

Harrogate Address on Outward Bound

Address by Dr. Kurt Hahn
at the Conference at Harrogate
9 May 1965

Editor's note: This address was one of the last major addresses given by Hahn, at age 77, one of the most eloquent and passionate expressions of his ideas.

I must apologize for telling you what I am afraid many of you have heard me say before. But the kind and undeserved things Sir Spencer Summers said about me should not remain uncontradicted. I am not the found of Salem. That was Prince Max of Baden. And I am not the originator of what has been called the Salem System of Education. Shortly before he died Prince Max led an enthusiastic American friend around his schools. The friend asked, "What are you proudest of in your beautiful schools?" Prince Max answered, "I am proudest of the fact that there is nothing original in them; it is stolen from everywhere, from the Boy Scouts, the British Public Schools, from Plato, from Goethe." Then the American said, "But oughtn't you aim at being original?" Prince Max answered, "In medicine, as in education, you must harvest the wisdom of a thousand years. If you ever come across a surgeon who wants to take out your appendix in the most original manner possible, I strongly advise you to go to another surgeon."

Outward Bound would never have been founded in 1941 without the vision and initiative of Lawrence Holt. Before that there were experimental courses in 1938, 1939, and 1940. The first two courses took place in the north of Scotland. They were run by one of the most inspiring guides of young people, Lord David Douglas Hamilton, with the devoted assistance of Alexander Henderson who is here today. The course in 1940 took place in Wales

under the executive responsibility of Captain Wakeford and Henderson. These courses provided experiences which decisively influenced the design of Outward Bound. Here I must make a confession: one of the best things about Outward Bound is its name – Lawrence Holt insisted on this name, against my strong opposition.

I would like to pay one more tribute. Outward Bound could never have survived without Sir Spencer Summers. Wonderful pioneering work has been done by the first Warden, Jim Hogan, and by the unforgettable Doctor Zimmerman, but the original sponsors had not solved the all important recruiting problem. The first Outward Bound school was not economically safe when Spender Summers took charge. I had, in public, demanded that Industry should grant a paid training holiday to their young workers. I was told, even in 1946, this was a dream remote from reality. Spencer Summers turned this dream into a reality: many thousands of young people who are sent by their employers today to experience health-giving activities – not only at Outward Bound schools – are indebted to Sir Spencer and his patient and tenacious negotiations which carried conviction with responsible men in Industry.



Athenian Wilderness Experience students in the Sierra

In looking back on this conference I would like to focus attention on certain controversies, which only came to the surface intermittently, but which I believe constituted the ever-present undercurrent of the debate. Behind these controversies are importance differences in the reading of human nature. May I say right away I found myself in sympathy with much of the criticism – not of the reality but of the vocabulary with which the reality is presented.

The first conflict of opinion centers around the question: what can be done in twenty-six days?

May I begin by quoting what Charles Dickens has said in *Great Expectations*:

"That was a memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me. But it is the same with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it and think how different its course would have been. Pause you who read this and think for a moment of the long chain of iron and gold, of thorns or flowers that would never have bound you but for the formation of the first link on that memorable day."



Climber at Colorado Outward Bound

I will relate an example from my own experience. I had a Swiss Colleague in Salem, who was a grievance nurser. He went to Greece on a holiday trip with two English colleagues. When they stood on the Acropolis, they looked into a wonderful sunset – olive green and silver – an experience not easily forgotten. Suddenly

the Swiss took out the watch he carried in his pocket, opened the lid, seized a piece of paper which was under the lid, and threw it towards the setting sun. My English colleagues asked him whether he was feeling quite well. Would he like to see a doctor? He said: "Oh, no, I will tell you what it is all about. Whenever anybody has annoyed me in Salem I write his name on a piece of paper and put it into my watch, so that every time I look at my watch I am reminded of my enemy. I had written down the name of Mr. X on this piece of paper, but here it is so beautiful, I must forgive him."

Well, I cannot possible prescribe that looking down from the Acropolis into the setting sun is a cure for grievance nursing – but it *can* happen. Let us beware of exaggerated claims which we are apt to make – it need not happen. It is fair to ask: how often is it likely to happen?

The second important clash of opinions centers around a controversy which is rampant today: how far are inclinations and disinclinations true guides to a youngster's purpose in life? I have been asked critical questions lately in this country. They surprised me and reminded me of attacks to which I had been exposed in Germany in the twenties, when educational theory and practice was obsessed with the danger of repressing the young. I was interviewed by a journalist in Wales. He asked me, "How can the methods you believe in do justice to the indoor-type?" He was horrified when I said, "by chasing him outside." Then there was another journalist, a very distinguished one, who said, "How can Gordonstoun do justice to the introvert?" – an introvert is defined in the *Oxford Dictionary* as someone who is mainly interested in his inner processes. I answered, "By providing circumstances which turn him inside out." And a third one wondered how we deal with the extrovert. My answer shocked him, "By turning him outside in."

Let me define, in general terms, the conviction which is behind these answers:

It is the sin of soul to force young people into opinions – indoctrination is of the devil – but it is culpable neglect not to impel young people into experiences.



Climber at Hurricane Island Outward Bound

I have often been guilty of such neglect and I would like to relate to you one of my greatest failures which will haunt me all my life and which was due to my excessive attention to a boy's manifest inclinations.

I had a boy in Salem who was an extrovert if every there was one – wild, reckless, thirsty for adventure. I gave him plenty of opportunity for engaging in daring experiences, trying at the same time to implant a concern for the safety of himself and of others. He was quite good in class without working hard. He was intelligent – I am sure he did not work hard enough. One day I found the following letter on my desk: "K. and I have run away to Milan (Lake Constance is a long way from Milan), we found things rather boring in Salem. We will be back in a week. We promise you to obey the Salem laws: we will not smoke or drink. Do not send anybody after us, for our parents cannot afford the cost of recapture (his father was a poor parson)." Well, I did send a very agile English colleague of mine after them, who caught them twenty minutes after they arrived in Milan, which they had reached after 48 hours. They

had lived en route from stolen cherries and from milking cows.

Now comes the extraordinary part of the story. The originator of this enterprise, the writer of the letter, was punished. I am hesitant – after the inspiring address given by Mr. Clegg – to confess that I believe in reward and punishment as indispensable incentives in helping young and old to do what they know is right. I think of a wonderful sermon which William Temple once preached, in which he said, quoting Jowett: "I always want to buy a railway ticket, but the knowledge that the inspector comes just clinches the decision." Saintliness is out of reach for most adults, even for bishops, so I do not think we should expect youngsters to be saints – capable of living up to their ideals merely through the strength of their conscience. Well, this boy was punished with having to stay at school in the summer holidays and to work on the land long enough to earn what his recapture had cost.

I visited him from time to time and one day I saw that under his hands was growing a statue of clay – of a runner with a big knapsack, exhausted, sitting by the roadside, obviously a self-portrait. I was astonished. I did not say much. But a fortnight later he had modeled a statue of King Lear bending over the dead Cordelia and I have seldom seen in painting or sculpture grief so vividly expressed through the movement of a body as this boy had succeeded in expressing it. I summoned a sculptor friend of mind and he could not speak. He beckoned me out of the room and said: "Hahn, such a talent is only born every hundred years!" So I asked this boy: "Why did you never do this at school, why did you never do this before?" And he gave me the devastating answer. "I can only do these things when I am sad, and here I had no opportunity for being sad." This experience may explain to you why, if I had sons, I would rather send them to a day school, and one inspired by the watchwords which Mr. Clegg

has given us yesterday. The boy did one more piece of sculpture – a statue of Christ talking to a child. It was bought by the Caldecot Community in Kent. It stands in their chapel. The talent completely fizzed out. He joined the German Air Force in 1934 and was killed in the war. His fate had cried out in these lonely holidays when this extrovert was thrown upon his spiritual resources, but self-discovery came too late, because we had humored his manifest inclinations at the expense of his all-round development.

Now I come to the third clash of opinions. We believe, with John Newsom, that schools should widen and deepened their responsibilities to include leisure guidance in the timetable. If we are right in this, then much greater importance should be given to building up physical adequacy. Again we must avoid exaggerated claims, There is no more misleading statement than "Mens sana in corpore sano." While it is essential for a healthy youngster to have a well-developed physique – that is to say to have his powers of resilience, acceleration, co-ordination, and endurance carefully trained – it does not follow that a sound body necessarily harbors a sound mind, just as I do not think that Lord James is right when he says that "Intelligent people are better human beings." I have no doubt that Goebbels, at the age of 17, could have obtained four advanced levels at scholarship standard. *[editor's note: Goebbels was the Nazi Minister of Propaganda and Public Information who controlled the media to mobilize popular support for Nazi goals. He depicted the Jew as an odious creature and the main enemy of Germany. He conceived the Kristallnacht pogroms, the first major attack on the Jewish population in 1938, in which hundreds of synagogues, shops, and houses were burned and thirty thousand Jews were arrested and deported.]*

I was once addressing a meeting of parsons in Wales, and I was severely cross-examined: "What has all this fitness training to do with Christianity?" This was my answer: "If the robbers among whom the man fell, to whose

rescue the good Samaritan came, had been trained in resource, initiative, endurance, they would have been all the more efficient robbers: but if the priest had been thus trained he would not have passed by on the other side."

The tragic history of continental countries transmits the warning that we should take heed of Napoleon's words: "The world is not ruined by the wickedness of the wicked, but by the weakness of the good." Again and again when disastrous decisions were taken by German governments in the last 50 years, wise men retreated in noble helplessness, lamenting events which they could have influenced. If we take to heart the lessons of history, we will regard it as a very serious responsibility of schools to build up the nervous strength in the vulnerable, the imaginative, the sensitive, by methods which will harden yet spare them, so that they will be better able to stand the strain which responsible citizenship imposes.

Also, in this country there is the danger that the best are inclined to withdraw from the tough struggles of public life. It is in the public interest, as well as their own, that their physical development is not neglected. I hope in this context that Mr. Clegg will look more kindly on the high jump!

I now come to the difference of opinion which I regard as fundamental: are we living in a sick or healthy society? The answer to this question depends on what we expect from Outward Bound. What is the function of Outward Bound? What is its missionary assignment? What are the limits of its influence as imposed by the surrounding to which the "Outward Bounders" return? Mr. Longland – I may have misunderstood him – denies the ills to the cure of which I believe Outward Bound can contribute.

Let us start with perhaps the least important decline which I believe affects the rising

generation – the decline of physical fitness. Mr. Longland thinks I am exaggerating. I offer him a bet. Let us bring about an examination of four thousand healthy teenagers, girls and boys, drawn from grammar schools and comprehensive schools. Let these adolescents be submitted to fitness tests, that is to say, tests designed to examine those powers of the body which the medical profession today regards as the basis of vital health: tests of agility, of muscular efficiency, and of stamina. I am not referring to tests of athletic prowess but only to tests of physical adequacy. This is my bet: I maintain that as a result of such an investigation Mr. Longland will be depressed, no less than President Eisenhower was depressed when 4,000 healthy teenagers were examined in New York and 56 percent could not pass the minimum fitness tests. Frightening evidence has come from Germany. The German Army has found that an alarming number of health recruits on joining the Army cannot walk eight miles. Medical experts tell me that "under-exercise" has become a menace to the health of affluent nations.

But this physical unfitness is only a minor evil compared with another decline which afflicts us all, young and old: *the decline of compassion*. When I was in New York last year I found thoughtful men and women deeply concerned and deeply ashamed about an event which had taken place at an apartment house in a respectable part of the city. A girl was murdered just outside this apartment house in which she lived. It took the murderer thirty-five minutes to complete the job. He went away twice, frightened by the screams of the girl, probably expecting that somebody would come to her help. *Thirty-eight* witnesses looked down from their comfortable apartment rooms and did *nothing*, not even call the police. They called the police two minutes after the girl was dead. The police arrived within a few minutes. When the witnesses were cross-examined by the police, by lawyers, by social workers, they

all gave me answer: "We did not want to become involved."

I flattered myself at the time that this could not happen in Britain, but when I came back I read a leading article in *The Times* on the 38 witnesses, ending with the question: "Could it happen here?" Then I went to Germany, where I visited an old friend. His daughter had just been attacked by a hooligan in a university town. Nothing serious happened. The hooligan had been chased away. The girl lay on the ground, shocked, and asked a passerby, would he telephone for a taxi? The man said: "Do it yourself."

We in the Western world confronted by a progressive inhumanity of the society in which we live. I would agree with Jack Longland, healing forces have been released from many independent sources. I go so far as to say – there is a resistance movement among the young against the temptations inherent in present-day society.



Life guards in New South Wales, Australia

I am thinking of the Surf Life Savers of Australia who have introduced into the art of life-saving that meticulous care which has always been devoted to the art of war. I have in mind dedicated mountain rescue teams, and the young volunteers who are active in the Red Cross and the St. John's Ambulance, and the many schoolboys and girls who are engaged in

epic labors of love. Seven hundred boys of the Manchester Grammar School are helping the spastic, the old, the deaf, and the blind. We should not forget the community service of Alec Dickson, and the great work of Voluntary Service Overseas which he founded.

All over the country you find boys and girls responding to the call; but you also find great numbers who do not respond. I can not console myself with those who do. If anyone tells me, when I am worried about the suicides which occur in a certain university, "My dear fellow, just think of the many undergraduates who do not commit suicide," I am not comforted. I am thinking of those who have despaired of life, many of them young men of great promise. I am also concerned about the "Mods" and "Rockers" who don't seem to care if during their orgies of vandalism they endanger human life. I am deeply alarmed about young people who take drugs. Most of them were spiritually healthy when they were children and only became spiritually deformed in adolescence. I do not blame the youngsters, I blame the adult world, and I also blame those schools which do not accept a remedial responsibility, in other words, which fail to introduce into the timetable health-giving activities designed to develop certain tastes and distastes. I am referring to emotional habits likely to make the young resistant to the insidious influences to which they are inevitably exposed.

In the light of this diagnosis I would like to try and answer the question: "What can Outward Bound contribute to the cure?" That was the theme of the statements we heard from the Wardens yesterday. It is natural, I would say, it is desirable, that they believe in the lasting effect of an Outward Bound training, even when such faith is not justified. The films we have seen – incidentally I liked the BBC film, and in particular enjoyed the critical remarks of the interviewer, and Tom Price's answers – the film we have seen, also the beautiful Colorado

pictures, could not transmit what so greatly impressed all of us yesterday: the humanity of the Wardens, their deep concern about the individual youngsters entrusted to their care. Faith in human nature is a vital element in this humanity.

I remember a remark of Salem's first Director of Studies, old Doctor Reinhardt – I believe this remark would have pleased Mr. Clegg – it was made at a master's meeting. A young colleague had said, rather contemptuously, "I have no faith in this boy." The old man became very angry – his blue eyes, like those of Garibaldi, always grew black in anger – he said, "Then you have to right to educate him."

An Outward Bound course can have a transforming effect in a good number of cases. There will always arise occasions during the 26 days when a boy or girl overcomes his or her fear and feels deeply for a neighbor who needs help. That combination of overcoming fear and pity cleanses the soul – so the philosophers tell us.

But the message, one even may say, the inspiration, received at Outward Bound is apt to evaporate, leaving no trace on future conduct, unless the Outward Bounders, in their normal surroundings, will *translate it into action*, in other words, unless they seek and find opportunities for a demanding active service of use to their fellow men. This raises the all-important problem of the follow-up. This problem is as yet unsolved. Definite progress could be made towards its solution if the Outward Bound Trust, as well as the Wardens, take to heart the appeal which Jack Longland made yesterday: Look over your shoulder and go into a co-operation with other people and organizations whose work is directed to the same purpose as your own. I am sure he has in mind the remarkable "Service by Young activities" which are in operation

throughout the country. But we must be under no illusion. While the opportunities are there, many Outward Bounders will fail to seize them, unless, after their return to their home surroundings, they are confronted by a challenge which they find difficult to resist. During the war there were few youngsters who felt comfortable if they refused to serve.

Can such a response be created in peacetime on a purely voluntary basis? I would have given a pessimistic answer to this question up to two years ago. But in May, 1963, there took place an event which has given us great hope: The Royal College of Surgeons held a Convention on Accident Prevention and Life Saving. Eminent doctors had been alarmed by deaths from exposure, which had occurred during adventurous pursuits, and they were deeply conscious of the revolutionary change which had taken place in the attitude of the medical profession to the role of the layman. This was due to the rediscovered expired air method of resuscitation, originally introduced by the prophet Elijah, and to the closed cardiac massage which has been developed in the United States and which has already saved many lives.

At this Convention there were three highlights which were of special interest to me and which I would like to mention: A distinguished doctor from Norway, where they teach the expired air method in elementary schools, created quite a sensation when he said, "Lifesaving is the business of the layman, the less serious things we can leave to the doctors." Twelve apprentices of the Army Medical School, all under eighteen, demonstrated on life-size models the methods of resuscitation they had learned. The doctors present were deeply impressed. One very distinguished surgeon said to me: "I wish all young doctors would be as competent as these boys."

The Duke of Edinburgh pleaded in a moving speech that rescue and relief organizations should make use of teenagers, girls and boys, and trust their competence and dedication if they are well trained. He said that hospital beds and casualty departments were certainly essential – likewise cemeteries. He stressed the vital necessity of correct action taken promptly on the spot. He ended by expressing the hope that the Convention would rouse a conscience for safety and bring the thoughtless and callous into deserved contempt.

For us schoolmasters a threefold call went out from this Convention:

- a. A call to schools to give training in First Aid, and for the Bronze Medallion of the Royal Life Saving Society, a place of honor in the timetable;
- b. A call to rescue and relief organizations to open welcoming gates to adolescents;
- c. A call to the young of the free world to help in the fight against unnecessary death and suffering.

As a result of this convention a medical commission has been set up under the eminent surgeon, Norman Capener, which will advise on accident prevention and accident control in the home, in industry, on the roads, in adventurous pursuits by water and by land. There will be close co-operation with non-medical experts on training, equipment, and the limits of endurance of different age groups.

I hope Outward Bound will keep in close touch with this medical commission and seek their advice on many problems which baffle the layman today: problems of exhaustion and exposure, problems of subnormality, often difficult to discover but demanding special care.

All who are interested in Service by Youth are now likely to welcome a Conference of Relief and Rescue Organizations to discuss, under medical guidance, the aptitude and readiness of adolescents for a demanding active service and to consider how to enlist such readiness in the common interest and in the interest of the young.

Is it too much to hope that a loosely federated Corps of Helpers will be called into life? This Corps would have many and various branches, from traffic police and helpers of the disabled to fire service and surf life savers. It would be a Corps of adults, but admitting well-trained volunteers from the age of sixteen, and prepared to use them in earnest once they have passed certain basic tests. The basic tests would be tests of physical fitness and of competence in first aid and swimming (including life saving). The proficiency tests would vary in accordance with the skill or technique demanded by the requirements of the particular organization the young volunteers want to join. Special concessions should be made to physically handicapped young people: they have often developed a remarkable "power to overcome" through the very challenge they have accepted in their daily lives – the challenge of their disability.

I don't expect that volunteers would come forward en masse – at least not at first – but a minority would respond. We need conspicuous examples which will inspire others to do likewise. "Aristocracy," as a Norwegian democrat said, "is the salt wherewith democracy should be salted." He did not think of the aristocracy of birth or social position. We need an "Aristocracy of Service." In a democratic society you can only accelerate developments by example.

I would expect Outward Bounders in great numbers to accept the challenge and to help in creating a fashion of conduct. I am often asked:

"Why should helpers of spastics or of old people or of the blind be trained in First Aid and Life Saving?" My answer is this: "It seems reasonable to conclude that volunteers for such Samaritan Service are helpfully inclined people. If that is so, then they ought to be spared the humiliating experience of having to witness as helpless onlookers a tragedy on the roads or in the water which they could have averted if they had been properly trained.

I would like in conclusion to tell you of a conversation I had in the late 'thirties, not far from here, which had a profound influence on my work. I had sought our William Temple at Bishopthorpe. I had designed a pledge for the Gordonstoun Watchers, the Coastguards. It ran like this: "I promise to serve Hopeman village and this district, through them my kind and country, and Christ through all." I asked Dr. Temple's advice on this wording. He gave me an astonishing answer. "Can't you leave Christ out?" He added in effect. "You see, I am not only interested in the mission to the Christians but also in the mission to the heathens." And then he added: "Samaritan service is a source of the Revelation." I am certain today that the Archbishop was right. "The Unloving do not know God." He who drills and labours, accepts hardship, boredom and dangers, all for the sake of helping his brother in peril and distress, discovers God's purpose in his inner life.

That applies to all walks of life. Judge Curlew, the President of the Australian Surf Life Saver, to whose example Outward Bound owes so much, will be pleased to hear of an experience I had at St. Pancras Station the other day. A porter, a young man of about 25, was carrying my bag. I asked him where he came from. He said, "I come from Cornwall." I asked, "Have you heard of the Surf Life Savers of Cornwall?" He said, "I am a member of the Cliff Ladder Party." I remarked, "Would you

mind telling me how can 'cliff ladder' at St. Pancras?" And he said, "I go home every fortnight to be on duty." He goes there at his own expense.

I believe that the challenge of Samaritan Service if properly presented, rarely fails to capture young people, body and soul, not only in the Western world. I hear encouraging news about the young people behind the Iron Curtain – many of them look westward, with distrust but also with hope. They ask a question which makes us blush: "Are you in earnest about the ideals you profess?" Who shall give an answer? Young men and women who render hard and willing service to their fellow men in danger and in need.

Outward Bound can ignite – that is all – it is for others to keep the flame alive.



Kurt Hahn, 1950