

A Testimonial by Mildred J. Loomis

Looking back along the corridors of time, scanning mankind's slow ascent, appreciation comes for the seers and wise ones whom we know as social critics and crusaders for a better world. Every age has known them. If a line were drawn representing the upward climb, steps and bulges would appear, resulting from the impact of the heroes, sages and doers. Because of Confucius, Buddha, Aknanton, Plato, Ruskin, Krishnamurti, Edison, human life has improved. Most of them have worked quietly and struggled patiently, their contributions not known nor accepted until long after their life and death.

Dr. Ralph Borsodi belongs on that list. He was one of the quiet, singularly revolutionary philosophers and achievers of the modern world. In New York City, in his early twenties (circa 1918) he chose the direction he must move—to moderate the over-urban, over-industrialized and over-monopolized aspects which modern America called Progress. He had committed himself to move mountains—he would do it by persuasion, by education.

RALPH BORSODI* PLURALIST, WHOLIST, ACTIVIST

Dr. Borsodi made for himself a unique place in the modern world for at least three reasons:

1. His emphases were many; his contribution is not single. His concerns were for a good life for individuals but also for the improvement of public and social institutions. He was not a one-idea man, a monist. He was a pluralist, encompassing the many concerns of living a good life in a good society.

He ranged in anthropology, sociology, economics, ethics, politics, history. While he chose from many sources, he was an originator. He decided that all people, everywhere confront universal problems. He rigorously classified and defined seventeen major problems of living. He examined everything from a colloid of soil to world peace. By 1920, as an organic gardener, he was applying composted humus to his soil. In 1943 he integrated ethical land tenure and a stable world currency into a unique global peace plan. In 1968 he prepared a 'new curriculum' for reassessing and reshaping a whole culture.

2. Borsodi was a wholist. He did not sponsor, in his pluralism, a lot of random changes and activities. For him "man was the measure"; he tested every idea and action by its consequences on human well-being. He pointed to satisfying and personality-producing "normal ranges" in human experience, below and beyond which living was abnormal. He challenged teachers to lead the way in envisioning and achieving (teaching) a human way of living—not merely passing on the "culture" in which they happened to be living. Borsodi integrated activity around normal, fully functioning living.

3. Borsodi was a doer, an activist, not merely a thinker, analyst and writer. He practiced in his individual and family life, the creative, responsible, ecological, human pattern he called modern homesteading. He initiated and developed new communities; he created a School of Living at the center of a community of homesteading families for demonstrating and teaching a new lifestyle; he developed the University of Melbourne (Florida) for the study and action on problems of living. He instituted the Community Land Trust; he experimented with a commodity-backed Constant currency. Until the very end he was writing and counselling the projects he had originated: The International Independence Institute, the School of Living, several intentional communities, and hundreds of modern homesteads. His last book, (explaining the Constant and a cooperative, non-governmental banking system to end inflation) was completed a few days before his death.

In working at this triple goal, Borsodi went deeply into the wisdom of both the East and West. Never a slave to a Master, Borsodi chose for his mentors those who offered guidance in the endless human quest, which for him was ethical and normative. Borsodi was fond of Emerson for clarifying a philosophy of humanism; Blake articulating that war, injustice and unhappiness plague "moderns" because of mistaken beliefs; John Ruskin, Eric Gill and William Morris for insisting that human behavior is shaped by the work one does; Thoreau and Sir Albert Howard for showing man's part in, and need for, the natural organic world; Coomasway sustaining beauty in simple, useful

things; and Gandhi encouraging improvement of hand, small-scale and village production. On three trips to India, Borsodi spent nearly six years working, studying and writing with Gandhians and Libertarians.

While central to Borsodi's concept of a good life was space, land and nature, he recognized that these were shut away from millions who need and long for them by errors in economic and political structures. To these Borsodi turned his incisive mind and determined action. Again he culled the wisdom of great minds; Blackstone, Ricardo, Henry George, John Locke, J.J. Rousseau, Thomas Jefferson, Pierre Proudhon, Benjamin Tucker. Again he added his originality, applying their ideas in community building via the Community Land Trust, cooperative credit, constant currency and voluntary associations.

For almost a century, Borsodi lived through the complexity of modern times—a booming factory industrialization, the centralization of population in huge cities, the spread of agri-business—depression years, war years, government-support years. Prosperity and affluence have been followed by disillusionment, youth revolts, questioning, —a yearning for a return by many to simpler living. Critics of industrialism are now popular; E. F. Schumacher and Ivan Illich from abroad; Alvin Toffler, Murray Bookchin and Karl Hess in America. Guided by them and a new science, Ecology, many people have begun (1960's and

1970's) restructuring their lives and society in decentralist ways.

Ralph Borsodi was a forerunner and prophet of all this, and to him was granted the unusual privilege of seeing his *Ugly Civilization* and *Flight from the City* republished in 1972, forty years after their first appearance. Many who now turn to Borsodi's life and books, to the School of Living and the decentralist movement, mourn his passing in 1977 and honor him as "a man of our time."

*Mrs. Mildred Loomis studied with, and assisted, Dr. Borsodi at the Suffern N.Y. School of Living, 1939-40. She chose modern homesteading as her lifestyle. With her husband, John Loomis, Lane's End Homestead (Brookville, Ohio) became an outpost of the School, from which they edited the School's publications, directed the school's work, organized nation-wide conferences on decentralism, and seminars on Major Problems of Living, in which Ralph Borsodi participated (1940-1970). She has completed a biography of Ralph Borsodi and a history of the decentralist movement, and works with the School of Living from Sonnewald Homestead, Spring Grove, Pa.

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