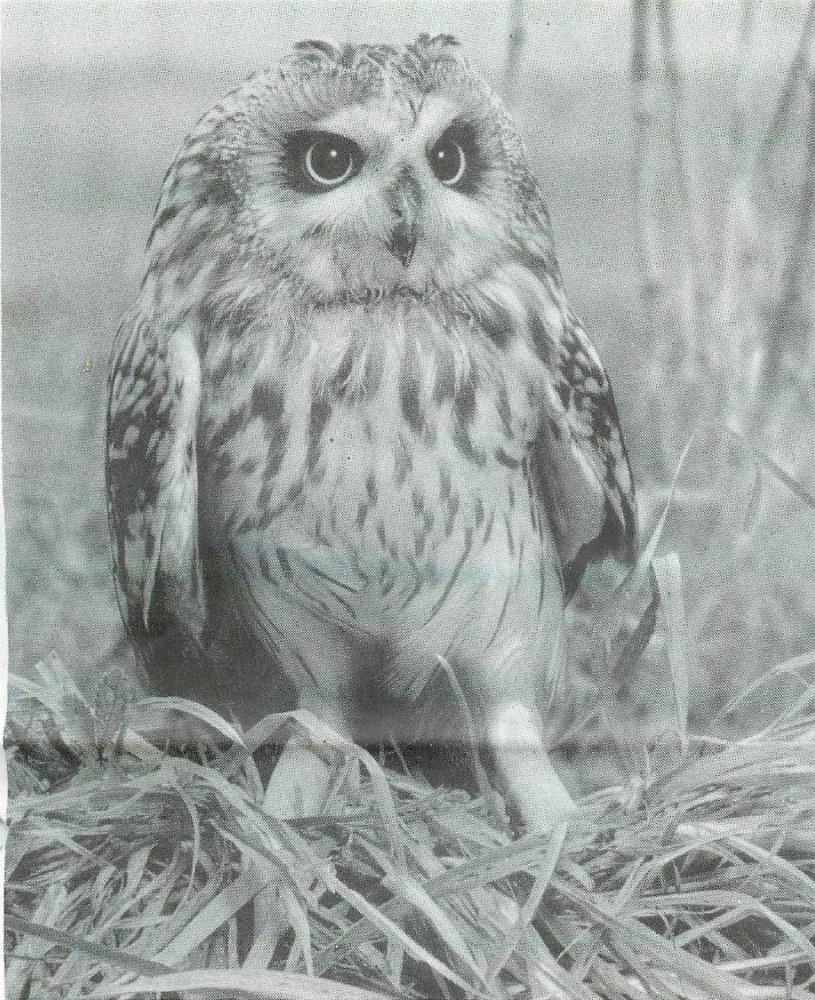


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Short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*)

Dennis Avon and Tony Tifford, Ardea London

WHAT FUTURE FOR THE WEB OF LIFE?

THE SHORT-EARED OWL, first spotted in the distance, quarters the level grassland at low altitude. Suddenly it is gliding past on silent wings. It banks and comes to rest on a nearby post. You can see the fierce expression of those yellow eyes and powerful, hooked beak. It listens, and then launches itself once more into the evening air. Short-tailed voles beware!

Nature has the power to inspire. Something in my spirit was lifted by the sight of the owl. We are told that one million plants and animals may become extinct in the next 20 years through destruction of habitat, such as tropical rain forest. This is more than a tragic prospect for the nature-lover. It is a threat to the whole web of life which is mankind's life-support system. The delicately balanced, barely understood ecosystem is often surprisingly robust. But could it withstand such an assault? No one knows. Some fear that the impact could be as devastating as a nuclear war. At best, the loss of potentially useful resources would be incalculable.

We cannot afford to be selective in our concern about the environment. For the selfishness which is often the root cause of polluted estuaries, razed rain forests and oiled auks is no different in kind from that which fails to consider the sufferings of the Third World, the lonely or the oppressed. A cure for selfishness must be high on the agenda of environmentalists or we shall only be dealing with peripherals—like trying to keep a drowning man's feet warm.

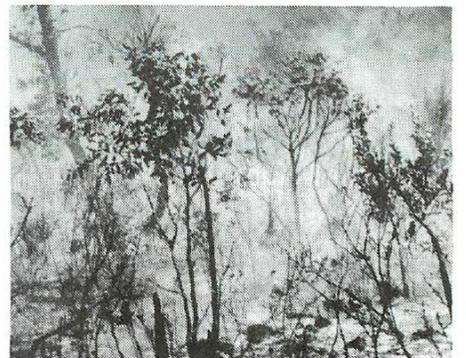
There is no 'greenprint' which will impose an answer to selfishness on an unwilling world. That depends on the choices each of us makes daily. Do I put my interests or society's first? Does my country put its or the world's interests first? Do I pause to put out unneeded lights when someone else is paying the bill? Will Britain do something about the acid rain which our industrial waste causes to fall on Scandinavia? On many such choices may depend the future viability of our planet.

Kenneth Noble



Australian Information Service, London

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The Karroo, South Africa

GRASSING THE SEMI-DESERT

by Roland Kingwill, South Africa

I LOOK FROM MY OFFICE WINDOW to the mountains, blackened by the searing drought afflicting the country, and think back on many years of farming. The farm is situated in the mountains of the Great Karroo—a huge plateau of roughly 80 million acres, graduating from an arid west to a semi-arid east. Because of the lack of regular rainfall the vegetation is extremely vulnerable to damage by animals. Yet it is a good farming area—healthy for man and beast, producing mutton, beef, wool, mohair and, to a lesser extent, milk and fruit.

Much scientific information on veldt management is now available. Dedicated extension officers use their time and imagination to advise farms on the best methods of applying new discoveries. Government subsidies are available to encourage conservation of the soil. Yet the Great Karroo is in danger of desertification. A recent symposium at the local college of agriculture agreed that the grazing lands of South Africa were deteriorating. With an increasing population and many needing higher living standards, this is dangerous.

Knowledge, energy and financial encouragement are clearly not enough. In my own experience the missing factor was supplied by a decision which, at the beginning, had nothing to do with conservation. Although I was aware of growing problems in the country and sometimes of a sense of anxiety, my life lacked purpose and direction. My wife and I met some people who helped us seek and find God's

direction in our lives. This changed things in our home and made us feel responsible for our country's future.

Soil erosion was an urgent problem at the time. 'The place to start to find the cure is on your own land,' I felt God telling me. 'Decrease the number of sheep grazing your ground by one third, rotate your flocks in their paddocks.' This meant sacrificing income, at a time when we were carrying a heavy bond on the land. But we decided to launch out in faith, sold one third of our livestock and began a strict grazing management scheme.

In a semi-arid area changes come slowly. But after some years we realised that grass was growing where it had never grown before. Shrubs were coming onto what used to be bare patches of ground. Then the sheep began to yield more wool and the percentage of lambs increased.

Twenty-five years after we began our experiment there was a critical drought. Interestingly, the government decided to give financial assistance to all farmers who would reduce their stock by one third, to conserve the veldt.

As I look at the brown mountains or down the long valley I now know that there is much better grass cover than there was when we began our new system many years ago. Redgrass (*Themeda trianda*) covers hillsides where it could not be seen before. When the rains come, the grass will slow down the water's descent into the valley and the precious topsoil will be kept in its place.

For us this is an investment which can never be calculated in cash. We have had to take less money so as to care for the land, but it has brought an abiding joy to our hearts. It has also proved that land which has begun to deteriorate can be reclaimed.

There are many environmental problems, some more explosive than misuse of the land. Nearly all have their roots in men and women, and they can be answered as we learn to make God's plan paramount in our personal lives. ■

A PAINTER'S EYE

by W Heaton Cooper RI, the landscape painter

ONE SPRING AFTERNOON, when I was about 17, I tried to paint the view from a mountainside, looking across a lake and up a river valley to the mountains at its head. I had to admit failure. So I just sat still, watching the clouds being carried by the west wind from the sea 30 miles away. The mountains lifted the clouds, which dropped their showers, thus feeding the springs and the river which in turn fed the lake, which sent its waters back into the sea.

Something about this orderly cycle of the movement of water—one of the basic needs of mankind—gradually convinced me of the existence of a mind behind it all. This brought me an experience of deep joy and reverence, and of the presence of God in His creation which somehow included me. An experience of Christ, God in man, came some years later.

Most of my life has been an attempt, through many failures, to give expression in form and colour to God's blessing upon His earth. 'O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all; the earth is full of Thy riches....' The 104th Psalm says it richly, and so have many writers, poets and painters since.

Yet alongside this has existed a flaw in man's nature—his greed for power, possessions and prestige. This, especially and increasingly in our time, is destroying the God-given balance of creation. Ruthless cash-cropping, litter, pollution, the exploitation and destruction of animals are the evil results. Blindness to the natural beauty of the earth and the needs of man leads to nuclear contamination, defoliants, acid rain, napalm bombing and other poisons.

At a recent international conference of ecologists David Attenborough said that the problem of conserving the



Murray Atholl

W Heaton Cooper

world's environment is at least as serious as that of nuclear war, and that we have about 20 years in which to solve it.

How are we to find the answer? The root problem, greed, lies in the human heart. That is where we need to find the cure. Whenever I have honestly faced my own greed and ambition—usually greed for prestige, which is fairly common among artists—and handed over all that I know of myself to all that I know of God, the answer has begun to come.

As well as dealing daily with the greed in ourselves, we obviously need also to challenge the symptoms of that greed. To quote a local instance, last year one of the most powerful combines in the country made a highly organised bid to carry out a scheme which would have defaced the two wildest and loveliest lakes in England. Several conservation societies and individuals were able to stop this. Truly David and Goliath!

If we have experienced the cure for greed personally or socially, we can pass on this answer to anyone, whoever they may be and in whatever position of power—and thankfully there are a few such people who are fighting hard to bring ethics into economics. ■

LAST STAND

The Truchanas Huon Pine Reserve, South West Tasmania, was named after a Latvian refugee who devoted much of his life to photographing Tasmania's South West. His campaign saved these ancient Huon Pines from extinction, after most had been destroyed by logging or damming for hydro-power. Truchanas' collection of 70,000 colour slides was destroyed in a bush-fire about 10 years ago. He was drowned in the Franklin River rapids while trying to re-photograph the area.

*These trees reached up for light
when Jesus walked on earth,
a thousand years of rain and sun
sealed their archival growth.
A thousand more they stood in state
in their lost world inviolate.*

*Till white man with his lust
to plunder, reap, and sell,
rifled their forest solitude
ruthless to find and fell
with axe and chain and screaming saw,
the planet's final predator.*

*But one man, late in time,
born beyond distant seas,
burned with impassioned mind to save
these rivers, mountains, trees.
A tide was stemmed before he went:
these pines remain his monument.*

*Now for our race our globe
our fragile only ark
swung between fear and hope we ask
what waits in the great dark—
a rendezvous with some new birth,
or the last stand of man on earth?*

Michael Thwaites

How we escaped

by John Williams, Victoria, Australia

EVERY SO OFTEN something makes you realise how nature still governs the modern world. In one 24-hour period this February south-eastern Australia was ravaged by bush fires which took 71 lives, destroyed 1,770 homes and wiped out animals and property worth billions of dollars. My wife and two young children and I were involved in a minor way in one of the outbreaks.

We were holidaying in my brother-in-law's beach house two hours' drive south-west of Melbourne. I remarked to the next-door neighbour that it must be one of the best places on earth to have a break. The three-mile beach was surrounded by hills covered by magnificent eucalyptus forest, on the edge of which were dotted a few hundred houses. You could be marvellously alone with the sky, the sun and the untamed trees. As the waves kept breaking on the sand as they had for centuries, you felt a bond with things eternal hard to find in cities.

The bush this year was drier than we had ever known it. You grow up with harrowing stories of what happens when fire gets loose in such conditions. But this beach house was not far from the main road and the sea. Scores of other houses stood between it and the bush. There had been fires in other summers and once or twice a few homes had been burnt. But there was very little chance, we all thought, that anything would get as far as us.

Cloud

The forecast that day was for very hot weather—well over 40°C. Half-way through the morning my two-year-old son and I drove a mile to collect our mail, the milk and a newspaper. We wanted to get onto the beach and into the cool water as quickly as possible. But for some reason I took the time to take some money out of the Post Office bank and fill the car with petrol.

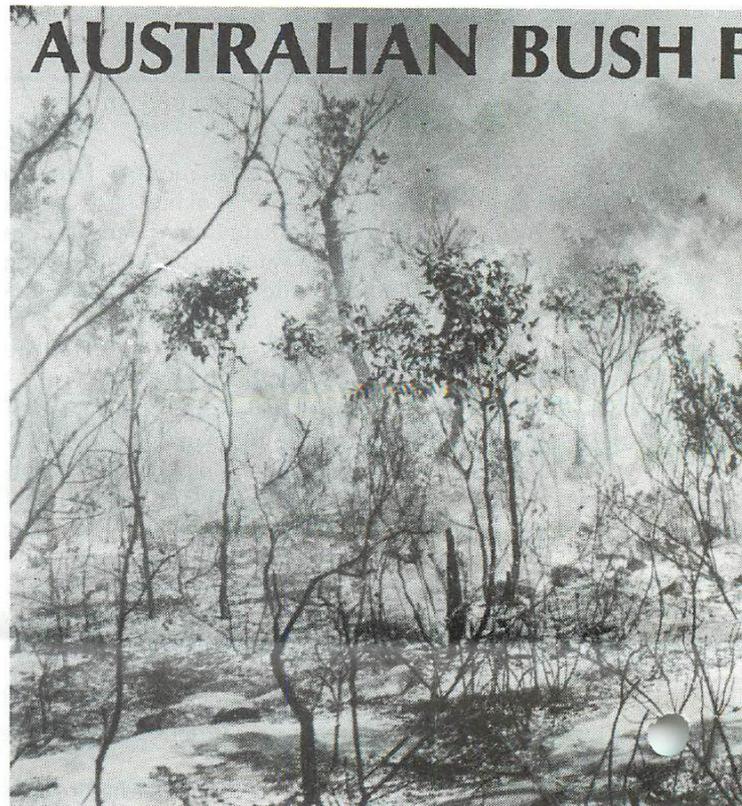
In the afternoon my wife offered to stay with the children at the house while I went for another swim. The neighbours and I stood in the water and looked at a big grey cloud over the headlands to the south. We thought it must be the duststorm we were expecting. 'It can't be a fire,' the neighbour said, 'or we'd smell smoke.'

Then a fire truck went down the road. Obviously something was burning somewhere. But it was only one truck, and an old one at that.

When I got back to the house, though, the power had gone off and my wife was packing our clothes. It seemed sensible to put most of our things in the car, in case. Then she took the children for a walk and I went out the back of the house to see if there was anything I could do with a hose to make the house less vulnerable, in the remote chance that it would be threatened. A couple of minutes later she came rushing up the hill, shouting that the police had driven past saying everyone should go down to the beach.

It still didn't occur to us that we were doing anything but getting out for an hour or two. We left the sheets on our beds and our food in the refrigerator. We looked round to see which of our hosts' possessions we could take, and gathered up the visitors' books in which hundreds of guests had written messages of appreciation.

When we reached the main road a hundred metres away,



we found that the police had sealed it off to the south and were telling everyone to go north. The fire, they said, was coming at 20 kilometres an hour and was six kilometres away.

We went to the community hall near the post office and sat around with a few dozen others for half an hour. Only then did we ask God to tell us in silence what to do. The thought came to go home to Melbourne. It still seemed a fairly far-out idea, but at least the children could sleep in their own beds. So we set off. If I hadn't got money and petrol that morning we could not have done so.

Kindergarten

Later we discovered that if we'd delayed for another hour the fire would have cut the road. At about that time the wind changed, turning the bush fire into a fire storm which covered ten kilometres in eight minutes. Houses exploded sending whole roofs flying through the air. Just 100 metres from where we had waited in the hall, four people survived by rushing down the cliffs and standing up to their necks in the sea for two hours. My brother-in-law's house, and those around it, are now ashes. Ninety per cent of the homes in the area were destroyed. And this was only one of a dozen places struck by the fire that Ash Wednesday.

There have been many stories of heroism, and of miraculous escapes. One township in the hills outside Melbourne was almost completely wiped out. As the men fought the fire through the night the women and children sheltered in the kindergarten hall. Then the flames reached them. At 3am 120 women and children lay for an hour on the floor under wet blankets while two men sat on the roof playing hoses on it, with flaming debris as big as soccer balls flying past them. When the fathers returned they could not believe their families had escaped. As the fire passed on, a telegraph pole burned in the shape of a cross. A small child said in the silence, 'Mummy, God loves us.' ■



The Australian Information Service, London

And now regeneration?

by Michael Brown, Australia

'RECESSION, DROUGHT and now these bush fires...It's like Moses and Pharaoh in Egypt,' said a despondent state cabinet minister, as walls of flame raced at 80 kilometres per hour through his state, razing whole towns to the ground, obliterating forests, killing livestock and people.

In relatively few months, these plagues have struck Australia one after another. Economic recession, in a supposedly 'lucky country' blessed with resources, has been bad enough. Added to that is the worst drought this century, with reports of up to 3000 sheep in one small area being shot and abandoned all in a day's work. For some farmers, this has been the fourth year of drought; the national grain crop has been cut by half.

Then a week before the fires, TV screens showed an aerial picture of Melbourne being steadily enveloped by a curtain of dense dust—tons of precious topsoil whipped off farmlands of the interior, where overgrazing and deforestation have left the land defenceless against the drought. Up to 60 per cent of our export earnings come from the land. That scene reminded us that our economic life-blood is being swept away, clogging up dams and rivers, draining out to sea.

And now the bush fires: TV images of mountainsides aflame, burnt-out vehicles, pathetic figures sitting through the smouldering rubble of their homes. Something in the nation turns. Disgruntled Australian attitudes of 'knocking' and 'whingeing', evident especially during the current election campaign, disappear overnight. Relief funds raise their targets four times over. Building workers, who have led the push for wage increases, offer their help with the

reconstruction. Bob Hawke, a contender for Prime Minister, has been campaigning on the slogan of 'Bringing Australia together'. The fires have done it for him.

But is it enough? Will we really learn the lessons of these plagues? Or like Pharaoh, will we turn back and harden our hearts again? The Old Testament is full of stories of nations turning away from God and His way, and inviting retribution upon themselves. Elijah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Joel, Jeremiah, Isaiah: a succession of doleful prophets warning of the suffering that was to come unless people changed their ways. Their message was hardly welcomed: After three years of drought and famine, Elijah was still having a tough time convincing the nation to turn from worshipping false idols. What reaction would he get in Australia today, one wonders? Within this century, Mahatma Gandhi chastened his countrymen with the thought that the purpose of a massive earthquake in Bihar was to make them repent of the sin of untouchability, of treating people as filth because of their caste. 'Who knows that all our woes are not due to that one black sin?' wrote Gandhi in 1924. Would the Mahatma regard Australia's troubles today as a result of an eroded moral landscape and burnt-out conscience?

Exchange

Surely a God of love does not victimise a few innocent folk—like those who lost homes, farms, dear ones in the fires—as punishment for the sins of the nation? No., it cannot be. But that is to misrepresent what the prophets were driving at—which was really the same basic law of cause and effect that underlies environmental issues. Flout the natural laws—which apply as much to man's inner moral environment as to the outer physical environment—and someone, somewhere, will sooner or later cop the consequences. Sadly it is often the innocent.

When my own ancestors settled in Australia 120 years ago, they vastly overstocked their properties, destroying natural grasses and unwittingly ravaging the land. Knowing much more, we continue the process today. Our unique rain forests in south-west Tasmania rumble with bulldozers and are threatened with *flooding in our lust for energy resources*. Man's insatiable demand for coal-power energy is pumping carbon dioxide into the atmosphere at a rate that will raise surface temperatures significantly and create repeated droughts in our temperate wheat-producing zones within decades. Bush fires may be termed 'natural disasters', but in one state, Victoria, 119 fires this summer have allegedly been lit by arsonists.

Man's outer environment may depend on the condition of his inner environment. If this is so, we must face the truth of what we have done to each other and to God's universe. With honest repentance, and forgiveness from God and from each other, renewal will come as surely as green shoots will appear amidst the blackened skeletons of our forests.

Foretelling the work of Christ, Isaiah expressed God's promise of 'beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness'. In the bush beauty will ultimately emerge from the ashes. For man, the process is not automatic. The exchange requires an act of thought and will, a choice.

Can we, in gratitude for God's love and gifts, start to nurture the great rich land He has entrusted to us for the benefit of all, and stop devouring it with our selfish appetites and narrow-mindedness? Fire, scientists say, brings regeneration to nature. Will it bring regeneration to us? ■

ALAN CHANNER is about to start a degree in applied zoology, with a view to working on the ecological aspects of agriculture and conservation.

TOTAL CONSERVATION

CONSERVATION, Prince Philip stated in *Highlife* magazine recently, is 'partly a practical and partly a moral issue'. 'It is (about) what individual people believe to be right or wrong and the sort of world they would like to live in. For all practical purposes we could survive in a concrete jungle on some nutrient material.'

The Duke of Edinburgh provokes some important questions—What sort of environment suits man best? What is the future of man's relationship with the natural world?

In recent years financial gains have largely been given primacy over nature. Greed has been institutionalised in the name of economic growth. Man is becoming increasingly alienated from living nature.

In *Small is Beautiful* E F Schumacher quoted a controversial statement of Harrison Brown, a professor of the University of California: 'Industrial society is fundamentally unstable and subject to reversion to agrarian existence. Within it the conditions which offer individual freedom are unstable in their ability to avoid the conditions which impose rigid organisation and totalitarian control.'

Dr Schumacher commented, 'Even if this were dismissed as a long-term view there is the immediate question of whether "modernisation" as currently practised without regard to religious and spiritual values, is actually producing agreeable results.'

What can we do? We must certainly not continue in the present vein of whatever's quickest and easiest for short-term gain. But while it is easy to see where society is wrong, it's another thing to answer the problems in the microcosm of society which is me. For as Prince Philip points out, conservation is a personal challenge. 'You've got to allow your concern for conservation to influence your decisions and practice at all times,' he wrote in the article already quoted. 'It is no use complaining about oil on the beaches and leaving all your rubbish when you have a picnic.' ■

HOWARD GRACE is a teacher in a Berkshire comprehensive school:

WHY MOVE UP MARKET?

IN A CURRENT AFFAIRS session some months ago I discussed the economic situation in Britain with a group of sixth formers. They felt it was natural for people to strive for material advancement. I asked whether, once their basic needs have been met, more wealth makes people happier. This led to a fascinating discussion about priorities in life.

As a teacher I feel I must apply the theories I talk about with my pupils to my own style of life. For instance, I have heard many people say that a family cannot live on a

teacher's salary. That depends on what you mean by 'live'. I am on the bottom salary scale for teachers. My wife doesn't go out to work because we feel it's important that she is available for our two small children. Yet we seem to have the money we need.

Of course we are sometimes tempted to want more. Recently a job on a higher salary scale became available at school. A colleague suggested I apply for it. Apart from more pastoral contact with problem children it would have involved a lot more administration. After some thought I realised that it was more important for me to have time and energy to concentrate on trying to be a good classroom teacher of mathematics and of sixth-form current affairs than to earn a higher salary.

When I moved to my present job, my wife and I took out a mortgage on a house. We looked for certain features—such as a large room for entertaining in a small economic home—which we thought would make it possible for God to use it and us to the full. It seemed the natural way to proceed. Our first estate agent had other assumptions. 'It's about time she moved up market,' he said, of another client. Of course there are often good reasons for getting a larger house or a more responsible job. But 'moving up market' smacks of materialistic and prestige-seeking motives.

We have found that when we are involved in helping other people to reach their full potential, we are satisfied. And we are much less likely to succumb to the attractions of consumerism, one of the main threats to the preservation of the earth's resources. ■

WHOSE MONEY?

by Mary Wood, Birmingham

A FEW WEEKS BEFORE CHRISTMAS, I bought an expensive fur coat. I have always had a fur coat for warmth and my two old ones were beyond repair. I sold them both to be used for patching other coats.

As Christmas drew nearer, I began to feel guilty. All the charities were asking for money. There was not much about.

I told myself I would not have given away what I paid for the coat, anyway. Then I had a card from a friend saying what a gift it was to have friends who remained faithful to their commitment to God, year after year. This brought me up short, as I had never committed my money to God, *letting Him tell me how to use it. I suddenly realised that whenever I felt depressed I would go out and buy something to cheer me up, which did not really help in the long run.*

I told some friends the whole story. I asked God's forgiveness, recommitted my life to Him and this time gave Him control of my money too. I am no longer young. But I know God has a plan for my life, where I put others before myself. ■

'There can be little doubt that a visitor from another planet dropping into our world today would take a very jaundiced view indeed of man's claim to be regarded as homo sapiens. Where is the wisdom in a species that has destroyed its own sense of well-being and put its entire economic, financial and social structure in mortal peril by insisting on abusing a simple device that it had invented to facilitate exchanges of goods and services—money?'

C Gordon Tether, Lombard column, 'Financial Times'

EURO-ARAB GATHERING 3 APPROACHES FOR PROBLEM- SOLVERS

AN OLD MANOR-HOUSE in the snow-covered uplands of the Ardennes was recently the venue for discussions along the lines of the Euro-Arab Dialogue which has been taking place over the past years under the auspices of the European Community. However, this, the latest in a series of conferences arranged by the Robert Schuman Centre, was outside the framework of the formal sessions. Attitudes towards Middle East problems were a particular focus of the discussions.

The hosts were Bernard Zamaron, a Counsellor in the European Community Commission at Luxembourg, and his wife. They have converted the farmhouse and barn adjacent to their manor-house into a conference centre—the logs burning in the chimney-piece contrasted with the modern interpreters' booths and equipment in the hall. The guests were ambassadors and other representatives of Arab countries, along with Members of the European Parliament, officials of the Community, and experts in various fields.

Economics secondary

The keynote was struck by Robin Mowat, a historian from Oxford, when he asked whether anything in Europe's experience since 1945 might be relevant to the Middle East. Appropriately, at a centre which goes by the name of the founding father of the European Community, Robert Schuman, Dr Mowat quoted his words:

'To begin by creating a moral climate in which true brotherly unity can flourish, overarching all that today tears the world apart—that is the immediate goal.'

'The acquisition of wisdom about men and their affairs by bringing people together in public assemblies and personal encounters—that is the means employed.'

'To provide teams of trained men, ready for the service of the state, apostles of reconciliation and builders of a new world, that is the beginning of a far-reaching transformation of society in which, during 15 war-ravaged years, the first steps have already been made.'

'It is not a question of a change of policy; it is a question of changing men.'

Schuman had written these words when Foreign Minister of France as part of his foreword to the French edition of *Remaking the World*, the collected speeches of Moral Re-Armament's initiator, Frank Buchman. Schuman wrote at almost the same time as he launched his plan for setting up the first Community. The kind of 'public assemblies' he had in view were those of MRA at Caux. He attended one himself, as did his partner and co-founder of the European Community, Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of West Germany.

'If we Europeans have anything to offer now,' Dr Mowat continued, 'it can only be in a spirit of acknowledging our wrongdoings and shortcomings, past and present, and humbly seeking forgiveness. Then perhaps our positive and creative experience may be accepted as valid for others.'

Having torn ourselves to pieces in wars which became world wars, we at last found a way of dealing with our conflicts and problems—a way which could become a model for the rest of the world.'

That economic problems are secondary was made clear by John Stebbing, whose experience stemmed from his time as Chief Secretary in the governments of Swaziland and Somaliland. Modern methods of irrigation, water-control and desalination could make many arid lands productive. Farmland could now be developed in the Middle East on a sufficient scale to reduce congestion in refugee areas and resettle a high proportion of families, while for others there could be a viable future through the encouragement of industry and the creation of modern services. It was the 'political will' that was lacking—a phrase which implies a change in motives and human relations which could transform the situation.

Break with past

The discussion did not lack reminders, however, of present realities with their legacy of conflicts and tensions. How could such problems be tackled in a new context was the question. Assessing the validity of the European experience in this connection, reference was made to Irène Laure, the former resistance and socialist leader. She had helped initiate a new era between France and Germany when she apologised to the Germans at Caux in 1948 for her hatred of them and their country. Reference was also made to the Moroccan nationalist Ahmed el-Guessous. The answer which he found at Caux to his hatred led on to his playing a vital part in the independence of his country. A similar outreach of Caux had been crucial in the negotiations which brought about the independence of Tunisia.

The importance of the spiritual factor was stressed by Robert Battersby, Member of the European Parliament for Humberside, and Mme Lentz-Cornette, MEP for Luxembourg. Her point was that with this factor you could sit down and reach agreement—otherwise emotions such as hatred dominated and you became aggressors. Yves Brunswick, head of the French Commission for UNESCO, called for a 'break with the past, and a spirit of openness' which could come through a change of heart and mind among Europeans as well as people in the Middle East.

Summing up

How to achieve reconciliation was one of the main themes. Leopold von Buch, a member of the former landowning élite of East Prussia, spoke of his hatred of the British after two wars in which his country had been defeated and his family had become refugees. He had found freedom from the resentments which had particularly festered in his heart during his many months in a British prisoner-of-war camp. This had enabled him to play a part in bringing unity not only in his own part of Europe but in countries overseas.

The conference ended with a period of silent listening, so often the means of bringing new hope into difficult situations and in resolving conflicts. As the presiding ambassador said in his summing up, three approaches for dealing with problems such as those of the Middle East had been presented—the approach of 'prayer and meditation'; the technological approach for creating fertile lands; and the political approach. He said that his approach was 'these three together'. ■

CREATIVE CHANGE IN NUWARA ELIYA



Local teachers talk with foreign visitors at a house party in Sri Lanka.

FOURTEEN PEOPLE from five continents last month travelled to Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka, to take part in an MRA house party on the theme, 'Creative change for inspired democracy'. Students, teachers, tea planters, an agricultural officer and other Sri Lankans also took part.

The house party was told of action which developed out of a similar occasion last year (See *New World News* Vol 30 No 9). Sumithra Ratnayake, Principal of Paynter Memorial School, Nuwara Eliya, had decided to take ten students from five Sri Lankan schools to a youth training course at the MRA centre at Panchgani, India. One of these students was 19-year-old Jayaweera Kumarasinghe. In India, he found release from his bitterness at seeing his cousin burned alive as a suspected terrorist in 1971. On his return he wrote a play, *Student power new style*, dramatising the true story of how Madras students helped settle a nine-month-old strike in the Standard Motor Company. The play also weaves in local experiences of student strikes and family problems. Twenty-five pupils from his school at Galnewa travelled with their principal and five teachers for eight hours by bus to give the first public performance of the play in Paynter Memorial School during this year's house party.

Miss Ratnayake said that after last year's house party she had become concerned about the mother of one of her pupils. This woman had no money because her husband was a drunkard, and eventually deserted her. So the woman was forced to take trees at night from the forestry reserve behind the school, for firewood and to sell. Miss Ratnayake, hearing that her sister had received an order for 100 crocheted blouses, decided to teach the mother to crochet. The idea caught on in the town and now 15 women are earning money making blouses instead of destroying trees.

Rohini de Mel, who initiated the house party, said that 'creative change' sprang from care. 'Inasmuch as the

creation of man was God's masterpiece, so man can be inspired by God—the Divine Spark which reposes in all of us—to act with care and responsibility towards our fellow-men.' Miss de Mel said the task for the future was 'to multiply this creative force and find a new quality of living'.

After the house party the international visitors took assemblies in three of the schools which had sent pupils to Panchgani. They experienced the rich variety of Sri Lankan life as they drove along the country roads, and walked through paddy fields to visit a Muslim village in Kalawewa. They also visited the Victoria Dam Project, Anuradhapura and Mihintale. ■

'CLASHPOINT'

THE HOUSE-FULL signs were out as a multi-racial audience packed the Westminster Theatre, London, last week for the first night of *Clashpoint*, a play by Betty Gray and Nancy Ruthven. Ambassadors, community relations officers and minority leaders in the stalls could hear the cheers, laughter and whistles as school parties, one of them from Brixton, participated in the action from the circle.

The play shows the clash between races and classes in a British city. But as one of the cast, Miguel Richards, told interviewer Alex Pascal on BBC Radio London, 'the play goes on to show how it can be resolved'.

The cast, who take time from their jobs, studies or retirement to take part, include Hari Shukla, Senior Community Relations Officer for Tyne and Wear. At a reception after the first-night performance, Mr Shukla said, 'The issues in the play are real. We have been trying to tackle them. I began to get results when I started to use the methods shown in the play.' These included seeking guidance from 'the Inner Voice, which means Almighty God'.

The three-night run is the latest in a series of performances which has taken *Clashpoint* to several British cities and towns. Nearly 400 attended two performances in Sheffield last month. The Provost of the Cathedral, the President of the Council for Racial Equality and the Vice-Chairman of the Pakistan association introduced the Sheffield performances. A police officer commented afterwards, 'There is something in this play for everybody.' ■



Hari Shukla, Senior Community Relations Officer for Tyne and Wear, talks to one of four ambassadors who attended the performance of 'Clashpoint' on 2 March.

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