Only a person who can find a value in every sort of activity and devote himself to each one with full consciousness of duty, has the inward right to take as his object some extraordinary activity instead of that which falls naturally to his lot. Only a person who feels his preference to be a matter of course, not something out of the ordinary, and who has no thought of heroism, but just recognises a duty undertaken with sober enthusiasm, is capable of becoming a spiritual adventurer such as the world needs.

ALBERT SCHWEITZER
My Life and Thought
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Acknowledgments

I am deeply indebted to my stepmother, Vreni Schumacher, for her confidence and encouragement in this undertaking and for the access she gave me to all books and papers in my father's archives.

Those I interviewed are too numerous to list here. There were almost a hundred. I thank all of them for the warmth of their reception, their hospitality and their help. Some are mentioned in the book, others will recognize their contributions in the text and will, I hope, accept that as my thanks. Those who do require special mention are David Astor, Werner von Simson and Walter Fliess, all of whom patiently read through the manuscript at an early stage and contributed considerably to its improvement.

I am grateful to David Astor for permission to use illustration no. 15, and to Gritta Weil for no. 17.

My thanks are also due to Xandra Hardie, my editor, who showed the utmost tact in directing the evolution of the manuscript into its present form, and to Christine Sacre and Cecilia Scanlon for typing the manuscript.

Most of all I thank my husband, Don, for putting up with domestic chaos while never ceasing to encourage me, and my six children for the occasional moment of peace.

BARBARA WOOD

Kew, Surrey
1983
Prologue

It took a long time before I realized that the man who died on September 4th, 1977 was my father. There was little room for a sense of personal loss when the obituaries mourned the passing of a ‘prophet standing against the tide’, or, ‘A man who asks the right questions of his society and of all societies at a crucial time in their history,’ or which claimed, ‘To very few people is it given to begin to change, drastically and creatively, the direction of human thought. Dr Schumacher belongs to this intensely creative minority.’ (Governor Jerry Brown, Senator Charles H. Percy, The Times respectively.) Such comments were followed by letters of condolence from heads of states as well as countless lesser-known people from all over the world whose contact with this man, Schumacher, had somehow affected their lives.

Even more unreal were those who called at the house asking for some memento. One asked for his hat, another for his typewriter. Had this man been some sort of saint, I wondered, whose relics were now being collected for posterity? Others came wanting to set up Schumacher centres and Schumacher societies.

Slowly it dawned upon me that this world figure, guru, prophet, was supposed to be my father - Pop. I had wanted to write Pop’s biography ever since he had started telling us stories about his life one Christmas Eve. He was a superb story-teller and I was always riveted by his tales. But the character in those stories was flesh and blood, not some remote superman. As I reflected on those stories and on the man I had known as my father, on the changes he had undergone even in my lifetime, I began to feel that his story was much more important than the success he had achieved at the end of his life. Senator Percy said that he had asked the right questions of society; I knew he had also asked some far harder questions.
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of himself. His story is the quest for the answers, a search which took him to many places both in a physical and a mental sense and led him to some disturbing conclusions about himself and his outlook on life.

There was no shortage of material to help me as I started in my task of piecing together my father’s story. It soon became apparent why his study was such a sea of papers: he had never thrown anything away. There were also scores of people to whom I knew I must talk. Their different approaches turned out to be as revealing as the interviews themselves.

I began with the men in my father’s life. Many of them I knew had opposed him fiercely, or at very least ridiculed him when he first came out with statements that later were regarded as prophecies. There was no sign of any antagonism in our friendly conversations. However hard I tried to play devil’s advocate the picture I got was consistently one of harmony and good will. My father appeared too good to be true.

I then turned to the women. They were one of my father’s weaknesses. His good looks and charm had captivated quite a few hearts. He needed women around him, to care for him and listen to him. The first to be a sounding-board for his ideas had been his sister Edith; later on Julia Porter, a friend whom he respected more than most of his male colleagues, was one of the most important. But despite the mutual admiration and affection, these female colleagues and friends were harder with their final verdicts than their male counterparts. Only by talking to the women did the weaknesses I already knew about, or had suspected, come to the fore and allow my father to take shape as a human being.

The third stage of my research took place in Germany. I had been conscious of a tension in my father when he was with his German friends and family. I thought of him as a German but I wondered what others thought and what he himself felt. An old English friend told me that he had heard my father say, ‘Ich bin ein Vaterlandsloser Geselle’ – I am a fellow without a Fatherland.

The question of national identity brought me face to face with a subject that my father had avoided talking about: his decision to leave Germany and the effect this had had on his life and relationships. It became clear that history had put up
Prologue

a barrier which had distanced him from some of his family and friends, which had made them very critical of him, at times even harsh in their judgments. In Germany a picture emerged of a self-centred and egotistical man, whose criticism of scientific progress and academic endeavour was attributed to his own lack of thorough academic training.

In the face of these extremes of adulation and hostility I have tried to avoid making any judgments in this book. I have told the story of my father’s life as truthfully as possible. There were times when this was painful, more often it was fascinating and rewarding. My father and I were great friends, I understood him as a friend as well as a daughter, but I had no part to play in the forces that shaped his life. For this reason, and to avoid the temptation of making subjective judgments, I have kept out of the narrative as much as possible.
E. F. SCHUMACHER