THE
Small Community

FOUNDATION OF DEMOCRATIC LIFE

What It Is and How to Achieve It

by

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THE SMALL COMMUNITY

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EDITOR'S FOREWORD

This book is in its way a manual of human survival. It is a study of the small, primary community where more than anywhere else, men can find the way to live well. It points out how the good community may be attained.

In this era of great cities, megalopolitan culture and massive events we are likely to forget the human measure. The human scale, the quiet integrity of our finite powers, is ignored; and because we can pile events on events in mountainous accumulations by the use of mechanized energy, we assume that the human scope and range of life can expand to include them. But this is not true. Neither is it desirable.

Life now is no bigger than it was four generations ago. A man today has no more ability to comprehend in his thought the experience of living or to appreciate its values than had his grandfathers. He has no more control over his affairs. Men have increased their control of the natural environment, it is true, but in so doing they have created a social and mechanical environment so out of scale with man that it is overwhelming. The struggle now is less with Nature than with man. To maintain human integrity against the mass of our own creations is the main problem.

This book points the way, and the only way in my opinion, not only to the good life but to the very survival of our Western world. Other books, other people through the ages have pointed out this road to human welfare. But with each

age, with each new technology, with each birth of a new culture, it becomes necessary to point the way again. Modern men are bluffed by the prestige of bigness, by the so-called efficiencies of centralized control and mass production. In some fields production and control of this sort are efficient and effective, it is true, but by no means in all. The small community, the intimate group within the scope of a man's acquaintance, remains the primary pattern in which men must live if they would have good life. Their moral sensibility and devotion, their appreciative integrity and natural art depend on it. They must live in small communities, it would seem, to maintain even their reproductive vitality and racial existence.

If Arthur Morgan, the author of this book, were more limited in his social interests and sympathies he would be an appropriate symbol of that American type and legend called the dynamic man. As a man of action his career might well be the envy of any two-fisted but one-minded go-getter, whose stereotype dominates the advertisements, the mass literature and the sentiments of so many modern people. An engineer of national repute, perhaps the foremost figure in the United States in the reclamation of wet lands and flood control, he has ranged through the fields of action from helping a neighbor clean a pond to projects involving many millions of dollars over ten or fifteen states. In fifty or more co-operative engineering projects, in the Dayton flood-control work, in the Pueblo flood-control work, in the Arkansas drainage project, in the reclamation works in the Southern States, in the early work and development of the Tennessee Valley Authority he has been the main factor in dynamics and design. For twenty years he was an engineer by profession, president of his company, prominent in the American

Society of Civil Engineers and a member of the governing board. As a man of action, not merely on paper but in the field, he is one of the forces that have made America powerful.

But Mr. Morgan is also a man sensitive to human needs and values. He is an educator nationally known, president for many years of Antioch College and originator of the "Antioch idea," first president of the Progressive Education Association, member of the executive committee of the League to Enforce Peace which initiated the plan for the League of Nations, and a philosopher who never went to college. In these generous interests and sympathies he is decidedly more than that American stereotype, the man of action.

For behind these variegated interests and activities there is a unity of life that is at once intellectual, dynamic and moral. It is a deliberate and organic unity. Its main interest is human beings, their motivations, their controls. In his engineering activities, his educational work, his business, his administrative, political, financial and managerial affairs, the study of the human being was central. Mr. Morgan tells of this interest in a letter to me from which I quote:

"Various persons have wondered why, after years of association with extensive affairs, I should come to center my attention on those seemingly insignificant elements of our society, the small villages and other primary groups. This centering of attention has not been capricious or accidental, but is a normal and essential conclusion of a long process of inquiry.

"From the time I was a high-school student I was impressed with the slow and halting course of human progress, and constantly asked myself, What are the controls of human

character and personality? What are the keys to the direction of those influences which would lead to the fulfillment of the possibilities of human life? No matter what I did, that question remained near the forefront of my mind, and so my varied experiences became data to be used in trying to answer that question."

Mr. Morgan has worked primarily with men throughout a life of action and varied interests that have taken him to every part of America. He has been not only an engineer working with materials but, in the best sense of the word, an engineer of human destinies. His boyhood was spent in a small frontier town. His early work as a land surveyor took him into small communities where he lived for a few days at a time in many families deriving from almost every stock in Europe and representing every culture. As a reclamation engineer, he lived for years in the field in close contact with the workers on the job and with small communities and the families of the region where the work was done. He employed during this period more than two thousand engineers as well as many other men, and he worked out careful plans for the selection of personnel. He personally examined the records of thousands of these assistants. He interviewed thousands of prospective employees. He supervised the work of more than two hundred contractors in various fields of construction. He handled large projects by "force account," by direct purchase of equipment and employment of men, and he carried through the legal phases of these undertakings with scores of lawyers.

In his educational work, as college president and chairman of the board, he adopted new methods of selection of students, searching their backgrounds almost as closely as those of prospective faculty members. In financing the college he

became acquainted with hundreds of leaders of American life in business and the professions. Many of those persons became close personal friends.

As administrative head of the Tennessee Valley Authority a hundred million dollars worth of construction was under his direction. He assembled his staff and selected his employees by a thoroughgoing process of examination never before attempted in a great public agency. The savings in turn-over and general efficiency were great. He has worked for more than fifteen years with labor leaders and their followers, and in 1918 and 1933 co-operated with them to develop uniform overall labor codes. He has worked with manufacturers and has had close contacts with numerous persons in public life, including the President and his wife, cabinet members, senators, congressmen, governors. In the Tennessee Valley Authority he accomplished a great work by his ability to understand and to co-operate with diverse sorts of people. When the movement of the TVA seemed no longer in his direction there was a break. He left the TVA with a great work done.

Through the long years of life and work in all parts of America Mr. Morgan's continuing interest has been the observation of the drives and incentives of men. In fields seemingly remote from his main professions, as vice-president of the American Unitarian Association, as trustee of a theological seminary, as originator and director of a small but successful technical industry, as charter member of the American Eugenics Society, his interest has been always in people. He studied over the origin of personal traits and in his youth wished to become a physician so that he could examine the sources of personality in his patients. This hope was never fulfilled in himself. After years of discussion with

his friends, however, he finally found in Samuel S. Fels a person who responded to this interest. The Fels Fund laboratories at Antioch College were founded for carefully planned studies and records of the development of children, beginning at an early prenatal period and extending into maturity. For about ten years the development of one hundred fifty children has been carefully followed by a professional research staff.

From this lifetime of experience, from extensive travel and observation here and in Europe, there gradually has emerged in Dr. Morgan's thought a conviction of the significance of the small, primary social group in the determination of human culture. That conviction he says, "does not go to the extent of a belief that other elements of social and personal environment are not also vital. A conviction has been reached, however, that the significance of the primary group has been so greatly overlooked that the oversight is coming to menace the continuity of our basic culture. Just as concern over nutrition does not imply that no other element of personal care is important, but only that nutrition cannot safely be ignored; so concern for community development does not imply lack of regard for other elements.

"In social as in personal economy, it is wise to give attention to vital concerns that have been overlooked or neglected. It would be very unwise to see those neglected elements as the only important ones. Significant as is the primary group, its usefulness has limitations. It is the source of social order, good will, and personal and economic security, but not of the ranging, inquiring mind, or of the free personality. The very process by which I became convinced of the importance of the primary group was that of transcending such groups and having a wide range of experience which

enabled me to see them objectively. A good society demands a far higher regard for the importance of the small community, but it demands that all elements of social organization, of which the small community is but one, shall be kept in good proportion."

So important to Mr. Morgan is his belief in the primary significance of the small community that he has formed an organization called Community Service, Inc., designed to give professional assistance, counsel and managerial aid in the rehabilitation of small communities or the formation of new ones. To the small community and its development in the United States he intends to devote the rest of his life.

But Mr. Morgan is no fanatic. He recognizes the need for large-scale organization, for mass production and mass power in their proper places. But he rejects their domination over human life. He insists on the primary place of the small community in human welfare. This alone would involve a deep and wholesome change in modern affairs of revolutionary significance.

BAKER BROWNELL
Supervising Editor

INTRODUCTION

Several years ago I went to visit a man in the southwest of France. The village street on which he lived was lined by a high, solid brick wall which sheltered the houses from the passers-by. At each house was an iron gate, above which hung a bell. When the bell was rung a servant would come and open the gate. Each house was separated from its neighbor by a similar wall, while to the rear was a steep rocky hillside covered with an almost impenetrable thicket of wild plum and blackberry brambles. Thus, each house was a sort of walled castle.

I arrived at the village in the morning, and since my host did not expect me until afternoon, I decided to spend the intervening time in exploring a nearby forest. After walking for two or three hours I was absent-mindedly making my way when the rough going brought me to my senses. I found myself in a tumble of boulders in a thicket of thorn trees and briers. The path had entirely disappeared. The time of my engagement was approaching, but it seemed better to push ahead to the other side of the forest, rather than to retrace my course. Shortly I came to a place where the waste from a household was dumped, and following the path leading to it through the thicket, I soon found myself at the entrance of an enclosed garden.

As I walked up the garden path, whom should I meet but my host! When he saw me emerge from the thicket and enter

the garden he raised his hands in almost frightened astonishment and exclaimed, "But, Monsieur, it cannot be! There is no path! One does not come from America by that way." He would not be at ease until I had explained the manner of my arrival.

Is it not similarly necessary that I explain my apparently sudden if not forcible entry into a field commonly included in the domain of Rural Sociology? Why should a person whose life has been spent as engineer, educator, and administrator essay entrance into so different an area, one already so well occupied by able men? To indicate how such a course came to be taken is to disclose the major theme of this book.

Archimedes is said to have remarked, "Give me a fulcrum on which to place my lever, and I can move the world." Every person who is trying to make his life yield enduring results is on that same quest. He is trying to discover the situation and the conditions in which the limited powers and abilities which are his can be used most effectively to produce enduring values.

During the course of twenty years the writer sought to use the profession of engineering as his fulcrum. He would carry through public works with economy, efficiency, and integrity. People would see that work being done, he reasoned to himself, and would come to respect the philosophy of life which produced it. Also, certain necessary work would be accomplished.

Such a course yields great satisfactions. It brings one close to reality. Structures of earth, concrete, and steel are not sustained by propaganda or by wishful thinking. Engineering is excellent discipline. Yet it has its shortcomings. If one has paid a great price to achieve a philosophy of life he will wish to express that philosophy with clearness and

definiteness. A dam or a bridge or a river-control work may perfectly serve its purpose, and yet as a medium for expressing a philosophy of life it may be inadequate.

Also, the practice of engineering seemed to the writer not to provide full opportunity for communicating to others the view of life he had worked out for himself. With the public for whom the engineer works, this is especially true. People see the engineer in his specialized capacity. What they want from him is engineering judgment and action. Most of his contacts with his clients are so specialized, so limited, and so infrequent that they do not provide effective opportunity for exchange of views on general aims and purposes, much less for achieving unity of fundamental outlook. In large measure the same holds true for the relations of the executive engineer with his staff. Such contacts usually are specialized, brief, and related to the work immediately at hand. Most of the persons involved already have matured and definite views of life which are but slightly subject to modification by such contacts. Pleasant and satisfying as are the professional associations of an engineer, they perhaps do not provide a most effective fulcrum for the lever of one whose chief interest is in achieving for himself and in co-operating with others who are striving to acquire a total view of life in good proportion and perspective.

It was for this reason that, after twenty years of professional practice, the writer changed his field of work from engineering to education. In association with college faculty members, and with students during that nascent period when learning by imitation may be replaced in some degree by critical, reflective thinking, would there not be greater opportunity for maturing and for giving expression to one's philosophy of life? The years spent in that field were most in-

teresting and, let us hope, not wholly unprofitable. But they taught a lesson which was further emphasized by several years of public administration.

That lesson is that the fundamental traits of personality are fixed earlier in life than is generally supposed. College students may greatly extend their intellectual outlooks; philosophy and religion may be revolutionized, political views may be changed as greatly; yet the basic habits of action may be but slightly modified by such intellectual and emotional transformations.

It is not that this period of training is unimportant from the standpoint of character-building. The environment of the earlier years may be far from unified. Parents may give one direction to the lives of their children, while the influence of friends and playmates may be quite different. Church and school, books, newspapers, movies and radio, may add yet other, perhaps discordant, elements. The young man or woman of college age, therefore, may not be a unified, integrated personality, but may reflect a great range of discordant influences. The college years may be a period of adding to that confusion of personality; or they may be a period of clarification, unification, and integration. Those years may provide opportunity for wise appraisals, for elimination of disintegrating influences, and for the strengthening of those which give clarity, strength, and consistency to character. The period when physical and intellectual life are maturing is very important.

Yet only occasionally do college years change the basic personal reactions, and when such change does take place it represents great personal achievement at great effort. Even when there is sincere intellectual and emotional conversion, the early habits of life may continue to control. The brilliant

medical student may continue to be careless of his own health. The deeply convinced pacifist may continue to be aggressive and unkindly in his temper. The man who is consumed by a sincere urge for public service, through lack of early training in thrift may be very wasteful of public funds. The research scientist may be far from eliminating prejudice in his general views. The person who by great effort has achieved a satisfying philosophy of life for himself may find his early conditioning leading him to dictatorial habits, to trouble-making, and to inconsiderate actions. During all his life his early training may be a drag upon his actions, and may partly neutralize his usefulness. Many men endeavor to influence others, not because they wish others to be like themselves, but because they hope that others may escape the personality-handicaps under which they themselves live and work.

Where there is fine quality, it, too, has come largely from the early environment. Little by little the impression has deepened that the early years are of controlling significance. By and large it is those years that make character.

Then comes the necessary conclusion, which is the main theme of the first part of this book, that to a very large degree it is the family and the small community that determine the influence of the early years. Observation makes it clear that the small primary group or community which has this profound influence is being greatly neglected, and in America is tending rapidly to disappear. Yet need for it is not disappearing.

From these experiences it has become the conviction of the writer that of all major factors which enter into the determination of our national life, few if any are receiving so inadequate attention as is the welfare of the community or

primary group. It was by this course of experience that he came to feel that the preservation and the perfecting of the small community is one of the greatest issues facing our times, and also that for many a person a life-career in such a group may be the best possible fulcrum on which to use the lever of his capacity for social usefulness. This book is in brief a survey of the field, and a guide to work within the small community.

The treatment of the subject differs markedly from those which record case studies of technical social anthropologists. Such studies are necessary and valuable; but to a considerable degree it is not necessary or desirable to use their methods in pointing out some of the major difficulties facing communities, and the grave dangers to society resulting therefrom, or before pointing to some obvious means for meeting the situation. Sometimes what is most needed is to emphasize to the layman what to the sociologist is common knowledge. Even in sociology many men are laymen in branches outside their own specialties.

There are certain obvious lacks of balance in the book. Aside from the treatment of community councils, methods of community organization are insufficiently described. Education, aside from adult education, is passed over almost entirely, as being too vast and varied a field to be effectively treated within the limits of this book. Particularly, agriculture receives almost no attention. Many rural sociologists have thought of small-community life and farm life as almost synonymous. Fundamentally, however, the nature of a community does not depend on the callings of its members. A fishing, mining, or college town will be found to have the same fundamental traits as a farming community. It is the

underlying characteristics of community life with which this book is concerned, rather than their application to any particular calling.

The writer is greatly indebted to those men in the field of rural sociology who have read and criticized the manuscript, especially to Edmund deS. Brunner and Arthur Dunham for their many valuable suggestions, and to Lowry Nelson, Robert A. Polson, and Thomas D. Eliot for their helpful comments and criticisms. Many other persons have offered comments and proposals. His secretary, Eleanor Switzer, has carried the burden of typing and putting the manuscript in order. Lucy Morgan and Griscom Morgan also read and criticized the manuscript. Acknowledgments to publishers for permission to make quotations, with identifying notes for all quotations used, are given at the end of the book.

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