

HARMONY

*Harmony is the musical
flow of environmental awareness
and evolutionary knowledge
through the mind of man.*

Harmony of knowledge, will, and feeling toward the earth is wisdom; for it has to do with living at peace with other forms of life. At one time man lived in harmony like all other creatures, and during most of his long existence this had been his way of life, but today it is no longer true. Since the beginning of civilization, harmony with nature has been almost disregarded, though it has been recognized by a few great minds as the only solution to the problem of finding peace and contentment. Man has devoted his intelligence and energy to conquering nature, subduing it, molding it to his will. He has in the last few decades changed the surface of the earth, crisscrossing it with a vast network of roads, excavations, and lines of communication. He has become a geological force, leveling mountains, pushing hills into valleys, swamps, and estuaries, polluting the earth, air, and water to the point it may soon become uninhabitable for him, as well as all other species.

He has exhausted the earth's resources, robbed both water



and soil of nutrients, exterminated many forms of wildlife, reached a point in his savage exploitation where he must assess what he has done.

In wilderness, harmony is the natural way of life as it has always been, but we must not destroy it by overcrowding or by any exploitative use that might change it. The most important function of the wilderness for modern man is the opportunity of glimpsing for a moment what harmony really means. Having sensed it, he can bring the vision back to our urban complexes, and the wisdom that enables us to understand what we have lost. It is wisdom we are striving for in our daily lives, wisdom that colors our attitudes not only toward cities with their clamor but toward all who live within them, nearby or far removed.

My camp is tucked into a cluster of spruces and pines, with its doorway looking down a great vista of island-dotted waterway. I have just started my evening fire and a thin plume of smoke rises to the sky. The canoe is snubbed to a tree, the packs under cover, and enough kindling tucked away for morning. A squirrel chatters at me from an overhead branch and whisky jacks are already drifting in for scraps of food. It is easy to think of harmony here. The soft musical, almost ventriloquial notes of the whisky jacks—their lack of fear brings me close to them.

I eat my meal to the singing of the birds back of the tent. This to me is balance and wisdom, and I know the whole world of nature is a matter of adjustment. Harmony, I realize, is impossible to define; it is presumptive and ridiculous to say, "I am in harmony at this particular moment." Harmony is an intuitive sense, an unexplainable thing, something that is part of you without your knowing how it came about.

There are catastrophic occurrences in nature, but in time such imbalances are corrected and harmony returns. Man in

his short time span, his inability to accept the long point of view, is impatient with the slowness of nature and doubtful of his world ever achieving balance. Why, he asks, do tornadoes level great stands of trees that took centuries to grow? Why do floods inundate the bottom lands of rivers, with great loss of life and destruction to countless homes, villages, and even cities? Why the ice ages that have come and gone for millions of years? Why earthquakes, wars, and disease? Why do the four horsemen of the apocalypse ride across a once peaceful earth? Why? Why? Things such as these man cannot understand, for he has not the length of vision.

A year ago a sudden windstorm blew down a huge Norway pine behind my cabin. That tree had been a joy to me, but the wind came without warning, twisted it, and felled it so close to the end of the cabin that it grazed the corner and dropped its great weight next to the fireplace without harming a single other tree. When I saw it, I was shocked, knowing what could have happened, though I had been warned when a bolt of lightning hit its lofty top a couple of years ago and made a livid scar down its trunk to the ground. I knew then the tree was doomed.

I did not cut the splintered stub, but left some fifteen feet of it standing as a reminder of my good fortune. Out of the rest I made firewood, for much of it was already dead and dry. Now my woodshed has the finest kindling I could ask for and a pile of the branch ends to use in the fireplace when I want the smell of them.

I think of the spruce budworm, which has decimated millions of acres of balsam and spruce, of the cotton-boll weevil, of the blight that wiped out the great chestnut trees in the Eastern states, of the countless epidemics that have supposedly ruined forests all over the continent, and thinking about them I am sometimes sad, until I remind myself it is

part of the great cycle. Though it may seem out of harmony with nature's plan, it is only because of our limited perspective that we do not comprehend.

Last summer a party of young boys camped at the north end of Basswood Lake, their tents set up on the smooth duff under a stand of big red pine. During the night, a storm blew up and a bolt of lightning hit the top of one of the tallest trees, flashed down the trunk following the root over which one of the tents was pitched, instantly killed a boy lying close to it and shocked several others. Why did it have to happen? Where was the harmony there? It was a time of sadness for the boy's parents and for his companions, and again there was no explanation. All I could think of was the old Indian tradition of never camping under big trees. Centuries of experience had taught them why.

There is more to harmony than events such as these, for it involves man's attitude toward the earth. Instead of looking at it in the concept of the old Judeo-Christian philosophy of domination—ignoring the ancient ways of nature and molding it to our wishes—we must now look at the earth with recognition of our close relationship to all life.

Our ecological crisis is simply proof we as exploiters are now reaping the results of greed and thoughtlessness, that only when we know what is meant by an ecological conscience will we ever reverse our attitude and be able to meet the situation we have created.

Harmony is evident in countless ways. It is easy to see it working in the wilds, more difficult to understand in the cities, even though there we have before us the ultimate result of our activity. We speak blithely of conservation, the environmental movement, forgetting the basis of everything is harmony. It means many things, but foremost is the realization that this old earth is our home, the only one we will ever

have in spite of progress in exploring space. I often think the greatest achievement of our space effort is the picture of our beautiful blue-green planet whirling in space surrounded by an atmosphere that makes it habitable for man. More than anything coming out of these dramatic adventures, this view of the earth is the most important. For the first time man saw it with cosmic perception: this was the world he must cherish and preserve.

The astronauts who took the famous series of pictures talked about how they felt seeing all of the earth at one time, and how beautiful it was, how small and alone it appeared in the vast void of space. If all mankind could see what those men saw, the planet that had given man and all other creatures birth, if he could see at a glance the ugliness he was responsible for, if there were some way he could see the pollution of the oceans, rivers, and lakes, the swirling atmosphere around it, the mountains of garbage he has placed upon it—if this cosmic view could be extended to the point where he would realize his survival was at stake, he might be willing to do something about it.

But even though man knows, and scientists have told of the hazards we have raised, he goes his merry way, believing somehow the nightmare will go away and life continue as usual. The journeys to the moon, the explorations of Mercury and possibly other planets have demonstrated our power and ingenuity, and though there are many marvelous by-products from those efforts which add to our comfort and efficiency, unless we face reality soon, all such advances may be for naught.

Einstein's feeling for harmony puts all worries into perspective when he says: "The scientist is possessed by the sense of universal causation. . . . His religious feeling takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural

law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that compared with it, all the systemic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection. This feeling is the guiding principle of his life and work. . . . It is beyond question closely akin to that which has possessed the religious geniuses of all ages."

AWARENNESS

*If I knew all there is to know
about a golden arctic poppy growing
on a rocky ledge in the Far North,
I would know the whole story of
evolution and creation.*

The little bay below the cabin was calm, though white-caps were showing on the open lake in the dusk. It was autumn, the time of full color; the tall white birches and flaming maples rimming the cove glowed with the last rays of sunlight. My companion called and I hurried down to the landing. The water was translucent mother-of-pearl; the reflections so clear it was not until a slight ruffle stirred the water that the birches trembled and the maples glowed anew, as though someone with a broad brush had blended them along the entire shore.

My friend, a famous photographer, turned to me and I could see his excitement. He took many pictures, caught the water when it was still and when it stirred and quivered the reflection of the trees. In his eyes were wonder and delight, and though he had spent his life portraying the beauty of many places, this for him was a perfect moment.

This sense of awareness and wonder we find in children;