us consider their doubts before we go further.

First of all, modern machine production seems to have solved the age-old condition of scarcity of the material things needed for life. Science and invention, industrialism, commerce, and transportation have made it possible to produce and distribute more and better food, clothing, housing materials, tools and equipment, comforts, and luxuries than mankind has ever had hitherto. For an American, a stroll through a ten-cent store, a chain-grocery store, and a department store, followed by a

perusal of a catalogue of some of the large mail-order stores, is convincing on that score, to say nothing of what meets our eye on every street. Henry Ford's idea that civilization progresses by the increase in the number of people's desires and their satisfaction looks sensible. The vast quantities of paper and ink devoted to advertisements add emphasis to that belief. The financial and social stability of every industrialized country seems to be founded on the expectation of an ever-expanding market for mass production. Russia, as well as capitalistic nations, has this aim. The whole world appears to be geared to this concept. Isn't it an anachronism to talk of simplicity in such an age? Is it not our duty to rise above and master the increasing complexity of life? Without irreverence, is not that what God has done in the creation and evolution of this universe?

Furthermore, to revert to simplicity would pretty surely mean for most people the re-assumption of a vast amount of drudgery which our modern complex appliances handle for us. Complex as our paraphernalia is, nevertheless, does it not protect us against famine, disease, and extremes of temperature? Do not our tractors, electric lights, gas stoves, water pipes, electric refrigerators, house heating, airplanes, steam and motor transport, telephones, lift us beyond the threshold of animal existence, remove from us oppressive fears, give us a sense of security and at least the possibility of leisure? We must surely have leisure if civilization is to advance.

Another doubt comes readily to the mind of every parent. We all want our children to have every advantage, to be healthier and stronger than we have been, to learn more than we did, to make fewer mistakes, to have better characters, to see more of the world, to be able to live fuller and richer lives, to have more power and beauty and joy. How can they in this day acquire the necessary training and education for this, how can they come into contact and association with many people and many beautiful and stimulating things and scenes if we, their parents, cramp our lives and theirs by resorting to simplicity? Do not even their bodies require a great variety of foods in order to be healthy? How is the mind to grow unless it is fed unceasingly from a wide variety of sources? Surely beauty is a most important element in the life of both individuals and communities, and how can we have beauty if we are limited by a drab, severe, and monotonous simplicity of form, line, color, material, texture, and tone?

Again, many people who doubt the validity of simplicity would say that if it were put into effect it would extend itself beyond the lives of individuals and claim application to group affairs. They would then naturally say, if many people "go simple," who is going to carry on the necessary complex work of the world? Governments, industries, and institutions have to be carried on and they are highly complex. Are these people who so greatly desire simplicity going to dodge their share in the complex tasks of society? In most organizations power is exercised over people. Is it right for some people to try to escape wielding that power? Who is to wield such power wisely if not those with a conscience? Is it not the duty of sensitive people to grasp power and direct its use as well as possible? Is this cry for simplicity only a camouflage for irresponsibility, for lack of courage or failure of energy?

These questions suggest that in this idea of simplicity there may be a danger to our community life. The existence of a large nation or a large city is nowadays inherently complex. To insist on simplicity and really put it into effect would seem to mean eventually destroying large organizations, and that means our present mode of community and national life.

So much for the doubts. Perhaps there are others, but these at least are weighty.

## Answers to Doubts

Let us consider the first major doubt, to the effect that modern science and inventions have made possible a boundless supply of goods and foods of all sorts, so that the ages of scarcity and all the assumptions, thinking, and morality based thereon are outmoded, including the idea of there being any value in simplicity.

Although, from an engineering point of view, technology has made it easily possible to supply all of mankind's material needs, this possibility is far from being an actuality. There is a very big "*if*" attached. Despite the wondrous mechanical, chemical, and electrical inventions, scarcity of necessities still exists to a painful degree in every country. These are large portions of the population of the United States who do not have such comforts as water piped into the house or apartment, and furnaces to provide house warmth in winter. Yet this country is one of the wealthiest and most widely mechanized.

Another failure in application of technology is shown by the vast numbers of unemployed in almost all countries—probably more than ever before in the history of the world.

Our financial price system and debt structure controls production, distribution, and the wherewithal to pay for consumption. That system operates to cause wheat to be burned in the United States while millions are starving in China; tons of oranges to be left to rot in California while children in our city slums are subject to rickets, bad teeth, and other forms of ill health for the lack of vitamins in those oranges; and so on for a long chapter.

The great advances in science and technology have not solved the moral problems of civilization. Those advances have altered the form of some of those problems, greatly increased others, dramatized some, and made others much more difficult of solution. The just distribution of material things is not merely a problem of technique or of organization. It is primarily a moral problem.

Quantitative measurement and the use of quantitative relationships are among the most powerful elements in science, technology, and money. Because of this, the preponderating stimuli exerted by science, technology, and money are on the quantitative rather than the qualitative aspects of life. The qualitative elements are cramped. But the essence of man's social life lies in qualitative rather than quantitative relationships: it is moral, not technological.

In Volume III of Arnold J. Toynbee's great *Study of History* he discusses the growth of civilizations. For some sixty pages he considers what constitutes growth of civilization, including in that term growth in wisdom as well as in stature. With immense learning he traces the developments of many civilizations—Egyptian, Sumeric, Minoan, Hellenic, Syriac, Indic, Iranian, Chinese, Babylonic, Mayan, Japanese, etc. After spreading out the evidence, he comes to the conclusion that real growth of a civilization does not consist of increasing command over the physical environment, nor of increasing command over the human environment (i.e., over other nations or civilizations), but that it lies in what he calls "etherealization": a development of intangible relationships. He points out that this process involves both a simplification of the apparatus of life and also a transfer of interest and energy from material things to a higher sphere. He follows Bergson in equating complexity with Matter and simplicity with Life.[1]

If this be so, it is time to call a halt on endless gadgeteering. We had better turn our attention to cultivating qualitative relationships and the ways of life which promote them. Our technology is overdeveloped. It rests on a moral foundation which had developed in a simpler world and was intended for simpler conditions. Our civilization is like a huge engine resting on too small and weak a foundation. Its vibrations are tearing the whole thing to pieces. In order to carry the load and strain we need to develop stronger self-control and group and individual morality.

To those who say that machinery and the apparatus of living are merely instruments and devices which are without moral nature in themselves, but which can be used for either good or evil, I would point out that we are all influenced by the tools and means which we use. Again and again in the lives of individuals and of nations we see that when certain means are used vigorously, thoroughly, and for a long time, those means assume the character and influence of an end in themselves.[2] We become obsessed by our tools. The strong quantitative elements in science, machinery, and money, and in their products, tend to make the thinking and life of those who use them mechanistic and divided. The relationships which science, machinery, and money create are mechanical rather than organic. Machinery and money give us more energy outwardly but they live upon and take away from us our inner energy.

We think that our machinery and technology will save us time and give us more leisure, but really they make life more crowded and hurried. When I install in my house a telephone, I think it will save me all the time and energy of going to market every day, and much going about for making petty inquiries and minor errands to those with whom I have dealings. True, I do use it for those purposes, but I also immediately expand the circle of my frequent contacts, and that anticipated leisure time rapidly is filled by telephone calls to me or with engagements I make by the use of it. The motor car has the same effect upon our domestic life. We are all covering much bigger territory than formerly, but the expected access of leisure is conspicuous by its absence. Indeed, where the motor cars are very numerous, as on Fifth Avenue, New York, you can now, at many times during the day, walk faster than you can go in a taxi or bus.

The mechanized countries are not the countries noted for their leisure. Any traveller to the Orient can testify that the tempo of life there is far more leisurely than it is

in the industrialized West. To a lesser degree, the place to find relative leisure in the United States is not in the highly mechanized cities, but in the country.

Moreover, we continually overlook the fact that our obsession with machinery spoils our inner poise and sense of values, without which the time spared from necessitous toil ceases to be leisure and becomes time without meaning, or with sinister meaning—time to be "killed" by movies, radio, or watching baseball games, or unemployment with its degradation of morale and personality.

Those who think that complexities of transportation, communication, and finance have relieved the world from underfeeding and famine are mistaken. Probably their error comes from the fact that they belong to the comfortable and well-to-do groups among the powerful nations of the world. They have not understood, if indeed they have read, the statistics and reports of social and relief workers in regard to the extent of undernourishment in their own populations and in the rest of the world. They forget about the recurrent Chinese famines, so vast in extent. They have not examined the evidence indicating that famines in India in modern times probably have greatly exceeded in extent and perhaps in frequency those of centuries ago.

Those who shudder at the appalling loss of life by the Black Death in mediaeval Europe, forget the tens of millions killed by influenza during the World War. Those who point with pride at the statistics of the lowering incidence of contagious diseases often fail to mention the rising amount of degenerative organic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, kidney, heart and circulatory failures, and of insanity. So distinguished a physiologist as Alexis Carrel in his recent book, *Man the Unknown*, has given evidence sufficient to startle and humble our pride in respect to the alleged "conquest of disease." He states that merely increasing the age to which people live tends to add to the number of aged people whom the young must support, and does not necessarily spell progress. He even believes that our modern techniques for comfort are doing our people grave biological harm by atrophying our adaptive mechanisms, to say nothing of the social evils created by industrialism.[3]

No—the way to master the increasing complexity of life is not through more complexity. The way is to turn inward to that which unifies all—not the intellect but the spirit—and then to devise and put into operation new forms and modes of economic and

social life that will truly and vigorously express that spirit. As an aid to that and as a corrective to our feverish over-mechanization, simplicity is not outmoded but greatly needed.

Let me postpone for the time being the relation of simplicity to the education of children, for it is organically related to a subsequent part of the discussion and is better treated there….

## Simplicity and Personality

It is often said that possessions are important because they enable the possessors thereby to enrich and enhance their personalities and characters. The claim is that by means of ownership the powers of self-direction and self-control inherent in personality become real. Property, they say, gives stability, security, independence, a real place in the larger life of the community, a feeling of responsibility, all of which are elements of vigorous personality.

Nevertheless, the greatest characters, those who have influenced the largest numbers of people for the longest time, have been people with extremely few possessions. For example, Buddha, Jesus, Moses, Mohammed, Kagawa, Socrates, St. Francis, Confucius, Sun Yat Sen, Lenin, Gandhi, many scientists, inventors, and artists. "The higher ranges of life where personality has fullest play and is most nearly free from the tyranny of circumstances, are precisely those where it depends least on possessions…. The higher we ascend among human types and the more intense personalities become, the more the importance of possessions dwindles."[4]

The reason for this is something that we usually fail to realize, namely that the essence of personality does not lie in its isolated individuality, its separateness from other people, its uniqueness, but in its basis of relationships with other personalities. It is a capacity for friendship, for fellowship, for intercourse, for entering imaginatively into the lives of others. At its height it is a capacity for and exercise of love. Friendship and love do not require ownership of property for either their ordinary or their finest expression. Creativeness does not depend on possession. Intangible relationships are more important to the individual and to society than property is. If a person by love and service wins

people's trust, that trust will find expression in such forms as to preserve life and increase its happiness and beauty.

It is true that a certain kind of pleasure and satisfaction come for acquiring mastery over material things—for example, learning to drive a motor car—or from displaying ownership of things as a proof of power. But that sort of power and that sort of satisfaction are not so secure, so permanent, so deep, so characteristic of mental and moral maturity as are some others.

The most permanent, most secure, and most satisfying sort of possession of things other than the materials needed for bodily life, lies not in physical control and power of exclusion but in intellectual, emotional, and spiritual understanding and appreciation. This is especially clear in regard to beauty. He who appreciates and understands a song, a symphony, a painting, some sculpture or architecture gets more satisfaction than he who owns musical instruments or works of art. The world of nature and the museums afford ample scope for such spiritual possession. Such appreciation is what some economists call "psychic goods." Entering into the spirit which lies at the heart of things is what enriches and enlarges personality.

There is the simplicity of the fool and the simplicity of the wise man. The fool is simple because his mind and will are incapable of dealing with many things. The wise man is simple not for that reason but because he knows that all life, both individual and group, has a certain few essential strands or elements and outside of those are a vast multiplicity of other things. If the few essential strands are kept healthy and vigorous, the rest of the details develop almost automatically, like the bark and twigs and leaves of a tree. So the wise man confines most of his attention to the few essentials of life, and that constitutes his simplicity.

We cannot have deep and enduring satisfaction, happiness, or joy unless we have self-respect. There is good reason to believe that self-respect is the basis for all higher morality. We cannot have self-respect unless our lives are an earnest attempt to express the finest and most enduring values which we are able to appreciate. That is to say, unless we come into close and right relationships with our fellow-men, with nature, and with Truth (or God), we cannot achieve full self-respect. Or, as Rufus Jones puts it, we must keep our "honor before God."

Simplicity of living is, as we have seen, one of the conditions of reaching and maintaining these right relationships. Therefore simplicity is an important condition for permanent satisfaction with life. And inasmuch as national self-respect is a necessary condition for the maintenance of a nation or a civilization it would seem that widespread simplicity, as a cultural habit of an entire nation, would in the long run be essential for its civilization to endure. At any rate, in the two civilizations which have endured the longest, the Chinese and the East Indian, simplicity of living has been a marked characteristic. The wealthy Indian rajahs, often considered so prominent a feature of India, are, most of them, not greatly respected in India. With but few exceptions they are not moral or intellectual leaders, and in politics they are all creatures of an alien government. True, the simplicity of living of the Indian masses has been largely the enforced simplicity of poverty. Nevertheless, among the real intellectual and moral leaders of India, the Brahmans and social reformers like Gandhi, voluntary simplicity has been and still is a definite and widely observed element of their code and custom. This is true also, I believe, of the leaders of China, the scholars.

Those by whom simplicity is dreaded because it spells lack of comfort, may be reminded that some voluntary suffering or discomfort is an inherent and necessary part of all creation, so that to avoid all voluntary suffering means the end of creativeness. Refusal to create may result in loss of self-respect.

Simplicity is clearly a sign of a pure heart, i.e., a single purpose. Also, because environment has an undeniable influence on character, simplicity of living would help to stimulate and maintain such singleness of purpose.

## Simplicity—A Kind of Psychological Hygiene

There is one further value to simplicity. It may be regarded as a mode of psychological hygiene. Just as eating too much is harmful to the body, even though the quality of all food eaten is excellent, so it seems that there may be a limit to the number of things or the amount of property which a person may own and yet keep himself psychologically healthy. The possession of many things and of great wealth creates so many possible choices and decisions to be made every day that it becomes a nervous strain. Often the choices have to be narrow. The Russian physiologist, Pavlov, while

doing experiments on conditioned reflexes with dogs, presented one dog with the necessity of making many choices involving fine discriminations, and the dog actually had a nervous breakdown and had to be sent away for six months' rest before he became normal again.[5] Subsequently, American psychologists, by similar methods, produced neuroses in sheep by requiring many repetitions of mere inhibition and action; and as inhibition is an element in all choices, they believe it was that element which may have caused the neurosis in Pavlov's dog.[6] Of course, people are more highly organized than dogs and are easily able to weigh more possibilities and endure more inhibitions and make more choices and nice distinctions without strain; but nevertheless making decisions is work and can be overdone.

One effect of this upon the will, and hence upon success in life, was deftly stated by Confucius: "Here is a man whose desires are few. In some things he will not be able to maintain his resolution but they will be few. Here is a man whose desires are many. In some things he will be able to maintain his resolution but they will be few."

If a person lives among great possessions, they constitute an environment which influences him. His sensitiveness to certain important human relations is apt to become clogged and dulled, his imagination in regard to the subtle but important elements of personal relationships or in regard to lives in circumstances less fortunate than his own is apt to become less active and less keen. This is not always the result, but the exception is rare. When enlarged to inter-group relationships this tends to create social misunderstandings and friction.

The athlete, in order to win his contest, strips off the non-essentials of clothing, is careful of what he eats, simplifies his life in a number of ways. Great achievements of the mind, of the imagination, and of the will also require similar discriminations and disciplines.

Observance of simplicity is a recognition of the fact that everyone is greatly influenced by his surroundings and all their subtle implications. The power of environment modifies all living organisms. Therefore each person will be wise to select and create deliberately such an immediate environment of home things as will influence his character in the direction which he deems most important and such as will make it

easier for him to live in the way that he believes wisest. Simplicity gives him a certain kind of freedom and clearness of vision.

## Simplicity and Beauty

The foregoing discussion has answered, I think, much of the second strong doubt which we mentioned near the beginning, the doubt that parents have as to the harm that simplicity might do to the minds and general cultural development of their children. In regard to aesthetics, simplicity should not connote ugliness. The most beautiful and restful room I ever entered was in a Japanese country inn, without any furniture or pictures or applied ornaments. Its beauty lay in its wonderful proportions and the soft colors of unpainted wood beams, paper walls, and straw matting. There can be beauty in complexity but complexity is not the essence of beauty. Harmony of line, proportion, and color are much more important. In a sense, simplicity is an important element in all great art, for it means the removal of all details that are irrelevant to a given purpose. It is one of the arts within the great art of life. And perhaps the mind can be guided best if its activities are always kept organically related to the most important purposes in life. Mahatma Gandhi believes that the great need of young people is not so much education of the head as education of the heart.

## A Caution

If simplicity of living is a valid principle there is one important precaution and condition of its application. I can explain it best by something which Mahatma Gandhi said to me. We were talking about simple living and I said that it was easy for me to give up most things but that I had a greedy mind and wanted to keep my many books. He said, “Then don’t give them up. As long as you derive inner help and comfort from anything, you should keep it. If you were to give it up in a mood of self-sacrifice or out of a stern sense of duty, you would continue to want it back, and that unsatisfied want would make trouble for you. Only give up a thing when you want some other condition so much that the thing no longer has any attraction for you, or when it seems to interfere with that which is more greatly desired.” It is interesting to note that this advice agrees with modern Western psychology of wishes and suppressed desires. This also substantiates

what we said near the beginning of our discussion, that the application of the principle of simplicity is for each person or each family to work out sincerely for themselves.

## Cultivation of Simplicity

Inasmuch as the essence of the matter does not lie in externals but in inner attitude, let us discuss certain ways by which that attitude can be cultivated. Since simplicity means the supplanting of certain kinds of desires by other desires, the best aid in that process is directing the imagination toward the new desires. We must try, of course, to understand intellectually all the implications of the new desires, but further than that, make the imagination dwell upon them in spare moments, and just before going to sleep and just after awakening. Read books or articles dealing with them. Associate with people who have ideas similar to those which you wish to cultivate. Exercise your discrimination in the relative values of different modes of living, and in the little details that compose them. Practice the desired simplicity in small ways as well as the large. Provide as many small stimuli as possible for this line of thought and conduct. Inasmuch as competition and emulation, especially the variety known as "keeping up with the Joneses," lead to complexity of living, and inasmuch as competition is encouraged by a sense of diversity and exaggerated individualism, we will help ourselves toward simplicity by cultivating a strong and constant feeling of human unity. Try to cultivate the ability to work without attachment to the fruit of works. If you realize that the purpose of advertising is to stimulate your desires for material things, you will be wise to avoid reading many advertisements. At least exercise selection in so doing.

Other elements of character which will be desirable to cultivate for this purpose are: strength to resist the pressure of group opinion; ability to withstand misunderstanding, unfavorable comment, or ridicule; sensitiveness to intangible values and relationships more than to sense impressions; greater sensitiveness to moral beauty than to beauty perceptible by the physical senses; persistence, endurance, and strength of will. If simplicity is a valuable thing, then to attain it we must pay a price. Estimate that price carefully against what you believe to be the value obtainable.

The religions which have had a characteristic specific body of custom and daily physical observances as an essential part of them have endured longer than other

religions. I refer to Judaism and Hinduism. Part of their vitality seems to come from this intimate blending of idea and action, this expression of inner belief in routine details of everyday life. If this be so, and we want simplicity to be a vital, enduring part of our lives, we must express it in the detailed physical warp and woof of our lives. For example, we will be wise to express our ideal by observing simplicity and moderation in food. The kind of self-control that is developed in curbing one's appetite for quantities and delicacies of food is of great value as a foundation for self-control in regard to desires of possession. It may be, as the modern psychologists say, that intellectual skills are not transferable from one subject to another, so that mastery of Latin does not help to a mastery of mathematics, but moral qualities which are cultivated in one sphere are usable in allied spheres. Gluttony and other forms of greed are not far apart.

Knowledge of diet will not only help control of food appetites, but it is essential in order to select food wisely so that we may be healthy while maintaining simplicity. This is especially true for mothers of growing children. Modern discoveries about vitamins, mineral content of foods, calories, food mixtures, sunshine, and fresh air show that it is entirely possible to live simply and have an optimum of health.

For people in industrialized countries, discrimination will be needed in the selection of machinery for personal and home use. The amount of drudgery in household and other tasks depends partly upon the kinds and extent of complexity of living. Some machinery is truly labor saving with a minimum of harmful byproducts or remote effects. In our American mechanized environment it will take intelligence to change successfully from living a complex life to a simple life.

As Ruskin said, "Three-fourths of the demands existing in the world are romantic: founded on visions, idealisms, hopes, and affections; and the regulation of the purse is, in its essence, regulation of the imagination and the heart…. We need examples of people who, leaving to Heaven to decide whether they are to rise in the world, decide for themselves that they will be happy in it, and have resolved to seek—not greater wealth, but simpler pleasure, not higher fortune, but deeper felicity; making the first of possessions, self-possession."[7]

## Involuntary Simplicity

All that we have considered has to do with voluntary simplicity, for those who have enough resources to live in more or less complex fashion if they wish. What about the involuntary simplicity of the poor? Is that a good thing? Its compulsion creates frustration, a sense of inferiority, resentment, and desire for the things denied to them. In so far as involuntary simplicity conduces to closeness with the healthy forces of Nature and to unity with fellow men, it would seem not wholly evil. The lives of the poor in cities, however, are not natural, but dependent on a highly artificial and complex environment which deprives them of sunshine, fresh air, and food in its natural state. That environment also very frequently deprives them of normal human relationships and activities. The more voluntary simplicity is practiced by the privileged, the more will the advantages of simplicity become available to the underprivileged, for their enforced simplicity will to that extent feel to them less invidious, and their poverty perhaps may then be on the way to remedy.

## Simplicity Alone Is Not Enough

However important it may be, simplicity alone is not enough to secure a thoroughgoing and permanent advance in civilization. The relative failure of the Franciscan movement seems to be evidence in point.[8] In addition to the changes in consumption which widespread simplicity would bring about, it will be necessary also to develop great changes in the present modes of production. Decentralization of production would be one of these changes. The social effects of that would be far-reaching and profound. Many other great changes will be necessary, including a different control of large-scale production and of land, and changes in distribution and in money as an instrument and as a symbol.

Simplicity, to be more effective, must inform and be integrated with many aspects of life. It needs to become more social in purpose and method. It ought to be organically connected with a thoroughgoing program of non-violence as a method of persuasion to social change, and to be definitely a part of a constructive practical program for the economic security of the masses. That is too large a matter to be considered here. But no

matter what changes take place in human affairs, the need for simplicity will always remain.

## Notes

1. Henri Bergson, *Two Sources of Morals and Religion* (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1935).

2. Hans Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of "As If"* (New York: Hardcourt, Brace & Co., 1925), XXX.

3. Alexis Carrel, *Man the Unknown* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1935), 114-16, 154-55, 233, 303-04.

4. Vida D. Scudder, *The Christian Attitude Toward Private Property* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Morehouse Publishing Co.).

5. Ivan Petrovich Pavlov, *Conditioned Reflexes: An Investigation of the Physiological Activity of the Cerebral Cortex* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927).

6. O.D. Anderson and H.S. Liddell, "Experiments on Experimental Neurosis in Sheep," *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry* 34, no. 2 (Fall 1935): 330.

7. John Ruskin, *Unto This Last* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1862).

8. Vida D. Scudder, *The Franciscan Adventure* (New York: E.P. Dutton Co., 1931).