

grows exponentially with such loss. For similar reasons, we should have taken better care of The Biosphere's rivets, the living species. Their future, in turn, is determined *inter alia* by their genetic diversity, so that neglect of this point may shake the very foundation of The Biosphere and hence of our human existence.

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* and, incidentally, the Co-Organizer and Local Agent of our Fourth International Conference on Environmental Future: Surviving With The Biosphere, which is to take place during 22–27 April 1990 mainly on the heights overlooking Budapest, and concerning which we plan to publish details in our next issue.—Ed.

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Interest and Beauty in the World

To one who, for nearly 80 years, has found our natural world fascinating and beautiful, it has become more and more distressing and emotionally painful to see it made increasingly and often shockingly homogenized and drab. The incredible diversity that makes Nature so interesting and satisfying to observe and investigate is disappearing at an exponentially increasing rate. The beauty that makes life so pleasant and worth living fades almost daily before our eyes, mainly in the names of 'progress' and profit! The only factor that will make the situation of our descendants tolerable may be that they will never have experienced the beauty that we know. If some of what is written about it persists and is read, or if photographs and paintings manage to survive and save faded inklings of what we have been privileged to enjoy, and so are seen, posterity will justly condemn us. The results of our greed and short-sightedness will be what will live after us. Our great-grandchildren will have little reason to revere us. There will surely be little trace of ancestor-worship in a future and, hopefully, more enlightened world.

One wonders why a natural landscape never becomes tiresome, why a new view—whether of mountain or prairie—is such a delight, why one never sees clashing or disharmonious colour combinations in a flower, a sunset, or a landscape. Is this something inherent in these phenomena, or is it something within us? Why is it that such things are so vivid to us when we are small children but tend to relative dullness as we mature? The latter impression may be the result of familiarity coupled with increasing preoccupation with survival in an ever-more crowded and competitive world. But our original response to what we see in Nature must be ingrained—an age-long, innate evolutionary conditioning and response to the environment in which Man developed. Instinctive recognition of what we were surrounded by during the evolution of our consciousness may be what makes us comfortable in, and responsive to, natural beauty. This beauty, itself, may be what, during our evolution, was imprinted in our nervous systems.

The clash and discordance of so much of what our artificial surroundings confront us with—colours put together in strange combinations, proportions seldom or never seen in Nature, weird angular shapes and geometrical arrangements—may well be simply things that were uncommon or not present in our evolutionary environment. Natural selection has formed us to fit and respond to what we are surrounded by. Artificial selection, resulting from more and more crowding into these increasingly unnatural surroundings, may well, as time goes on—if we survive—change us, even making us insensitive to what now pleases and satisfies us. It may make us, in the not-too-remote future, into something not very admirable from our present viewpoint.

At present it seems to us that, if there is something particularly beautiful or interesting in the world, there is always someone ready and waiting, for profit or power, to destroy or anyway change it—a jaundiced view, you may say, but one which we have become increasingly forced to adopt.

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