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AN EXTRAORDINARY CONSENSUS

PERHAPS casually, in *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold labeled a brief section about the slaughter of wolves, "Thinking Like a Mountain." He tells how, out with a party in some Arizona mountains, he saw what he thought was a doe, but turned out to be a wolf, emerge from a stream, to be joined by a half-dozen others, apparently full grown puppies.

> What was literally a pile of wolves writhed and tumbled in the center of an open flat at the foot of our rimrock.
>
> In those days we had never heard of passing up a chance to kill a wolf. In a second we were pumping lead into the pack, but with more excitement than accuracy: how to aim a steep downhill shot is always confusing. When our rifles were empty, the old wolf was down, and a pup was dragging a leg into impassable slide-rocks.
>
> We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes—something known only to her and to the mountain. I was young then, and full of trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view.

After a time Leopold learned better ways. In later years he encountered completely wolfless mountains and saw that they had been eaten alive by an excess of hungry deer. And then he saw the starved bones of the hoped-for deer herd, "dead of its own too-much, bleach with the bones of the dead sage." He realized that mountain slopes grazed to naked death by deer might need twenty or thirty years to regain their cover, while a buck pulled down by a wolf would be replaced in two or three years.

Wolves are a scourge to ranchers, but deer are a scourge to high country terrain. Leopold felt he had sensed the mountain's feeling about balance:

> The cowman who cleans his range of wolves does not realize that he is taking over the wolf's job of trimming the herd to fit the range. He has not learned to think like a mountain. Hence we have dustbowls, and rivers washing the future into the sea.
>
> We all strive for safety, prosperity, comfort, long life, and dullness. The deer strives with his supple legs, the cowman with trap and poison, the statesman with pen, the most of us with machines, votes, and dollars, but it all comes to the same thing: peace in our time. A measure of success in this is all well enough, and perhaps is a requisite to objective thinking, but too much safety seems to yield only danger in the long run. Perhaps this is behind Thoreau's dictum: In wildness is the salvation of the world. Perhaps this is the hidden meaning in the howl of the wolf, long known among mountains, but seldom perceived among men.

A poetic passage, some will say, yet with truth in it. But what sort of truth, and how much? How far can we go with this metaphor of a thinking mountain? If it thinks, can a mute height nonetheless speak? "I have seen," Leopold relates, "every edible bush and seedling browsed, first to anaemic desuetude, and then to death. Such a mountain looks as if someone had given God a new pruning shears, and forbidden Him all other exercise." Well, however mountains think, they found voice in Aldo Leopold, who made the mountain's spectacular communication into a wry comment about the salvation of the world. Our ad hoc versions of "peace in our time" are not the way to be saved.

Leopold would say, first of all, that we need to learn how the world around us thinks. There is the fact, then, that for Nature, which is Leopold's world, there is no difference between thinking and acting. We humans debate with ourselves and with one another, but nature's thought—call it instinct—is revealed in act. Nature's

consciousness is direct, while ours is reflective, mediated by inner dialogue, although we have our dulled and lethargic instincts, too.

Reduced to prose, learning how the world thinks should mean the practice of science. But science is a report on how nature works, not what it thinks. There is a great difference. Thinking involves the pursuit of ends, and from science we hear that nature hasn't any ends—we can do what we please with the natural world, using our knowledge of how it works. As Leopold points out, we hitch our scientific know-how to the goals of "safety, prosperity, comfort, long life, and dullness." It must be confessed, therefore, that science is not knowledge of the meaning of the world, but only information about how it works. In Leopold's case, the naked mountains were a signal to try to understand how mountains and the earth think. Humans, he maintained, need to learn to think like mountains, which means to recognize their ends. Is this ridiculous?

To answer this question we might first consider what scientific knowledge is and how it is established. First it is catalog and description of natural process. Then, usually through the application of mathematics, it becomes an account of the dynamics of natural process. Finally, it is the consensus of what established scientists have agreed is the description of the world and its dynamics.

Leopold practiced another kind of observation. He looked into a dying wolf's eyes. He read the palimpsest of the mountain slope's past. He practiced the sort of science known and advocated by Thoreau to learn "by direct intercourse and sympathy." Thoreau's was a moral science:

> It is with science as with ethics,—we cannot know truth by contrivance and method, the baconian is as false as any other, and with all the helps of machinery and the arts, the most scientific will still be the healthiest and friendliest man and possess a more perfect Indian wisdom.

Well, reading Thoreau and Leopold may persuade one that such a science might actually exist, but what about the element of consensus, so important to what the world regards as scientific knowledge?

It is not too much to say that such a consensus seems slowly coming into view. Take for example the "Gaea hypothesis," the proposal of James Lovelock, who believes that the earth is one great organism, interrelated and interdependent in all its parts. (Gaea is the Greek Goddess of the earth.) Hugh Malafry gave the substance of Lovelock's conception in *Mother Earth News* for last July:

> Life on earth, Lovelock feels, clearly exhibits the characteristic of being a single organism with man in the midst. And man, because of his nature, should be capable of functioning something like a central nervous system to the whole, thereby enhancing its development. Man, however, has failed in this responsibility and, instead, proceeds willy-nilly to alter the environment without regard for the greater organism he centers. He alters the environment on impulse . . . an impulse which disregards the Life of the Whole.
>
> Lovelock suggests that Life began to shape Its expression on earth many millions of years ago. It did this by creating the atmosphere we now know from random gases *and for the purpose* of developing a suitably protective mantle that would allow the more delicate expressions of the larger organism to emerge. Life, then—human beings notwithstanding—is, significantly, intelligent and it has direction.

Here, then, is another man—a scientist knowledgeable about pollution—who is convinced that the world of nature thinks, and doubtless that it also feels. Nature's thought and direction, he says, are now being violated by human actions which disturb delicately balanced ecological systems:

> Constantly urged on by his nature to ignorant, self-centered manipulation of the natural environment, man is rather like a radically disruptive central nervous system to the whole . . . inaccurate in his perceptions and destructive in his compulsive modifications. . . .

> Man prides himself on his intelligence, perception, vision, and the gift of reason. He sets himself proudly aside as the one creature with the capacity for self-consciousness that Life has brought forth on this earth. Yet to what purpose has this "self-consciousness" of the whole organism (which comes to focus in man) been put . . . other than to the self-centered, blind satisfaction of human greed as man exploits the organism for his own use in much the same way as an individual might abuse his body to satisfy some incomprehensible and irrational craving?
>
> A simple truth of Life on earth is that the whole survives or nothing does, just as the survival of the body is essential to the survival of the mind. Rather than justifying human function as it has been known on earth, man is well overdue for a dose of humility and a move toward picking up his responsibilities. The responsibilities of functioning as an integral, sensitive, and intelligent part of the natural organism of this earth . . . and of letting his gift of self-consciousness be exercised to the blessing of the whole creation of Life.

Here is a man into whom the intelligence and direction of the world have swept as on a flood tide of intuited meaning. Man must feel and become aware of all this, he declares, if he is ever to fulfill his own longings and sense of meaning.

The stuff of meaning, according to such writers, is our kinship with the world, our debts and responsibilities to it, and most of all our need to serve the world lovingly through acts of understanding.

Lovelock's "thinking like" and with the earth, we could say, is mission-oriented. A student of pollution, he wants us to change our ways. There are other modes of getting in touch with the earth and joining in the holistic consensus. In a letter to Hawthorne, after expressing his skepticism of the emotional extravagance which celebrates man's unity with the rest of life while ignoring the pains of disunity, Herman Melville added a postscript:

> N.B. This "all" feeling, though, there is some truth in. You must often have felt it, Iying on the grass on a warm summer's day. Your legs seem to send out shoots into the earth. Your hair feels like leaves upon your head. This is the *all* feeling.

Melville here thinks like a meadow, we might say. He is not alone in such capacities. Lawrence, during his visit to America, found himself feeling like a pine tree:

> I think no man could live near a pine tree and remain quite suave and supple and compliant. Something fierce and bristling is communicated. The piny sweetness is rousing and defiant, like turpentine, the noise of the needles is keen with æons of sharpness. . . . I have become conscious of the tree and of its interpenetration into my life. . . . I am conscious that it helps to change me, vitally. I am even conscious that shivers of energy cross my living plasm, from the tree, and I become a degree more like the tree, more bristling and turpentiney. . . .

Rilke, in Worpswede, spoke of those who, having feelings of this sort, deliberately go in search of Nature, "and try now, consciously and by the use of their concentrated will, to come as near to her again as they were in their childhood without knowing it." He continues:

> It will be understood that the latter are artists: poets or painters, composers or architects, fundamentally lonely spirits, who, turning to Nature, put the eternal above the transitory that which is most profoundly based on law above that which is fundamentally ephemeral, and who, since they cannot persuade Nature to concern herself with them, see their task to be the understanding of Nature, so that they may take their place somewhere in her great design. And the whole of humanity comes nearer to Nature in these isolated lonely ones.

Why are such men the lonely ones? Because they are the few—although now growing more numerous—who do not believe in conquest and exploitation. They are the ones who see—by their ability to think with Nature—that, as Lawrence said, "once life has been conquered, it is pretty difficult to live."

> Because when all is said and done, life itself consists in a live relatedness between man and his universe: sun, moon stars, earth, trees, flowers, birds, animals, men, everything—and not a "conquest" of anything by anything. Even the conquest of the air makes the world smaller, tighter, and more airless.
>
> And whether we are a store-clerk or a bus-conductor, we can still choose between the living

> universe of Pan, and the mechanical conquered universe of modern humanity. The machine has no windows. But even the most mechanized human being has only got his windows nailed up, or bricked in.

Those who have come with us thus far may be persuaded, in some fashion, that humans can indeed think like mountains, have rapport with the earth. Yet there are problems. Apart from the numerous dialects of those who participate in this sort of thinking, there is the rude fact that Nature, for all her cunning devices, is a cruel mother, stone cold to suffering and generous only with death. She kills as determinedly as she brings to profligate birth. Her intentions, save for the omnipresent pursuit of survival, remain darkly obscure. All life struggles to endure, yet nothing endures. Nature, totally engrossed in action, does not know this, but for self-conscious man, the selector of ends, a vast irony pervades the spectacle of the natural world. The poets who understand this and accept it sing as frequently of death as they do of life.

But what, we still must ask, are humans meant to do about this climactic defeat—this final frustration of being—when all that nature declares by example is that we ought to try to stay alive as long as we can? Is the answer written in some decipherable code, or should we simply try to make our peace with death, acknowledging it as some majestic natural good that we do not or cannot understand? This seems a harsh destiny.

Curiously, busy people in hospitals, where many deaths take place, no longer regard death as an obscenity that should be censored out of polite and acceptable speech. In *Health Is* for *People*, Michael Wilson says:

> Nurses, in fact, are usually far more balanced than doctors about death: they are more often with the patient, it is to their care that the doctor leaves the patient when he can do no more, and it is nurses who lay out the body. They have a natural instinct about death which is rooted in their understanding about birth.

Death and birth are balanced in a statistical way, but what about *your* and *my* death? We are compelled to believe in death, but what do we believe *about* it? Death is part of the way the world works—an obvious scientific fact—but has it a meaning?

The one thing that does not seem to work—for those blessed or cursed with self-consciousness—is *ignoring* the inevitability of death. Dr. Wilson speaks of the consequences of this:

> In the West we try to reach health by the eradication of such defects as can be cured, by the solution of such problems as may be solved, and by a denial of the incurable and insoluble—by their exclusion into institutions. We aim to have a sanitated society swept dean of such badness. Death, the great insoluble incurable fact, is denied. This denial of death is the root cause of our denials of its foreshadowings. Death is believed to be dominant over life. We really do believe in death: talk of resurrection and a future life is thought to be a fantasy. Sartre vividly describes in his novels the resultant meaninglessness which has spread through life. Medicine cannot but share in this loss of meaning, for the style of being a doctor is influenced by the society and culture of the day. The health machine has begun to falter. Prolongation of life is not necessarily good in itself: it is a possibility for good or evil. There is more to being human than just being well. It is not the doctor's fault if his powerful skills to prolong biological life bring greater problems to humanity in terms of quality of life; if the man or woman whose life he has saved lived on into an old age of poverty and a sense of worthlessness. It could be better to die young, alive: than to live old, dead.

Death, Dr. Wilson seems to be saying—a good death, that is—is in the service of life. Well, if worrying about death, agonizing over it, fearing it, hiding it, pretending that it will never happen, wears away the meaning of life, then accepting death seems sensible. But this is like the child's spontaneous familiarity and identification with nature. One does it without thinking, without knowing why. There have been those not only able to think like mountains, in harmony with the world of Nature, but also to think like immortals, as though death is but a casual change of form, no

more than an illusive appearance. Socrates had this view, and there have been others. "Myth and religion," Ernst Cassirer says in his *Essay on Man*, "emphatically deny the possibility of death." This denial, however, is not from fear of its dominance, but rather an affirmation of the supremacy and continuity of life:

> In a certain sense the whole of mythical thought may be interpreted as a constant and obstinate negation of the phenomenon of death. By virtue of the conviction of the unbroken unity and continuity of life, myth has to clear away this phenomenon. Primitive religion is perhaps the strongest and most energetic affirmation of life that we find in human culture.

For those who fear death, from regarding life as a losable possession, such myth will be only a fairy tale—mere "fantasy," as Dr. Wilson says. There are some others, however—a few—for whom an indifference to death seems but common sense. They are the ones who, for undisclosed reason, think like immortals. The Stoics, for example, who said practically nothing about a future life, wrote as if they took its timeless continuity for granted. Something that cannot help but happen does not need to be argued about. Something that is now and forever true needs no defense.

> This, then, is consistent with the character of a reflecting man [wrote Marcus Aurelius], to be neither careless nor impatient nor contemptuous with respect to death, but to wait for it as one of the operations of nature. As thou now waitest for the time when the child shall come out of thy wife's womb, so be ready for the time when thy soul shall fall out of this envelope. But if thou requirest also a vulgar kind of comfort which shall reach thy heart, thou wilt be made best reconciled to death by observing the objects from which thou art going to be removed, and the morals of those with whom thy soul will no longer be mingled.

It would be interesting to attempt to compile materials showing the extraordinary consensus of people who think like immortals, not in terms of talk or arguments in behalf of immortality, but of thinking consistent with the values that longing for eternal life so imperfectly represents. Those who think like immortals have nothing to say in the language which applies to possessions and to promised rewards or threatened punishments. The laws of another grammar govern their speech.

REVIEW
SOME GREAT QUESTIONS

IN his appreciation of Kant at the end of the first volume of *The World as Will and Idea*, Schopenhauer congratulates his great predecessor—on whom he will nonetheless improve—for having clarified so well the idea of the "thing-in-itself," that inaccessible core of reality which lies behind all sense and mental perception. Others, he says, had the same idea, since it is evident in both Plato and the Upanishads, but unlike the ancients, who wrote "mythically and poetically," Kant put the conception "philosophically and distinctly," in its pure metaphysical abstraction, we might say. Schopenhauer believed this to be a great advance over the Indians and the Greeks, but is it?

Plato and the Upanishads are still read, but Kant is read hardly at all, except by a few scholars. Just conceivably, the allegory and imagery used by the ancient writers make better communication than speculative abstractions whose purity, for most readers, amounts to emptiness—a "dance of bloodless categories." This, one could argue, is reductionism at the other end of thought, the loss of content at abstract reaches of the mind, whatever the technical accuracy attained. Meaning, in other words, loses its impact when refined to pure generality, pushed outside the region of everyday experience where most people live and do their thinking.

But what alternative is there? There is myth, allegory, symbol and metaphor. These are the rich forms of representation, and except by the most primitive minds they cannot be mistaken for "truth." They are the prime educational materials for teachers like Plato and the authors of the Upanishads, who knew both the necessity and uses of abstract ideas, but would not leave them naked for readers ignorant of how they must be clothed. Knowledge is not the scaffolding of syllogistic abstraction, but awareness of full-dimensioned reality at each "terrace of enlightenment." The richness of the higher levels lies in their wondrously inclusive unities, different from the isolating variety we know on earth. Allegory intimates this richness, while abstraction leaves it behind. No mathematical outline of dimensions can include what one might really see after he has scaled the heights. The myth, on the other hand, is at least faithful in this, since it suggests the exchange of one sort of riches for another. The supreme art of the teacher is to speak of this exchange, yet without the offense of materialization, and it is *here* that the value of abstraction becomes apparent.

The trouble with an unrelieved *tour de force* of abstract analysis is that it leaves so much behind, while its insistent logic compels theoretical assent. From this sort of "knowing" is born the fear that you cannot *really* know. And if you settle for it, the result may be a kind of sectarianism of the intellect, having a cold accuracy which enters the mind only by portals constructed by laborious definition, never through the openings made by flashes of independent discovery.

If, on the other hand, you attempt to "systematize" the course of independent discovery—which must, after all, have an order of its own—you get something like the ranges of Zen discipline, and this, when monasticized, again loses touch with the healthful forms of higher human longing.

In his introduction to the revised edition of Frithjof Schuon's *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Harper paperback), Huston Smith goes to Plato to set the scene of the search for knowledge:

> For the West, Plato forged the paradigm. The degrees of knowing are three. At bottom is opinion, or as we should say, observation. As this is constantly changing it grasps nothing permanent and worthy of being called "truth." The only knowledge fully deserting the name stands at the opposite end of the ladder; wholly transcending the senses, it is the contemplation by pure intelligence of the divine archetypes, above all the *summum bonum*, the Idea of

> the Good. The overlap of these two modes of knowing, sensory and intellectual, results in an intermediate activity that Plato stigmatized as "bastard," though as a stepping stone to true knowledge it was invaluable. This middle "knowledge" was geometry, or as we should now say, deduction.

The object, needless to say, is to replace "deduction" with first-hand experience, or immediate knowledge. Science is the endeavor through observation to convert deduction (hypothesis or theory) into indisputable knowledge of the world. However, the instrument used by scientists to persuade us that they have indeed accomplished this end is the language of deduction, although they also say (in theory, they say): go do the experiments yourself; don't take our word for it. The mystic, one who presumably has experienced illumination (the contemplation of the divine archetypes), also uses the instrument of deduction as the means of persuading others to find out for themselves. We cannot, in other words, escape use of the stepping stones—in fact, we are obliged to move around on them in declaring that they are not themselves knowledge, but only tools.

Inevitably, therefore, there are endless arguments about the value and use of stepping stones, just as there are endless arguments about the use and value of books.

Frithjof Schuon's book is about the stepping stones used in the various religions, about why the paths they indicate differ from each other, and why, beyond the curtain separating them from sight of the common goal, they converge and finally become one. The quality of his thinking may be illustrated by his explanation of the meaning of "dogma":

> Dogmatism as such does not consist in the mere enunciation of an idea, that is to say, in the fact of giving form to a spiritual intuition, but rather in an interpretation that, instead of rejoining the formless and total Truth after taking as its starting point one of the forms of that Truth, results in a sort of paralysis of this form by denying its intellectual potentialities and by attributing to it an absoluteness that only the formless and total Truth itself can possess.
>
> Dogmatism reveals itself not only by its inability to conceive the inward or implicit illimitability of the symbol, the universality that resolves all outward oppositions, but also by its inability to recognize, when faced with two apparently contradictory truths, the inward connection that they implicitly affirm, a connection that makes of them complementary aspects of one and the same truth.

This passage illustrates both the clarity and abstractness of this writer's "stepping stones." While articulate in criticism of the limitations of traditional religion, Schuon does not advocate abandoning them. Huston Smith summarizes his view:

> The tradition's codes help to establish the soul in equilibrium socially and thereby emotionally, while theology provides a road map to point the direction and show where desert stretches fit in. As Intellect [Nous] is everywhere, its Truth can flash anywhere; but to be steadied, sustained and increased, a "rheostat" is needed, Traditions are such for the human spirit. . . . Positively Schnon argues that even esoterics must, almost without exception, submit to exoteric rites. Forms are to be transcended by fathoming their depths and discerning their universal content, not by circumventing them.

We have a difficulty with Schuon here. A time comes when the forms must be abandoned, when the best established stepping stones make only a circular path. In the *Gita* Krishna presses Arjuna to recognition that the old forms and allegiances to which he longs to be faithful have become barriers to regaining his kingdom, and that the time has come to fight. A moment arrives when, if only for the sake of others less aware, the one who sees the outline of truth hidden behind the form must break with that form as no longer representative. Now it only hides. Krishna says:

> Even if the good of mankind only is considered by thee the performance of thy duty will be plain; for whatever is practiced by the most excellent men, that is also practiced by others. The world follows whatever example they set.

Emerson is a good example of one who saw the point of this injunction. He left the church

when its traditions no longer seemed to him serviceable as guides to truth.

The question left unanswered—which in a sense must remain unanswered, since the answer, when it comes, is indeed independent discovery—is, How does one know that the time has come to break with tradition?

There are some lines in Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia* which may apply. In Book Eight, after the Buddha's Enlightenment, he returns to his father's realm and speaks to a great multitude. What began his great quest, that unremitting search for knowledge which ended in his great reform? His hunger was born from the pain of others:

> I, Buddh, who wept with all my brothers' tears,
> Whose heart was broken by a whole world's woe,
> Laugh and am glad, for there is Liberty!
> Ho! ye who suffer! know
>
> Ye suffer from yourselves. None else compels,
> None other holds you that ye live and die
> And whirl upon the wheel, and hug and kiss
> Its spokes of agony,
>
> Its tire of tears, its nave of nothingness.
> Behold, I show you Truth!

One can hardly believe that it was submission to "exoteric rites" that made Siddartha sensitive to the pain of other human beings. Why were his brothers' tears *his?* Indeed, this is as much a mystery as any other, perhaps the greatest. No ordinary explanation of human pain would do for the young prince. No Brahmin rationalizing would suffice, no propitiatory gesture could assuage a pain that did not belong to him at all. Surely, it is when this spirit dies out from the traditions, leaving them without moral leverage, that the time has come for the world to make a new beginning in the pursuit of truth. For the individual, it comes when he begins to recognize that his longing is the same as the Buddha's.

COMMENTARY
END WITHOUT MEANS?

THERE is a curious correspondence between Melville's skepticism (see page 2) and Frithjof Schuon's critical attitude toward much of present-day "mysticism." In the body of his letter to Hawthorne, Melville said:

> Here is a fellow with a raging toothache. "My dear boy," Goethe says to him, "you are sorely afflicted with that tooth but you must *live in the all*, and then you will be happy!" As with all great genius, there is an immense deal of flummery in Goethe, and in proportion to my own contact with him, a monstrous deal of it in me.

Summarizing Schuon's view, Huston Smith says:

> . . . the young especially are looking for experience: direct unmediated God-awareness through altered states of consciousness. For Schuon this amounts to asking for end with out means, kernel without husk, soul without body, spirit without letter. But as man is by definition finite as well as infinite, body as well as soul, this one-sided approach holds little promise.

Ardor in the quest is no doubt necessary, but ardor purged of anxious impatience seems extremely difficult. The "flummery" of which Melville speaks is probably the by-product of an eager impatience.

What's wrong with impatience? Quite possibly, the same thing that is wrong with the willingness to accept rewards that have not been earned. Such would-be beneficiaries are most easily gulfed by flummery.

The proposal of planting eucalyptus "throughout the Los Angeles area" (see Frontiers) may not be viewed with favor by those experienced in urban tree-planting. These fast growers are dangerously brittle and a fire hazard because of their resins and oils. Chosen for planting in the environs of Los Angeles this spring are the Brazilian pepper, several members of the *ficus* family, liquid amber, and canary and other pines which do well in Southern California. These are the recommendations of the Tree People of the California Conservation Project, a group that has been active in the reforestation of the smog-afflicted mountain areas of Southern California. Other suggestions will be found in an article on urban trees in the *Scientific American* for last November.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE SCHOOL IN ROSE VALLEY

[In his Teacher Information Center newsletter for last March Len Solo named several of the schools he admires—places where the people who founded or run them "are quietly confident in themselves, know who they are, know what they want to see happen, and work long, hard, and lovingly at helping small numbers of children learn." One of the schools he mentioned is The School in Rose Valley, in Moylan, Pa., which issues regularly a Parents' Bulletin. Here we have condensed from the June-August issue (1976) "The Year Reviewed" by Anne Rawson.]

IT'S very quiet when the children go home for the summer. The chipmunks scurry about more visibly, and the mockingbird in the hemlock by the shop proclaims his sovereignty. Cris and I come and go; curriculum reports and *Leaves* are run off and sent to parents in the mail; orders for next year's supplies are prepared; the teachers' coffee-pot and mugs in Toad Hall are washed especially well and stowed away until next fall. Betty mails out fliers about The School and shows interested families around.

In retrospect there is a glow of satisfaction tempered by a few disappointments about the year just ended. The atmosphere of friendly informality, cheerful industriousness, and thoughtful caring has been treasured by us all and remarked upon by visitors. One visitor observed, "There's something in the teachers' faces—they really love what they're doing."

The efforts of all who worked, inside and out, to spruce up our appearance, have contributed to a feeling of fresh commitment and pride in every segment of our SRV community: teachers, children, parents. A tremendous activity in construction of play equipment was in response to pleas from the teachers of older children. It was felt that a dearth of "things to do" was causing an excessive number of negative encounters among these children outdoors. The items of new play equipment—Leon's climbing apparatus near Rawson, the hanging cargo nets, the geodesic climbing dome, the ill-fated tire tower (soon to be demolished and reassembled with adequate support), the paved court, the Forest Flier—all these "toys" were gratefully enjoyed by children who craved outlets for their energy. As each new item of play equipment appeared the competition for its use was fierce among the children. Then in staff meetings we wrestled with the changing needs for supervision until one exasperated teacher cried "Why are we getting all this stuff? It's just making problems!" Before the year ended it was clear that the "stuff" was great. As one after another item was unveiled and received its initial onslaught of eager acrobats, the children sorted out favorites, everyone learned how to handle the hazards associated with each thing and developed rules where necessary.

Meanwhile, inside classrooms, a lot was happening. Visibly, one had to marvel at the transformation wrought in each room by teachers, with parents brandishing paintbrushes, contact paper, posters and lovely green plants. Alma had a new balcony, Geoff had a red-carpeted wall.

The new approach to beginning reading, combining a careful phonics approach to skill acquisition and a rich experience with language, read, heard, written, and spoken, has proved successful and will be continued the coming year. Some of the material and ideas were useful in older groups where children needed help with handwriting or spelling.

There was an unusual number of good plays and a film—all original creations requiring a lot of imaginative script-writing, staging, scenery design, and acting. Nancy's group in the fall, when they were studying ancient Britain, "explained" Stonehenge with their plot—just ask Finn McColl, legendary Irish hero, about it. In the spring they introduced us to villainous Sandy Flash, a local highwayman of colonial times. Barbara's group ended the year with an Eskimo play—an effective mixture of myth and reality: very real glimpses of the Eskimo's life-and-death dependence on

hunting ability and luck, their belief in omens and spirits, and a choral recital of powerful Eskimo poetry. Geoff's group was very productive. They treated us to several light-hearted plays in the fall, and a major historical drama about Bonnie Prince Charlie elaborately produced with lovely Scottish songs woven into the story. Ruth's group ended the year with a charming adaptation of Lloyd Alexander's *The Black Cauldron.* I was touched by their very serious performances. Each child put forth everything he/she had to make a good job of it, mastering shyness, remembering to speak loudly, and really acting the part. That was true of all the plays, but those youngest performers deserve special mention. Janet's group's film demonstrated many mysterious special effects—an enormous boulder squashing a child, appearances and disappearances, moving toys—a clever exploration of a new medium. Jean's group and Johanna's boldly took to the Dome stage, too, on two occasions, pantomiming rock and roll musicians. They had created "instruments" in shop—guitars, drums, microphone—and rocked and rolled, strummed and drummed most entertainingly, in time with a favorite record. Alma's group acted out a song one Friday: "Little Black Bull went Down the Meadow," and on several occasions chose songs for assembly. Not to be forgotten is the chorus production of "Snoopy Come Home," an ambitious musical directed by Anna May, staged by Nancy and the oldest groups. The enthusiasm and good quality of the singing were exciting. Cameo appearance by Lucie Stephens delighted audiences at the three performances.

Wonderful, too, were the efforts of many parents and the teachers to improve communication. Open and honest dialogue is basic to the school's reliance on parent participation. The PTA and Education Committee meetings, at all levels of the school, designed to bring out concerns and to identify areas of strength and agreement, kept us very busy all fall. But energy and momentum died out before a satisfactory job was done. There remain difficulties in the practical matter of ample notification of meeting times, although the "Friday Free Press" began to meet that need; and there remain feelings that concerns may be heard, but are sometimes dismissed or inadequately responded to. It's very important to continue in the coming year the search for good means of channeling questions, suggestions, complaints.

It is necessary for the continuity of the School and for the preservation of its good qualities that the teaching staff and Anne be finally responsible for determining educational policy and form. But we serve the children and their parents. To the extent that their feelings are neglected in the development of our program, we are betraying a trust and neglecting a basic and founding element in the school's philosophy.

Aside from communication in general, a specific area of discontent was the kindergarten age group. For a number of years we have experienced a succession of children at that level whose behavior has interfered with the quality of life for other children in the group. They have monopolized teacher attention, spoiled the fun of other children, and prevented the development of group coherence. And yet by the time they go on to 1st grade they are able to fit into the group without too much commotion. We are *not* talking about "disturbed" children. Read books on child development and learn that 5 to 6 is an age for testing, for negative, challenging behavior. Recognize the value for other children of learning to cope with teasing, bossing, aggressive peers. Admit that such children are not unique to the kindergarten year. Still, there is a strong feeling, shared by parents and staff, that it has been a more serious and perennial problem than need be in kindergarten. Much time has been spent discussing this situation by parents, Anne, and teachers. In response this spring we began to introduce some *scheduled* readiness activities into the lives of the kindergarten children in Jean's and Johanna's groups. Ruth and Janet for several months provided one half-hour a day of pre-first

grade math and language activities. Johanna and Doris provided time and direction for groups working with Stern arithmetic blocks and encouraged interest in journals. The children responded quite well to these innovations.

Our preschool is well-equipped with toys, play equipment, art and craft materials. The program is rich in opportunities, including the special subjects—shop, sports, music, art. The teachers provide many special activities—cooking, crafts, nature study, games, trips.

These have been some of the high and low points of the year at The School in Rose Valley. There are many pieces of the story left out. On balance, for me the highs greatly outweighed the lows and the year has been a good one. The process of evaluation of the many facets of the school's activities is ongoing, and we look forward to another exciting year.

ANNE RAWSON

FRONTIERS

Local Common Sense

AT least the spirit of the ancient Irish Brehon Laws has been put into operation by the Los Angeles district courts through the cooperation of Judge Arthur Gilbert, presiding judge of the Los Angeles Judicial District. A central principle of the Brehon Laws was the *making good* of an injury caused, in contrast to the Anglo-Saxon common law principle of *punishment.* This idea of making good, or restitution, is the basis of the court referral program inaugurated in August, 1975, by the Voluntary Action Center, best explained by an example given by Ursula Vils, who described the procedure in the *Los Angeles Times* for last Oct. 17:

> The woman spoke little English. She knew only that she and her children were hungry, so she stole food for them—and was arrested and convicted. She had no money to pay a fine. The judge offered an alternative: service as a volunteer in a community agency.
>
> Her "sentence" was a boon. She was assigned to a Head Start center that needed someone who spoke her language. She could take her son with her. And when her volunteer hours were completed, she had proved so valuable that Head Start hired her.

During a year, the Voluntary Action Center, an agency with long experience in matching volunteers to community needs, has placed some 2,000 persons convicted of misdemeanors (shoplifting, traffic violations) in useful jobs. Several hundred agencies throughout Los Angeles County have benefitted from the services of the court-referred volunteers. The job categories range from accounting to rocking babies at the County-USC Medical Center. In one case a bank vice president convicted of drunk driving installed a computer system for a public agency instead of going to jail or paying a fine. A dental student charged with assaulting a police officer performed dental lab work for a hospital. Practically all the "volunteers" said they enjoyed the tasks assigned as alternatives to punishment.

Judge Gilbert, an advocate of the referral system, told the *Times* writer that choice of being referred to community work is entirely voluntary. The person under sentence may decline without penalty. When an individual has skills, the Judge said, it makes sense to have him use them for restitution to society:

> "If you send a person to jail, it costs the county money. Then, if he loses his job because he's in jail, all we've done is put his kids on welfare—at county expense. . . .
>
> "The response has been fantastic. One man worked as a counselor at a drug rehabilitation halfway house, and he became so fumed on to helping its clients they hired him. Another man was assigned to set up playground equipment at a park. He got so involved with the kids that he kept going back on his own.

Mrs. Kay Bixby, executive director of the Voluntary Action Center, with headquarters at 621 S. Virgil Avenue, Los Angeles, said that the center screens the volunteers referred by the court, finding jobs that they may be good at and are comfortable doing. She estimates that the program has saved Los Angeles County close to two hundred thousand dollars in jail costs, but no one can estimate the value of court referrals to the offenders, who frequently gain in self-respect, discover new abilities, and are prevented from thinking of themselves as victims. Unfortunately, as with other programs of unquestioned value, court referral survives in a hand-to-mouth existence, without secure financing. Articulate public support is needed by the Voluntary Action Center. A San Diego reader added this suggestion in a letter to the *Times* (Nov. 6):

> Especially apropos the Southern California region is the fact that many offenders presently wasting away in jail and prisons are nonviolent and could easily be given the option of either serving their time in jail and being warehoused, or being permitted to join a "community ecology corps" for the purpose of planting trees, especially eucalyptus seedlings throughout the Los Angeles area.
>
> In ten years our desolate brown areas could be Oregonlike forests. Aside from the benefit of combating smog since each mature tree produces

somewhere in the area of ten tons of oxygen and absorbs six tons of carbon dioxide, it would seem not only common-sensical but also a matter of survival.

While the Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA) now expects that solar sources will supply only three per cent of U.S. energy needs by 1990, a grass roots movement is under way that may make this prediction ridiculous. The *Christian Science Monitor* for last Nov. 16 reported on rapid rural development of do-it-yourself solar heating devices in various regions, giving a half-column to description of how the units are constructed. Some of the space-heating devices cost about $250 to construct, while water-heating systems range from $30 to $100. In one area, the San Luis Valley in Colorado, some sixty solar units have been added to the walls of existing structures—starting with a large aluminum sheet painted black and tacked to a south wall. A transparent fiber-glass case over the aluminum, equipped with 2" x 4" "baffles," retains the heat which, as hot air, is moved by fans to basement or crawl-space storage, often with creekbed boulders to absorb and hold the heat, which then rises through the floor during the night to warm the dwelling. In other areas piped antifreeze fluid conveys the heat from roof or wall to water storage tanks.

The basic practicality of such devices is described by Amory Lovins in his Foreign Affairs (October) article:

> In the United States (with fairly high average sunlight levels) solar heating and cooling are cheaper than present electric heating virtually anywhere, cheaper than oil heat in many parts, and cheaper than gas and coal in some. Even in the least favorable parts of the continental United States, far more sunlight falls on a typical building than is required to heat and cool it without supplement. . . . Partly or wholly solar heating is attractive and being demonstrated even in cloudy countries approaching the latitude of Anchorage, such as Denmark and the Netherlands. . . . Ingenious ways of backfitting existing urban and rural buildings (even large commercial ones) or their neighborhoods with efficient and exceedingly reliable solar collectors are being rapidly developed. . . . Some novel types of very simple collectors with far lower costs also show promise in current experiments. Indeed, solar hardware per se is necessary only for backfitting existing buildings. If we build new buildings properly in the first place, they can use "passive" solar collectors—large south windows or glass-covered black south walls—rather than special collectors. If we did this to all new houses in the next 12 years, we would save about as much energy as we expect to recover from the Alaskan North Slope.